“Am I gonna get positive in the end?” – Experiences of seeking asylum in Denmark

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Abstract

The recent influx of refugees to Europe and Denmark and the lack of studies on this topic prompted us to examine how staying in a Danish asylum center is experienced according to asylum seekers and mental health professionals within the asylum field. We use interpretative phenomenological analysis on data gathered during a three months internship in an asylum center in Denmark through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with two asylum seekers and two mental health professionals. Three overarching themes are presented as being central to the experience of being an asylum seeker in Denmark. Power in the asylum system, living in limbo and maneuvering the social arena of the asylum center. Common across all the themes is the overarching uncertainty of the asylum case, a lack of agency as well as ways of handling or coping with these issues. While our master's thesis largely supports existing research, we add novelty to this tapestry by introducing how resident translators and the position of power they hold is experienced, which, among other identified subjects, are areas in need of further study.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

In recent years Europe has received a large number of asylum seekers arriving from a multitude of countries, seeking safety, freedom, opportunity or various other goals. One commonly defining goal of these people is to obtain asylum which hinges on being granted the status of refugee in accordance with the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees which defines a refugee as:

> Someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, 1951, p. 3)

The recent influx of asylum seekers to the EU peaked in 2015 with more than a million new asylum applicants, of which the three most common countries of origin were Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (Eurostat, 2018). Of these Denmark received 21,316 applicants (Udlændingestyrelsen, 2017). Becoming an asylum seeker commonly stems from a rupture in one's life, caused by war, persecution or other destitute circumstances and often signifies a dramatic change in space, social structures and self-perception as a product of leaving one's home country. Like all migration the experience can be a transitional and liminal period of a person's life that can produce many different outcomes. Unique to the asylum seeker subcategory of migrants however is the need to conform to the legal definitions of what constitutes a refugee in order to obtain asylum. In Denmark the vast majority of asylum seekers are required to live within asylum centers or camps while their asylum claim is being processed. Because of the time spend there the centers are a focal point in the asylum process, and for some asylum seekers this process can last several years resulting in an extended period of waiting and having to live with the uncertainty of whether their asylum claim will be accepted or denied. In this project we will be working from and attempt to answer the following question:

How is staying in a Danish asylum center experienced by an asylum seeker according to asylum seekers themselves and mental health professionals working in the asylum field?

How the focus of the present master's thesis fits within extant psychological literature will be further elaborated upon in the following literature review. However the focus on asylum seekers' experiences and the inclusion of the perspective of mental health professionals are based on an interest in highlighting asylum seekers' own voices while providing contextualizing comments through the unique knowledge gathered by mental health professionals through their work with asylum seekers and their expressed issues relating to life as an asylum seeker.

2 Literature review

The aim of this literature review is to present existing psychological or otherwise relevant literature pertaining to the subject of how staying in a Danish asylum center is experienced according to asylum seekers and mental health professionals working within this field. This is done in order to synthesize and give the reader an overview of the findings already present in this field of research and to situate our own research within the larger mosaic of literature on how life in an asylum center is experienced. The review will underline the experiences of asylum seekers by mainly relying on qualitative research using data collected from asylum seekers and various key personnel relevant to the asylum centers. These perspectives are intended as a representation of the accumulated research on this topic and to add depth and breadth for later discussion.

The studies were found by using multiple online research databases and are primarily made up of peer-reviewed material. The search terms used were a combination of "asylum center", "asylum seeker" and "experience". The terms "mental health staff", "staff" or "personnel" were present in searches particularly aimed at uncovering research using the perspectives of these key figures. Furthermore some of the articles were found as a result of the writing of a literature review of asylum seekers' identity formation during our 9th semester. The literature search for our 9th semester litera-

ture review yielded articles which focused on identity formation but simultaneously highlighted the experience of living in an asylum center, which is what the research question in the present thesis focuses on.

The following review of the literature search results will be divided into studies using asylum seeker perspectives and studies that include perspectives of key personnel. The first part aims to explore current knowledge on which issues an asylum seeker might experience in an asylum center, while the second will focus on issues that key personnel related to the asylum center might see or experience, pertaining to the asylum seekers' lives. All studies included are from Europe, where EU-defined guidelines (Website of the European Commision, Migration and Home Affairs, 2018), ensure that there is sufficient similarity between the asylum systems across studies to warrant comparison with or key insights to be incorporated into our own study.

2.1 Asylum seekers' experiences

This section of the literature review will focus on studies which draw on the perspectives of asylum seekers living in European asylum centers. The studies will be presented according to relevant subthemes, in order to provide an overview of the central issues presented by the different studies.

2.1.1 The asylum system

One central issue highlighted in current literature on asylum seekers and centers is the power the system and center exudes and how this affects the life of an asylum seeker (Szczepanikova, 2012; Fontanari, 2015; Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016). In a study based on previous research on a Czech asylum center, Szczepanikova (2012) analyzed how asylum seekers' daily lives are impacted by asylum and immigration policies and the institutional practices in asylum centers. She argues that the interconnectedness between asylum and immigration policies, in lacking legal avenues of migration, creates a certain composition of residents in the centers whose motives for seeking asylum differs vastly. According to Szczepanikova this leads to a fear that their protection needs might not be seen as genuine in the asylum system, which was

generally perceived as inefficient by many residents in her study. The daily lives of asylum seekers were under a great deal of monitoring and control by the system and the employees of the center, who provided the assistance on which the residents depended. This connection between control and assistance were seen as positive by the employees, arguing that greater control gave them better opportunities to help. The asylum seekers however felt the control was excessive and oppressive leaving them little self-determination. Szczepanikova argues that the controlling system displaces asylum seekers' responsibility for their affairs, creating a dependency on the system, which carries with it stigma, unnecessarily isolates them and negatively impacts their ability to rebuild their lives and future prospects in the host society.

Fontanari (2015) did ethnographic research on this by looking at the effects of physical and bureaucratic structures on the everyday experiences of asylum seekers in Germany. She uses the term threshold to show how her participants are experiencing the asylum center as a place of confinement because of a sense of time suspension, non-belonging and in-betweenness as a consequence of the physical and bureaucratic structures surrounding their existence. She argues that the threshold, manifested in the form of the asylum center, is created by legal, spatial and temporal borders that control the entrance to society, and personal rights, through asylum. A similar study in Denmark highlighted how asylum seekers at an asylum center in Western Jutland are effectively living in a "total institution" which limits their possibilities in their everyday lives (Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016). This interpretation was based on observations showing how residents rarely left the asylum center because almost all of their everyday activities were situated within this space. A lack of options for transporting oneself without assistance from the asylum center staff as well as financial limitations put on the individual asylum seeker by being dependent on pocket money was interpreted by Christensen & Lauridsen as putting up invisible walls which contributed to the residents' state of being isolated within the asylum center.

Being made to prove the legitimacy of one's asylum claim is another issue in an asylum seeker's life in the asylum system according to a study by Goodman, Burke, Liebling & Zasada (2014). The presented findings, based on interviews with nine

asylum seekers in the UK, showed how their asylum claims were framed as being related to safety in order to prove their legitimacy as refugees. Goodman et al. argue that this strategy is employed to cast aside other more negatively perceived and illegitimate reasons for seeking asylum in the UK and to undermine the government's key argument for rejection which is often linked with a perception that the people seeking asylum are from countries which are safe enough for them to return.

2.1.2 Living in limbo

According to recent studies (Fontanari, 2015; Griffiths, 2014; Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016), life in an asylum center is characterized by a state of living in limbo or being in-between as a consequence of the uncertain status in society held by asylum seekers. Christensen & Lauridsen (2016) touch upon this state of being in their study and show how their participants experience time merely as something to pass as a consequence of the overshadowing importance of awaiting the outcome of their asylum claim. The asylum claim was experienced as both the cause of and the possible escape from the uncertain existence by the participants (Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016). Hope for a positive outcome, keeping the temporariness of one's situation in mind, accepting one's powerlessness and creating structure by participating in activities were used as strategies to deal with the uncertain status of being an asylum seeker and the accompanying often long period of waiting for an answer to their asylum claim. A study by Griffiths (2014) investigated how this period of waiting affects the experience of time by asylum seekers. Time, for her participants, were experienced as passing by slower during the period of waiting for an asylum decision and suddenly speeding up when the decision was being presented. Griffiths explains this experience as being due to a dual temporal uncertainty in the lives of asylum seekers. They are simultaneously longing for an end to the waiting while fearing the possible changes this might entail effectively keeping them in a desperate and passive state of being.

Intended as a contrast to the focus on the negative effects of the non-status condition, long waiting periods and lack of opportunities for meaningful activities, which have dominated most studies on the subject of asylum seekers, Ghorashi, de Boer & ten

Holder (2017) decided to investigate the narratives of asylum seekers in a Dutch asylum center. They discovered that asylum seekers' in-between position allowed them to dream bigger about their possible future in Dutch society, while also being able to more freely reflect upon their past thus gaining some level of agency despite living a rule-governed life. This was explained as being due to their physical distance to past societal norms and their ignorance of norms in Dutch society. However their study also showed that whether asylum seekers utilized their mental resources in this reflexive and creative manner seemed to depend upon how long they had been awaiting their asylum decision. This was reported as illustrating that despite the possibility of using this state of in-betweenness as a way of gaining freedom in thought, being in a long term state of uncertainty can often induce a feeling of devastating desperation in the person seeking asylum. A study conducted in the UK similarly uncovered how asylum seekers used narrative actions as a way to produce a sense of agency despite a restricted and liminal existence (Rainbird, 2014). Asylum seekers produced narratives portraying how they sought to overcome the existential crisis caused by their asylum seeker status through engaging in meaningful activities, using the rules of the asylum system in their favour or being openly critical of the objectifying treatment experienced as an individual in a controlling system. Furthermore some of the participants recounted so called "Heroic stories" of having managed to survive dangerous perils during their flight as one of the lucky few. By retelling these heroic stories, they became a manifestation of the inner strength and resources evidenced in the asylum seekers by themselves and others and thus created a basis for hope of a better future. In conclusion Rainbird notes how the inherent liminality of the asylum seeker existence becomes "the propellant of agentive action".

2.1.3 Self and other

Living in an asylum center inevitably puts a person together with a large number of people with diverse backgrounds which leads to the formation of different groups, problems and friendships (Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016). Common for all residents is the shared label 'asylum seeker' which often carry with it negative implications and stigma in the host society (Kirkwood, McKinley & McVittie, 2013). As such it's not a desired social category to be in, but a necessary legal one to obtain asylum. To

deal with this conundrum asylum seekers deploy various strategies in speech and action to navigate and negotiate identity. In an article based on former fieldwork Rainbird (2012) examines interactions among asylum seekers in the UK and how they through speech-acts both identify with and consider themselves distinct from other asylum seekers, and how both distrust and collaboration occur between them. Rainbird describes how the asylum seeker identity, which was and is portrayed in media and society as a dangerous "other", were imposed on her participants, and how they displayed agency in actively resisting this imposed identity. She notes however how asylum seekers are dependent on each other for collaboration on information about how to proceed with the asylum case, bureaucracy and various aspects of daily life. At the same time Rainbird witnessed distrust among her participants and other asylum seeker, most visibly in the threat others might pose to their application for asylum. It was seen both between and inside groups, most commonly in how others might obtain advantages or how they might lie about origin or story to secure asylum, which could pose a potential threat against their own claim.

Negotiating identity to deal with or escape the one imposed on asylum seekers is a central topic in Cuthill's (2017) article on repositioning the self as a path to gain social recognition and resilience for destitute asylum seekers. In her ethnographic fieldwork in a drop-in center in the UK she observed how asylum seekers renegotiated identity in the act of repositioning from 'other' to 'same'. One of her examples illustrating this is how some of her participants situated themselves as 'students', reconfiguring the negative and stigmatizing label of 'asylum seeker'. Cuthill argues that the performance, real or not, of vulnerability is a necessary part of securing asylum, but found that repositioning the social self, like in the above example, can lead to increased resilience towards one's position.

How people construct space can be important for their identities, and the affordances that space can provide. Kirkwood et al. (2013) examined how 'place-identity' was used in discourse by asylum seekers and the mutually constitutive relationship between place and identity. In interviews with native Scots they found both supportive and critical discourse on the construction of place in relation to asylum seekers, such as terms of economics or danger in order to paint people as either 'economic migrants' or 'genuine refugees', or how a place might be 'full' with problems or mi-

grants that should be taken care of first. Kirkwood et al. notes that asylum seekers themselves often did, and had reason to, construct their country of origin in terms of danger and insecurity to underline their legitimacy as refugees and not for instance 'economic migrants'. Furthermore they found that asylum seekers had to navigate the contradiction of talking about issues they faced and not complaining about their current situation. In contrast to their countries of origin which were constructed as dangerous, the host society would be constructed as relatively problem free. According to Kirkwood et al. this construction could also serve to portray the asylum seekers as having a legitimate place in the host society as well as infusing a sense of agency.

2.1.4 Perspectives on the asylum seeker experience by key personnel

During our literature search we were faced with a very limited body of research using the perspectives of asylum center personnel or mental health professionals working with asylum seekers on what it is like to live in an asylum center and go through the process of seeking asylum. As such the following review of the literature relating to this part of the research question will be quite brief since it is only made up of three studies.

The first study is by Roberto Beneduce (2015), who uses accounts from his work as a psychiatrist in the Italian asylum system as a data source. In the article Beneduce focuses on how lying becomes a common tool for convincing authorities of the legitimacy of one's refugee status for some asylum seekers. He provides examples of asylum seekers telling him how they had been schooled by other asylum seekers, lawyers and humanitarian workers about the benefits of having a credible story portraying the legitimacy of their asylum claim and in some cases are explicitly told what to say during the asylum interview. Due to the difficulty of asserting the truthfulness of asylum seekers' stories, bodily marks of torture are often used as an indicator of the legitimateness of individual asylum claims by asylum case workers. As a result of this, asylum seekers sometimes try to pass off scars of surgery as evidence of torture. According to Beneduce, asylum seekers feel forced to prove that they really are who they say they are or mask their true identity to fit the criteria of being a legitimate refugee. He also emphasizes the mental strain which he believes is being put on asylum seekers during the asylum seeking process as a consequence of the elaborate identity work required to convince asylum officials of their legitimacy as refugees.

Anne Douglas (2010) writes about her observations on the difficulties experienced by asylum seekers in the UK offered to her through her mental health work with this group of people. Aside from the reported distress caused by the loss of one's social network, home and the experience of traumatic events prior to and during the flight, Douglas also emphasizes how people are impacted by the asylum seeker identity and status in the country of refuge. The financial, geographical and educational restrictions imposed on asylum seekers threaten their identity, freedom and mental health. Douglas observed that most asylum seekers in her work are part of interdependent or collectivist societies and thus define their identity in group terms. Therefore the state of living in limbo and being unable to reconnect with one's family or social group while being prohibited from fully taking part and connecting with a new society can be a debilitating experience which has serious consequences for asylum seekers' mental health. Douglas provides an example of a 45-years-old chronically depressed woman who, upon receiving permission to stay after seven years of waiting, felt difficulty in moving forward since she had already completely lost hope.

Through inspiration from her therapeutic work with refugees in the UK, subsequent interviews with Kurdish asylum seekers in Greece and the UK as well as interviews with refugee and asylum seeker help organizations in these countries; Pamela Griffiths (2001) provides findings related to the experiences of Kurdish asylum seekers. The interviewed Kurdish asylum seekers in Greece and the UK focused on subjects such as the trauma of flight, difficulties of feeling accepted in a new society, an overarching feeling of fear and trying to cope with these negativities through upholding a connection with their culture and seeking sanctuary in community centers or clinging to the hope of returning to their homeland someday. Furthermore they felt that the hardships of flight and being in the position of an asylum seeker were worse for women than men. Contrary to the opinions on gender differences expressed by refugees and asylum seekers, the interviewed support organization members expressed that women had an easier time adjusting to the new surroundings, and sometimes even gaining new possibilities in the host country, while men were perceived as having lost a great deal in terms of power and status as a consequence of their new position in society. The support organization members reported the main difficulties of asylum seekers and refugees of having to do with housing, mental health and trusting authorities which was similar to those expressed by the asylum seeker participants.

2.1.5 Summary

Our literature review of qualitative research on asylum seekers in Europe has touched on several interesting issues relating to the experience of being in the process of seeking asylum. While there have been differences in the specific methods and foci of the articles it seems like there are certain commonalities across studies in relation to how being in the position of an asylum seeker influenced the different participants' expressed behavior, thoughts and interactions with others. Especially the boundaries, both visible and invisible, created by living in an asylum center and being subjected to the bureaucratic maze of the asylum center have been emphasized in the studies as being a possible cause of the stressors and challenges reportedly faced by asylum seekers. Some studies reported how asylum seekers often have to wait several years before being denied or granted asylum based on a judgment of the legitimacy of their reasons for seeking asylum. This extended period of waiting has been presented by some researchers as keeping the person seeking asylum in a state of limbo and uncertainty. Despite an overwhelming focus on how these challenges and stressors are contributing to a predominantly negative experience for asylum seekers, some of the authors of the presented articles have sought to uncover how people seeking asylum are coping with the issues they face in the center and in the process of seeking asylum.

As is evidenced by the rather small number of articles (13) presented in this review, the field of study on asylum seekers in Europe and Denmark is by no means exhausted. While there are common laws within Europe on the treatment of asylum seekers, the differences should not be discounted - even within the same country. It's likely that there are differences in experience from the center examined in the present study and for example the infamous camp consisting of tents in Thisted (Field note 1, p. 38, book 1). Furthermore in order to strengthen asylum seekers' resources for coping with the challenges of life in an asylum center or camp and the possible consequences of these challenges for their mental health, further research on the experiences of asylum seekers is needed. These identified gaps in existing literature and our available research lead us to the already presented question to be answered in our master's thesis:

How is staying in a Danish asylum center experienced by an asylum seeker according to asylum seekers themselves and mental health professionals working in the asylum field?

3 Definition of terms

3.1 Asylum seekers

In our use of the term “asylum seekers” throughout this master’s thesis, we are at danger of creating a stereotypical characteristic of this group of people, who are seeking asylum for a variety of reasons. People who come from diverse cultural, ethnic and experiential backgrounds deserve to be represented as such. Therefore we would like to make it clear, that when using the term “asylum seekers”, it is without the intention of dismissing the diversity of the people seeking asylum or their individual experiences. Instead we seek to provide a medium enabling the sharing of the personal experiences which occur as a result of forced migration and sharing the same context of socio-political and geographical place.

3.2 Praktik

“Praktik” is equivalent to the English word internship, and was something every asylum seeker had to do to earn their pocket money (Nyidanmark.dk, 2018), unless they were in school or above retiring age (65yr). The official term is “aktivering”, but the word “praktik” was instead exclusively used by both staff members and asylum seekers we met during our internship. It is supposed to provide the asylum seekers with meaningful occupation during their stay in the center. We have chosen not to translate “praktik” because it’s practical application in the asylum center we observed was almost completely divorced from the notion of an internship, with a few exceptions in internships outside the center. There were only few tasks which provided daily work in the center, so in function “praktik” was used to refer to almost any kind of activity assigned to the asylum seekers in the hours designated for the purpose of doing “praktik”.

3.3 Pocket money

The primary source of income for asylum seekers is financial support from the government. The base income is 51,32DKKR per day with the possibility of gaining an additional 8,56DKKR or 29,95DKKR per day, depending on how far one’s case is, for attending class or “praktik” (Nyidanmark.dk, 2018). The financial support is distributed every other week and must be picked up by the asylum seeker in person. While the official term is something

akin to “financial aid”, when translated from Danish to English, the terms ‘lommepenge’ or the English equivalent pocket money were exclusively used by both staff and asylum seekers in the asylum center where we did our research. As such we will also be using these terms when referring to asylum seekers’ source of income while living in a Danish asylum center despite this not being the official term.

4 The research site

Figure 1: Map of the asylum center

The site of our research was an asylum center in a remote part of Southern Denmark. We were able to gain access after calling the center and explaining our position as psychology students looking to conduct research to one of the staff members, who gave us the center leader’s phone number. We spoke to the center leader, who wanted to make sure that we wouldn't be doing any therapy with the residents during our internship, which we assured him that we wouldn’t. Following this we determined

that the date of the beginning of our three months internship would be March 1st 2016 ending on May 31st 2016. Furthermore we talked to him about how we would be able to make ourselves useful during our internship. He brought up the possibility of us arranging activities for the residents but that this wasn't a requirement as we were welcome to just observe and talk to the people, so long as we didn't do too many interviews, as he thought that many of the residents had already been through enough interviews with the police, journalists and immigration services. We were of course willing to meet his demands and discussed many ideas for possible activities both prior to and during our internship, however it quickly became evident that the resources for doing said activities were limited. Instead we focused on talking with people and observing the ways of life at the center while occasionally helping out the staff with different tasks such as driving people to be registered at the local school, helping residents pack, carry and unpack their belongings,. We also followed along as observers when staff members were going out to resolve problematic behavior, conflicts or similar issues. However for the most part, we merely provided what seemed to be a welcome distraction in the form of talking to asylum seekers about their daily lives at the center or whatever else might come up in conversation, playing games with the adults or being outside with their children and just being available and approachable without having the same rule-enforcing position as the staff members.

The center used to be an army base and had 14 buildings housing roughly 320 residents. The average length of stay at the center was estimated by the staff members to be about six months but we met people who had been in this particular center for up to five years and 3-year old children who had been born as asylum seekers. People would be moved from the asylum center due to developments in their asylum case, structural changes or if they caused too much trouble. Within the first two weeks of our internship the center was transformed from having mostly single male residents to being a so-called family center meant to mainly house parents and their children. This decision was made by the Danish Immigration Service without consulting the staff members at the center and without making the reason clear to staff members who were then subsequently unable to explain the reason to the affected residents. As a result of this transformation 60 single men were moved out

and a large number of new families moved in.

The 320 residents were divided among 11 buildings, which included older barracks and office buildings as well as a newer single-planned construction divided into six individual “apartments”. This newer construction, building 30, isn't represented on the map but was intended for families consisting of up to four members and included a bathroom and kitchen area for each family. People living in this building were the only ones fortunate enough to not have to share a kitchen and bathroom with other non-family residents. The rest of the buildings mainly housed families aside from buildings 23A and 23B which had exclusively single male occupants. Buildings 24 and 25 were not used for housing asylum seekers for most of our internship due to the discovery of mold after having moved the residents during the first two weeks of our internship. Single male residents were distributed in rooms according to ethnicity by the networkers and usually lived two and two together with a few having single rooms or two roommates instead of one. Families were assigned rooms for themselves but had to share bathrooms and kitchens with other residents in the same building. Families weren't always able to get a room which fit their size and were thus often forced to live quite closely together. However we didn't witness or hear of any rooms without enough beds for all occupants. Closet space was available in all the rooms as well as a pre-installed fridge and TV and many residents used their laptops or smartphone as a way to provide themselves or their family with entertainment while being inside their rooms.

Picture 2: Typical two bed room

Picture 3: Closet space and safety box

Picture 4: Fridge and TV

There was a small playground for the children to use as well as access to mooncars and balls provided by the staff members. However the mooncars and balls were

quickly claimed by individual families instead of being returned to the staff. Children were required to attend kindergarten or school alongside the local Danish children. Adults had the opportunity to either use the foosball table in the laundry room, located in building 21, or hang out in building 17, where tabletop games could be played, a resident hairdresser could be visited, clothes could be bought from the secondhand store, sowing could be done or the one computer could be used, if they wanted to do activities outside their room. These activities were run by residents as a part of their assigned activites referred to as praktik but was overseen by one of the networkers, Alice, who was in charge of opening the building in the morning and registering attendance. Building 17 was both the place where a lot of adults gathered as a part of their praktik, which for many consisted of merely showing up and being in or around building 17 for most of the day without doing any of the activities, since only a limited number of people could help out with these, or because they wanted to stop by and have a cup of coffee or tea and some small talk after attending school or a different form of praktik. These different forms of praktik could be the cultivation of a vegetable garden within the asylum center grounds or learning how to make honey from a local Danish resident. School, for adults, was run by teachers employed at the asylum center and consisted mostly of basic Danish lessons. School was mandatory for people aged 17-60. However there were separate classes for age groups 17-21 and 22-60, since asylum seekers aged 22-60 are required to attend both school and praktik. The teachers did not appear to be required to have prior teaching experience or any relevant training, however it did seem like being able to speak Arabic or other Middle-Eastern languages was a plus during lessons.

Building 22 housed no asylum seekers. This was a large barn-like structure commonly referred to as “Grøn lade” or “Green barn”, was where the maintenance staff, consisting of five people, had their office and tools. This was also where the distribution of cleaning articles and pocket money took place. The distribution of pocket money, which took place every other Thursday, wasn't managed by any of the staff members but by separate personnel employed by the Danish Immigration Service. Building 20 housed only a few asylum seekers, mainly single women or families, in the ground section. The first floor of building 20, known only as “Office” among residents and staff members alike, held the staff kitchen area, one of two classrooms, the office

area of non-maintenance staff as well as a reception area. A few times a week one or two social workers, who were in charge of assigning praktik and school to the residents, were present in this building to answer any questions or complaints from the residents and inform the people, who had not attended their praktik or school, of the repercussions of their actions. Aside from the social workers, there were usually two teachers and five networkers present as well as the center leader. The networkers were the ones who had the most day-to-day contact with residents and often took us along if they were headed out to check up on people in the center, help them with reported problems or try to reinforce norms and rules. The networkers also handled the communication between the residents and the Danish Immigration Service. However out of the total number of 15 staff members at the asylum center, only four held permanent contracts resulting in rather frequent replacement of staff members. People working as networkers, maintenance staff and teachers weren't required to have any sort of official training or education in regards to working with people and appeared to have vastly different professional and personal backgrounds.

5 Research method

In the present section we will introduce our methodological considerations. This includes the grounds on which the choice of method was made, how we were able to gain access to the research participants as well as how the data was collected and analyzed. This is done in order to provide the reader with insight into the process of finding the findings.

5.1 Choosing the method

While interpretative phenomenological analysis is presented as the main methodological approach in the present master's thesis, this study started out as an explorative effort to investigate the lives of asylum seekers during a research internship. It was done without prior considerations to an eventual end-point or specific reason question. Due to the wish of having a broad and open approach to our research field, we used participant observation resulting in copious amounts of field notes on a broad range of topics. In addition to the field notes, we conducted four

semi-structured interviews with two asylum seekers and two mental health professionals connected to the asylum center (See section 5.4). The data was collected between March and June 2016 and while trying to decide the possible direction of the present master's thesis, we re-familiarized ourselves with the gathered data and ended up with the formerly introduced research question relating to the experience of living in a Danish asylum center. Since we wanted to focus on the experiences of living in an asylum center we decided to conduct an interpretative phenomenological analysis and use the asylum seeker interviews as our main body of data. However we also wanted to include the interviews with the mental health professionals as well as our field notes. It is argued by Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe & Neville (2014, p. 545f) that it is possible to combine data sources in order to increase the trustworthiness of findings through data triangulation. Based on this the field notes and therapist interviews were judged as being a valuable resource for gaining multiple perspectives on and validation of the themes emerging from the IPA of the asylum seeker interviews.

5.2 What is interpretative phenomenological analysis?

IPA is a qualitative methodology which several authors have pinpointed as being of particular importance to psychologists (Shaw, 2018; Langdridge, 2007; Eatough & Smith, 2011). IPA is influenced by the theoretical traditions of phenomenology and hermeneutics (Shaw, 2018, p. 1).

The phenomenological aspect of IPA is grounded in a philosophical school of thought from the early 1900's concerned, amongst other things, with 'a return to the things themselves' as articulated by its founder Edmund Husserl (Shaw, 2018, p. 4). When combining this notion of a 'return to the things themselves' with psychological research, as IPA seeks to, the aim becomes to outline how people make meaning of their lived experiences and in turn the world in which they live which is encapsulated by the word lifeworld (Langdridge 2007, p. 107).

The influence of the method of hermeneutics on IPA is illustrated by how IPA is

particularly concerned with the interpretative activity involved in the analytic process when people are doing research with people (Shaw, 2018, p. 1). When doing an IPA the researcher is not passively observing, as the data magically shows its underlying themes but is actively trying to make sense of how the research participant is trying to make sense of his/her world (Shaw, 2018, p. 2). This analytic process is referred to as the double hermeneutic – an interpretation of the interpretation (Shaw, 2018, p. 2). In this process it is important that the researcher remains aware of his/her own interpretation of the world and how this might influence his/her interpretation of the participant's interpretation of their lifeworld (Shaw, 2018, p. 2).

Epistemologically IPA is situated within the critical realist paradigm which entails that events exist in reality but the only access to these is through a particular lens such as the specific perspective of the participant describing his/her experience of the event in a particular place and time (Shaw, 2018, p. 2). Thus the analyst is attempting to make sense of the participant's experiences in a particular point of their life, in a particular period in history, in a specific cultural, social and economic context (Shaw, 2018, p. 2). The results of an IPA are therefore not nomothetic in nature but idiographic, seeing as the focus is on the lived experiences of specific individuals (Shaw, 2018, p. 1; Eatough & Smith, 2011, p. 7).

5.3 Access and trust

The majority of most asylum seekers time is spend in designated asylum centers, which made them our choice of place to do conduct our study on the asylum seeker experience. A three months internship at an asylum center allowed us to be in the field for an extended time period and use participant observation and take field notes while the people we studied were in the process of seeking asylum, instead of alternatively obtaining information post-asylum through interviews. We contacted a few centers before being allowed access to one in Southern Denmark during office hours for two or three days a week during a three month period. In this time we attended morning meetings of the staff, participated in the daily activities of asylum seekers and occasionally helped both staff and residents with practical problems.

Establishing rapport with the centers residents was to some degree more difficult than anticipated. To stand apart from the employees we ditched the walkie-talkies that was given to us for safety reasons and tried to explain our purpose there, but due to our entrance and introduction to the center through the staff, we suspected that many still saw us as part of the staff and as such wouldn't share anything with us that they wouldn't with the regular staff. This became clear, as an example, when one researcher was asked for help with an administrative task that was part of the staff's duties (Field note 2, pp. 78f, book 3), or when the leader of the center told us how some residents thought we were conducting therapy in our conversations with them, despite our attempts at explaining our purpose (Field note 1, p. 41, book 1). We tried to make it clear to the people we interacted with, that we were at the center to conduct research as a part of our education to become psychologists. It didn't feel like our stated purpose was completely understood by people in the beginning, but over time it seemed that at least the residents we commonly spoke to acknowledged that we were not part of the staff, since we never acted like the staff, took on a role of authority or tried to change behavior like the staff might, setting us apart from them. In time people became more willing to share information, stories and we were even invited in for beers and asked by a resident to procure marijuana for him - things the staff would not be asked, which we saw as a sign of trust.

5.4 Sampling

The asylum seekers at the center came from very diverse backgrounds, the majority of which hailed from the Middle East, Afghanistan and Africa. Initially the center was mainly comprised of single men, but a month into our study it was reorganized into a center for families, entailing a diminished number of single men. During our study four interviews were conducted: two with therapists connected to the asylum center, and two with residents living there. We initially planned to do more interviews with asylum seekers, but due to our wish to conduct these towards the end of our internship as a way to elaborate on our own observations, we were a bit pressed for time and thus didn't have the opportunity to re-schedule after being faced with cancellations by two residents acting as translators at the center. After the first two months of initial exploration we contacted two therapists connected to the center

for interviews to gain greater insight from key personnel on what kind of issues the people seeking asylum usually had. One spoke about the volatile role of translators in the asylum system and a common lack of trust towards them (Appendix C, 1259-1270). While all residents were experiencing life in the asylum center, this information on the perception of translators severely reduced the pool of available participants due to language barriers. The intended use of the therapist interviews were to provide context for what challenges the asylum seekers might face, while using the asylum seeker interviews as the main source of insight into the life of an asylum seeker in Denmark. The interviews were scheduled in the last two weeks of our study and four English speaking male asylum seekers, with whom we had established rapport, were asked for an interview. Of these, two obliged: Hakim[1], an Afghani male aged 28 with a wife and two kids, and Omar from Palestine, aged 24 with a Danish girlfriend. Hakim didn't have fixed praktik for most of our stay, while Omar had a part-time assignment as a translator in the center, but was reluctant or avoidant in this task. Both had spent the majority of their time in Denmark at the center, and, respectively, five months and one year and four months in the asylum process. These interviewees were chosen based on their English capabilities and pre-established rapport between them and us. The interviewees were informed of the general purpose and direction of the interview and that it would be used in our future research, prior to arranging a specific time and location for it to take place. Before beginning the interview we made sure to inform the participants that they would be recorded and that they would be anonymized in the transcript. Aside from informing them prior to scheduling the interview, the same procedure was followed for the therapist interviews.

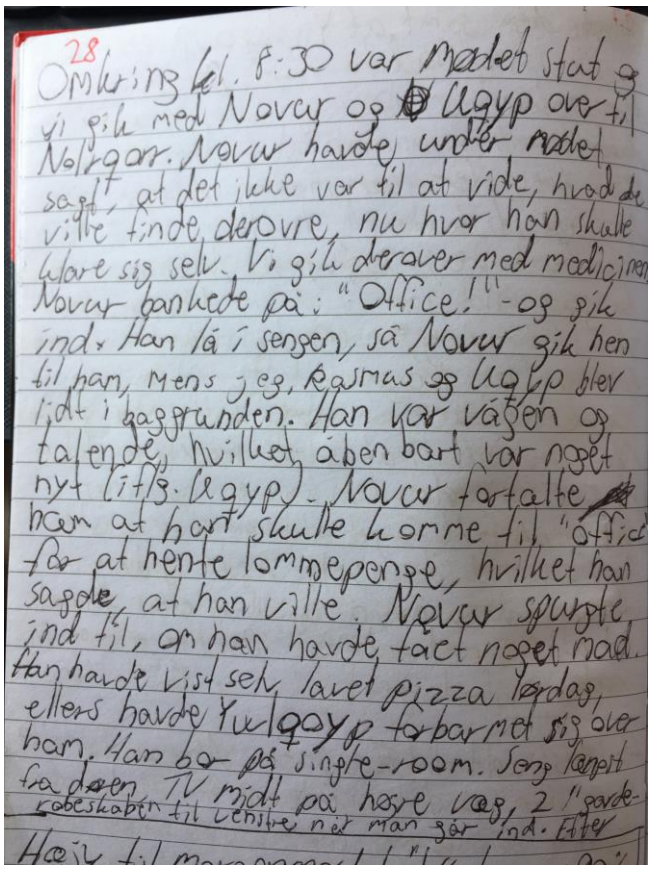
5.5 Data collection

5.5.1 Participant observation

Participant observation was one of the chosen ways of collecting data, following Angrosino (2017) we sought to achieve a balance of participating alongside the

1 All participants have been anonymized through aliases.

people we were studying while trying to keep an observational perspective on their activities and interrelationships. We attempted to achieve this balance by deliberately refraining from reading too much research literature on asylum seekers prior to beginning our study in order keep an open mind in regards to the living conditions, interactions and way of life in the asylum center. This decision helped us maintain a curious stance throughout our time at the asylum center, which played an important role in how we interacted with the people at the center. We also sought to maintain this curiosity when writing up our field notes by trying to keep our written observations as close to the perceived events as possible and by making our own interpretations and opinions known in the field notes following the observations or in a different space from the observations to make it clear, that they were our own wonderings and not perceived events or other's utterances. By making our own opinions and interpretations of certain events or actions known to ourselves, we strived to achieve openness to the field by becoming conscious of our own prejudices and understanding of events. An example of how we wrote up our field notes can be seen below:



Picture 4: Example of field note

As can be seen in this example of our field notes, we included the time of the observation and sought to describe how the events took place as well as what the setting was like. As can also be seen, we ensured the anonymity of all our research participants by providing them with aliases in our field notes based on a system which made their names look like gibberish to outsiders but was legible to us.

During the very first days of being at the center, we walked around with our notebooks and wrote down observations as they appeared before our eyes while trying to introduce ourselves to the residents and inform them of why we were there. We quickly changed this practice as it was clearly making the residents uncomfortable with our presence despite our attempts at explaining the purpose of our notes. Our actions of observing and writing notes could resemble those of the authorities present in dictatorial regimes from which many of the residents had fled or perhaps induce thoughts of being scrutinized in relation with their asylum claim. Based on this we began writing up our notes in the staff kitchen area, however seeing as we were open about writing down observations relating to the staff as well as the residents, this would sometimes prompt bypassing staff members to vent to us about other staff members or residents. In addition to using notebooks we also wrote short notes on our smartphones while being in the presence of asylum seekers. This practice was deemed to be appropriate and inconspicuous based on the frequency of smartphone use among the residents themselves meaning that typing on our phones for a short period of time would be probably be seen as us writing a text message and not as writing down our observations. The smartphone proved to be a valuable data collection tool, aside from providing a way to take stealthy notes, as it became possible to communicate with people who spoke neither Danish nor English through the use of Google translate.

A typical day for us at the center began by attending the staff's morning meeting followed by noting down central topics brought up during the meeting and observations about the interrelationship of the staff members. Then we would usually go to the building where residents socialized as a part of their assigned activities, play some games with them, talk about whatever might come up during conversation and help out with shared activities decided by the responsible staff member alongside

the residents. After having had lunch in the staff kitchen area, during which staff members would often raise issues relating to specific residents or tell anecdotes, we would note down observations from the time between the end of the staff meeting at nine o'clock and lunch at 12 o'clock. Afterwards we would either return to the same building, as this was the main social hub of the center, or walk around and observe people's activities or strike up conversations with different people. Towards the end of the day we would usually write down notes for the last hour or so before having to leave the center alongside the staff. In total we gathered roughly 360 pages of field notes written in notebooks and on our phones (Available in appendix G) [2].

5.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were employed as a way of gathering data based on a wish to shed further light on our own observations and be able to gain a deeper understanding of how certain aspects of being at the center was experienced by the people living there. The semi-structured way of interviewing was chosen based on the possibility of following the interviewees' train of thought and allow a larger degree of improvisation compared to a structured interview while being able to navigate our areas of interest. The interview guide for the semi-structured interviews with asylum seekers was inspired by the field notes we had accumulated at the time of creation and by some preconceptions regarding asylum seeker living garnered from the therapist interviews and our impressions from the time we had already spend at the center. The questions were open-ended and focused on how the interviewee experienced arriving in Denmark, living in an asylum center, the Danish asylum system as well as how they pictured their possible future (Interview guide available in appendix E). These questions were neither meant nor applied as a rigid checklist of questions for the interviewee to answer but as a way of guiding the flow of the interview when necessary. The interviewer and interviewee were thus co-constructors of the interview with the interviewer attempting to follow the direction of the interviewee while using the interview guide as a way of keeping within the general area of interest without limiting the interviewee's responses unnecessarily.

[2] The full amount of field notes haven't been digitalized but an overview of the notes are provided.

The interviews were conducted with both of the researchers present with one being the main interviewer while the other was mainly there for observation and constructive criticism after the interview as well as occasional further questioning of the interviewee. The presence of both researchers might have created a sense of us 'ganging up' on the interviewee but neither of them expressed a sense of uneasiness during or after the interview situation. The interviews were recorded using one of the researcher's smartphone and lasted roughly one hour each. The interview with Omar was done in his room and the one with Hakim in a room in the office building, which was normally used as a classroom. The interview in the classroom was interrupted by a staff member needing to retrieve her things which could have had an influence on the interviewee's sense of confidentiality.

The interview guide for the semi-structured interviews with mental health professionals was similarly inspired by our field notes and experiences at the asylum center as well as by our visit to the clinic from which they worked and our resulting. The interview guide was used in a similar manner to the interviews conducted with asylum seekers. Both of the researchers were active in posing questions during the interviews which were conducted in the interviewee's personal offices. The reason for both researchers being active question posers in these interviews differed from the way the asylum seeker interviews were conducted and was based on the therapist interviews being more akin to a casual conversation while still being guided by a few topics of interest (Available in appendix F). The interview with Lise lasted an hour and a half while the one with Lotte lasted roughly 40 minutes. Similar to the asylum seeker interviews, we made sure to obtain informed consent prior to beginning the recording of the interviews on the same smartphone as the asylum seeker interviews. We also ensured them that they would be anonymized.

The interviews were transcribed ad verbatim in full length and included nonverbal communication, pauses and half-finished sentences. The full transcripts are available on the attached CD **(**Appendix A-D**).** Nonverbal communication was put in brackets and the identified noise was either written by its name, such as [laughter] or as what the noise seemed to be indicative of such as [mumbling]. Pauses were marked with three dots or a comma depending on length, with three dots indicating longer pauses

and a comma for shorter pauses. Half-finished sentences or acts of trailing off were marked with a hyphen. If our interviewees indicated that they had been thinking something or that they had said something to another person, then the thought or utterance was put in quotation marks in order to emphasize that this act had been displayed. Interviewees were referred to as participant, marked by "P:" and the interviewer(s) were referred to as interviewer 1 (I1) or interviewer 2 (I2), depending on who was the main interviewer. For the therapist interviews the choice of who was referred to as interviewer 1 and interviewer 2 was decided by the transcriber at random as both interviewers were found to be equally active in posing questions. The asylum seeker interviews were transcribed by the researcher who had not been the main interviewer both because it would allow us to give each other some constructive criticism in regards to the interviewer's interview technique and gain a deeper understanding of the content of the interview, which the transcribing researcher had been a mostly passive spectator to. The therapist interviews were transcribed in the same manner, however, as noted, it was quickly judged that both researchers had been somewhat equally active during these interviews. As such, both due to this and the differing length of the interviews, the interview with Lotte (41 mins.) was only transcribed by one of the researchers while the interview with Lise (1h, 23mins.) was transcribed by both researchers with approximately half of the interview done by each. When the transcriptions were done, we were able to proceed with the data analysis.

5.6 Data analysis

In our analysis we followed the procedure for IPA described by Langdridge (2011) consisting of the following four steps of analysis: 1. Familiarizing ourselves with the transcript and capturing the meaning in the text, 2. Noting emerging themes and connecting the meaning in the text with broader contextual and theoretical concerns, 3. Structuring the themes, 4. Producing a final table of themes and linking these to specific quotes. Our transcripts with interpretative notes **(**Available on the attached CD, appendix A-D**)** display the process of exactly how we did our version of an IPA according to these four steps. In the following we will provide a written account of

how we did each of the steps. Hopefully this will provide a useful overview of how we analyzed our data and why we did it in this way, which can be further visually expanded by consulting the full transcripts.

We initially started out by individually going through the two asylum seeker interviews and completing steps 1-3. The researcher who had done the transcription of the particular interview also did the analysis. Step one consisted mostly of reading and re-reading the transcript while making notes in the left-hand margin of the transcript regarding the meaning inherent in the utterances of the interviewees in addition to re-listening to the interviews. In step two we adopted a more interpretative attitude towards the transcript and tried to look at what might be "hidden" in the words uttered by our interviewees in light of our associations to extant psychological literature and perceived connections or tendencies within the transcript while noting down general or specific themes in the right-hand margin. Finally in step three we focused on how the different emerging themes fit or didn't fit together and if some were more or less relevant to our research question. However after going through the identified themes together and receiving some constructive criticism from our guidance counselor, we decided to redo steps two and three in order to co-interpret each interview with a less theoretical and more textual focus. We were able to co-interpret the interviews by having one of us sharing his screen with the other via Skype while going through each interview discussing possible ways of understanding the utterances of our interviewees. This was done as a way of ensuring that the emerging themes were based on a common understanding of what was being said in the interviews thus achieving investigator triangulation (Carter et al., 2014, p. 545). Our field notes proved to be a valuable resource and enabled us in providing context for our analysis work and thereby either refuting or substantiating the relevancy and validity of our interpretations. The field notes were especially useful when providing information relating to our participants. After having produced a final list of themes for both of the asylum seeker interviews, we decided to turn to the interviews with the two therapists connected to the asylum center. The same procedure was applied to the two interviews with the therapists. However upon further discussion we decided not to use most of the themes produced from these interviews, since a lot of them were judged as being irrelevant to our research

question. This was due to the therapist interviewees explicating a lot of technicalities regarding how to conduct therapy with asylum seekers and as such didn't contribute to an understanding of the asylum seekers' experiences of living in an asylum center. For example one of the omitted themes related to the specific exercises used by the therapists. While perhaps relevant perspectives could be found in this theme, it was not pertinent enough to our research question to be included. Instead we opted to focus on the themes from the asylum seeker interviews and use the therapist interviews as a way to either add to or challenge the understandings produced through our interpretation of the two asylum seeker participants' experiences. The usefulness of this choice of application of the therapist interviews was based on the unique insight into the experiences of their clients presented to them through their therapeutic work with asylum seekers living in the same asylum center as our interview participants. So while it isn't a common approach in IPA, which focuses on interpreting the lived experiences relating to a certain phenomenon, the use of both field notes and the interviews with mental health professionals enabled the addition of comparative and differentiating perspectives which helped us achieve interesting findings.

6 Presenting the findings

The following analysis of data resulting from semi-structured interviews is organized into three overarching themes, which are supported by statements of two asylum seekers and two therapists employed by the asylum center in which the two asylum seekers lived. Furthermore our field notes will be used to elaborate on the statements made by the research participants in order to provide further context. The themes are meant to reflect the issues related to being an asylum seeker in Denmark. The themes that follow are not necessarily presented in an order of importance to the participants, but they are organized so as to first provide an understanding of how the asylum system, which frames the participants' lives, is experienced by them, to provide a deeper understanding for the reader of the subsequent themes, which mostly operate within this frame.

Three central themes emerged while answering the question of how seeking asylum and living in a refugee center in Southern Denmark is experienced by people in this position according to themselves and mental health professionals working in the asylum field. While there were differing foci between the participants, one overarching theme transcended these, which was the inherent uncertainty of being in the position of an asylum seeker which permeates almost every aspect of their existence. The experience of uncertainty will thus be present in the three identified themes which are 1. Power in the asylum system, 2. Living in limbo and 3. Maneuvering the social arena of the asylum center.

6.1 Power in the asylum system

6.1.1 The asylum case

The key aspect defining the status of the asylum seeker is the asylum case, which determines whether the applicant will be granted asylum or be send back to their country of origin. It is the prerequisite for staying in the asylum center and had a significant impact on the participants' experiences, since the outcome, positive or negative, will be consequential for their life after the asylum system. The importance of the asylum case can be illustrated by the following quote by Omar in which he recounts how the outcome of his asylum claim determines his ability to make plans for the future: "You get- are they gonna, just keep you like hanging or are they gonna find a way to send you back? You know? So h- h- how am I gonna think about future when I don't know anything?" (Appendix B, 1103-1106). Omar displays his frustration with being kept waiting for an answer to whether he will be allowed to stay in Denmark or be sent back to Gaza. This question of whether one will get asylum is clear and apparent in the everyday life of the interviewees. In regards to the asylum interview Omar had some worries: He was completely consumed with what the decision of his asylum claim would be. All his energy and efforts were focused on this one decision and every other aspect of his life and himself was neglected because of the huge amount of stress and anxiety he was feeling.

> Like in- at first- or... In my first five-six months.... didn't do anything. Eating, sleeping and just stress myself all the time, all the way. I'm thinking: ”should I say this to them?” ”should I say that?” (inaudible). Like to the... eh… [immigration services]. (Appendix B, 1030-1039)

What Omar is referring to here is how the burden of evidence rests solely on him, the asylum seeker, when attempting to prove the legitimacy of his claim for asylum. Because it's such an important decision and because he only gets a few chances to influence this decision during his interviews with the immigration services, thinking about what to say and how to say it can become all-consuming. It can be assumed without too much controversy that it is the goal of Omar as well as other asylum seekers to get a positive outcome of their case, and many spend a significant amount of time thinking about and preparing evidence and statements to support their case. As Hakim says:

> One translator another is giving interview. So she ask- said our interview three points. One is wh- how you come in Denmark. Another is details, you're married, your son, your name, your father's name, like this. Another is why you left your country, what is the result- reasons. So like this. But I always feel positive, I always feel positive because if I hundred percent problem in our country, if I have real problem in our country- to left our country, then Denmark knows. Denmark is- has a lot of psychologist, when you speak Denmark know you are wrong, you are liar, you are right, you are – like this. So I feel, ehm, good. Because I never tell lie, I never left our country without any reason. (Appendix A, 1165-1181)

To Hakim having a serious problem is a “good” thing, because it means he has a higher chance that the authorities will believe his case is within the official criteria of asylum, and serious enough to warrant being granted asylum. During our study he was very interested in outcomes of similar cases, and asked us for help in finding and printing pictures and documents which could help strengthen his case (Field note 3, p. 2, book 2). His statements on troubles in his home country and never lying could be seen as an attempt to come across as honest and fit the image of a legitimate refu-

gee. Omar similarly displays a concern in regards to the criteria for gaining asylum but expresses how these are not completely clear to him, as seen in his story of two Syrian brothers:

> They just nos- no time. Like there isn't- I think they do not have system they just choose randomly about, like, okay ”you 6 months, you 8 months” ”you wait, you positive, you negative””. Like for example, eh, one Syrian guy. I think his- his, eh, mother is, eh, from, eh, Lebanon. Eh, so, eh. His brother took positive (inaudible). They live in the same house, same conditions, same everything and his brother came and then, he get negative. (Appendix B, 909-917)

The uncertainty, perceived randomness and powerlessness of the asylum case procedure, makes it difficult to prepare for. Omar’s description of the case with the two brothers shows how it can feel almost Kafkaesque to try to navigate this system which is experienced as very convoluted while simultaneously having a significant impact on the person's possibilities in life.

6.1.2 Authorities

The first authority which Hakim interacted with when coming to Denmark, was the police, who handled his initial request for asylum by contacting the Danish Immigration Services and transporting him and his family to Sandholm which is a reception center for asylum seekers. Hakim recounts his first meeting with the Danish police:

> (…) I go to the office and police offic- station and ehm, say “I am refugee , I wanna-” so- but police station is safe with police I wait in three hours inside of police room, after this big call came and transferred to the Sandholm and ehm, after this we go to Allerød after Allerød we come Sandholm got ID card with my family (...). (Appendix A, 402-410)

Hakim displays two perspectives on the functions of the police during the retelling of his first encounter with the Danish police. He creates the space of the police station

as being safe and the police acting as gatekeepers for the initiation of himself and his family into the Danish asylum system via the "big call" from the immigration services to the police station. Other than being his first interaction with Danish authorities, Hakim also experienced the police as peacekeepers within the asylum center: "I am proud in Denmark government and in Denmark police, always try to make peaceful area." (Appendix A, 498-500). Hakim seems to view the police as being a positive factor in his life. This positivity wasn't necessarily shared by all the people living in the asylum center, since some people had bad experiences with trusting authorities, such as the police, in their country of origin (Field note 4, p. 17, book 5).

This issue of trusting authorities or authority figures was experienced by Lise during therapy sessions:

> Der er også nogen der hellere vil tegne hos mig, end at sige noget fordi hvis de er så- har så stor mistillid, altså de simpelthen ikke tror på nogen, altså srilankanere- tamilske tigre tror ikke på nogen, overhovedet. Så tegner de hellere, eller skriver til mig, så prøver vi over google translate i stedet for og det kan satme ikke være for godt. De er sikre på (inaudible) efter dem nu, altså. Respekt igen. Puha af hvor meget paranoia er der (inaudible)./There are also some who would rather draw with me than say anything because they have such a- have such a large feeling of distrust, so they simply don't believe anyone, so Srilankans- Tamil tigers don't belive anyone, at all. Then they'd rather draw, or write to me, then we try using google translate instead and damn that's not always too good. They are certain that (inaudible) are after them now, so. Respect again. Phew of how much paranoia there are (inaudible). (Appendix C, 1299-1306)

Lise's utterance illustrates how paranoia and mistrust in authorities can make some asylum seekers unwilling to speak openly to her. Lise hints at the possibility of this being due to a fear that the translator, which is often telephonically present in therapy with asylum seekers, might relay information to the authorities in the country from which the client has fled, since the asylum seekers, who Lise mentioned, are willing to communicate with her solely via drawings and text.

Another authority in the lives of the asylum seekers in our study is the staff at the asylum center. According to one staff member, their central objective was to try to integrate the outspoken needs of the residing asylum seekers with the structural decisions being made by the Danish Immigration Services as well as assign rooms and activities to the residents (Field note 3, p. 13, book 3). Omar and Hakim were both asked about their experiences with and understanding of the functions of the center staff during the interviews. Hakim emphasized how he appreciates the staff and how the leader in particular does a good job. He did however wish that they would be a bit better at investigating the rumors being spread around the center:

> I love Mikkel, Mikkel is a good manager in [Asylcenter] camp, Alice is also, Anders is also I appreciate them ehm, but ehm, I just wish-I wish [Asylcenter] staff to- if a person come say some things like for example "Hakim is wrong person, Hakim always drink-" for example "wine, Hakim always fight with people". Just example. But ehm, staff is- must investigate ehm, right- investigate right. But never error one point. If a person come say and is wrong you see it. You have a lot of camera you have a lot of security, search and investigate if it's right or not. (Appendix A, 554-573)

Despite him emphasizing that this is "Just example", Hakim seems to have experienced or seen some neglect from the side of the staff in regards to a situation such as the one he describes, since he decides to bring up this issue after being asked to tell us about his perception of the function of the staff. When he uses the word "wish" it seems to indicate that this is something which the staff should be doing but isn't, despite them having the possibility to use cameras to investigate whether a person is telling lies about another person or not. Hakim seems to place a great deal of power with the staff members through the surveillance cameras, which he wishes that they would use to keep residents from spreading rumors about each other. By placing the staff in this position of being investigators of the truth and helping people out with their interpersonal conflicts, Hakim is indicating that he views the staff as having the possibility of being omnipresent through surveillance footage.

Omar was rather uncertain in regards to the nature of our question about what the function of the staff was but highlighted three of the staff members and their position in the asylum center:

> I guess Alice deal with most of the people with anything, like, to communicate with lawyers, with, eh, any problem that you have, you go to Alice (...) but when it's- when she can't do anything about it she ask Anders I think, but he's the boss here, I think. [laughs]. So and Amanda not as much, a- as I said, soc- socializing, you know being nice a lot and talking with, hm, eh, normal stuff I guess. (Appendix B, 348-357)

Omar is describing how most of the contact between the asylum seekers and their lawyers in regards to the asylum case went through one particular staff member, Alice. Alice would call once a week to hear about the progress of different people's cases (Field note 3, p. 1, book 3). As such he and others were reliant on Alice when seeking new information about their asylum case. Furthermore it seems that, in his perspective, Alice is trying to help with as much as possible, "any problem that you have, you go to Alice", so perhaps there are other issues than the asylum case where he and others would contact Alice to get help. He also brings up another staff member, Anders, who he positions as the leader of the asylum center despite this actually being Mikkel, as mentioned by Hakim. Perhaps Omar has witnessed how Anders has solved problems for Alice, which could indicate to Omar that Anders had a higher degree of authority than Alice. Finally Omar mentions Amanda, whose function he sees as socializing with the residents. In Omar's optic Amanda seems to come across as acting in a manner which makes her friend-like or equal to himself and other residents, since she is "being nice a lot" and talking with them without it necessarily being about their case or some other issue they might need help with but just socializing and doing "normal stuff".

Like Omar and Hakim mentioned in the highlighted quotes above, they are dependent on the help of the staff when having to deal with problems inside the camp or seeking to contact their lawyers about their asylum case. Despite this not being mentioned by either Hakim or Omar it wasn't unusual for conflicts to arise between the

staff and the residents, as mentioned to us by Mikkel, the leader of the center, when we talked to him about how nice one of the residents were: “Bare vent til du siger “Nej”/“Just wait till you say “No.”” (Field note 1, p. 102, book 1). Not having their requests met would sometimes result in conflicts between the center staff and residents as was exemplified by our witnessing of such a conflict between a resident and the center leader, where the resident wanted to decide for himself whether he should attend school and his praktik or not without receiving a reduced amount of pocket money (Field note 2, pp. 21-24, book 4).

6.1.3 Agency and autonomy

While awaiting a decision on their case, asylum seekers are limited in several keys areas, especially economically and spatially. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work. Instead they receive pocket money to cover the cost of living, but have little to no option in increasing their income, aside from showing up for praktik or school (Field note 2, p. 28, book 1). Lise told about this as being a common issue brought up by her clients:

> De føler sig umyndiggjort og de føler at, hvorfor skal de have penge altså nogle vil i hvert fald ikke have penge fra staten. De vil hellere arbejde for dem. Det er slemt. Og hvis de så ikke får mere altså og hvorfor kan de ikke selv bruge dem til husleje f.eks.. Altså så der er så mange aspekter i det at de føler sig nedgjort. // They feel disempowered and they feel that why should they receive money like some of them certainly don’t want money from the government. They would rather work for them. It is bad. And then if they don’t get more like, and why can’t they use them how they want for rent fx.. Like there are så many aspects to it that they feel downtrodden. (Appendix C, 1996-2001)

Not having the ability to work to supplement or replace pocket money can feel humiliating and limiting to someone who is used to providing for themselves and their family. The amount of money received does not leave a lot of options on what to spend it on, other than what kind of food the person wants to buy from the local

shops. According to our field notes, the amount received is also a far shot from being able to pay for private lodgings in Denmark - something the asylum seeker has to apply for, even if they are able to afford it (Field note 3, p. 22, book 3). They have little to no agency in choice of lodgings, which are assigned to them upon arrival at the center (Field note 4, p. 2, book 1). Both Omar and Hakim described themselves as lucky in regards to their living situation because of the relative privacy they enjoyed compared to other residents.

The amount and way the pocket money is given out is an effective mechanism of tethering the asylum seekers to the center as expressed by Omar: "Like some people here they- they like, they rarely go out of this island, because it's really expensive to, travel." (Appendix B, 286-287). There were sometimes arranged tours and a couple of free buses to the biggest town in the area, but the residents' freedom of movement were otherwise fairly restricted because of the low fixed income and remoteness of the center (Field note 2, p. 1, book 5). The money is given out every two weeks, and collection is mandatory for the asylum seekers as a form of control that they're still in the system (Field note 1, p. 17, book 3). It was our impression that neither the residents nor the staff particularly enjoyed this activity in which the staff has to grant or deny leniency in missed attendance. This impression was shared by Lise, who recounted to us how her clients would often complain about the pocket money system:

> Om vi ser igennem fingre med, at de har altså ikke opholdt sig på centret. De skal tilbage og hente pocket money, hvorfor kan vi ikke bare sende dem med post, [deep breath] blablablablabla. / If we look the other way in regards to that they haven't been staying at the center. They have to go back to get pocket money, why can we not just send them with the mail [deep breath] blablablablabla. (Appendix C, 1964-1967)

While going back every two weeks is not a major disruption to most during regular weeks where there's school or praktik, Omar describes it as very limiting in times where there's nothing to do in the center, such as in the summertime:

> Yeah. And the bad- also bad thing about here that pocket money that you have to take it (inaudible) two weeks. It's like they keeping them here. You know... They not allow you to live somewhere else for time or take a vacation for two months from everything and come back, you know? You have to be here every two weeks. That's like a- like prison, you know? It's kinda, open prison. You have to come back. Check-in. (Appendix B, 698-710)

Omar had both a Danish girlfriend and an aunt living in Denmark with whom he could stay when there were no daily activities in the asylum center. He had a legal right to do so, however the way pocket money collection was conducted prevented him from doing so for very long, and the amount received was small enough that just coming back to get it would cost a significant part of it due to the remoteness of the center. Like many clients Lise had, Omar expressed frustration with the way the system was set up, restricting him and in his words "feeling like an open prison". He expressed a desire for a system which granted them more autonomy in their time off by, for example, depositing the money into their account or sending it by mail, which would allow him more freedom during stays away from the center.

There is very little agency and choice in what kind of praktik can be done in the center (Field note 1, p. 19, book 1). There are a few positions that could qualify as meaningful work, such as fixing bikes or farming and gardening, but the majority merely have to show up for attendance and then run out the clock, occasionally doing small tasks (Field note 1, p. 19, book 2). Hakim viewed himself as fortunate for being assigned to a praktik that had a purpose:

> Yea it's also good, but the office decided to you, ehm, work in honey project and especially teacher Abdul "you are good for honey project, please come with me if you-" I say "no problem, I am happy I love to work with you and with Abdul. It is good for me, yes. (Appendix A, 144-150)

From the excerpt it's clear that it's not a task which Hakim chose himself, but rather something the office decided he should do for praktik. Still, Hakim seems happy to be chosen for a project such as this, perhaps due to both the fact that the work makes

sense, and because he's proud to be chosen for this, out of so many other asylum seekers. There had been attempts at creating a pizza shop praktik, run autonomously by the asylum seekers, which brought them a little extra income. This was however later shut down when it became too popular with the locals, due to the low prices out-competing the local restaurateurs similar to the local painters union who demanded all painting work in the center be done by them and not the residents. A combination of these limitations on what can be done for praktik, and that it's chosen by the staff shows that agency in regards to work and daily mandatory activities is very limited.

6.2 Theme two: Living in limbo

6.2.1 Having an uncertain future

Omar told us how he felt like he had very little control over the outcome and proceedings of his asylum case which seemed to create a feeling of uncertainty and frustration for him:

> Wh- wha- what's it gonna be- wha- like it's- it's- if it's in your home country you know the possibility can be this or that, but here, well y- you never know and also ye- you actually never know what's- are you gonna get positive in the end? You get- are they gonna, just keep you like hanging or are they gonna find a way to send you back?. You know? So h- h- how am I gonna think about future when I don't know *anything*? (Appendix B, 1098-1106)

The uncertainty makes it hard for Omar to think about the future because he doesn't know if it's going to be in Denmark, or if "they", the immigration services, are going to find a way to send him back. Omar contrasts this with his home country where he, despite of the potential dangers he fled from, knew what he could expect in relation to his possibilities in life and future. Illustrating the impact of being stuck in a state of limbo, Omar mentioned to us during a conversation in the asylum center, that he sometimes was going crazy because of uncertainty about his future and his lack of control over it, coupled with a lack of things to do (Field note 1, p. 72, book 1). In the interview while talking about the future he mentions:

> Well now I'm trying not to think about it very much, but actually, eh, I kinda went to a- like to depression or wha-wha- what you call it, like. I don't wanna do anything or stuff now, just gonna, sleep all the time, you know? So… but now I'm, hm, not trying to think about the, further future. (Appendix B, 951-957)

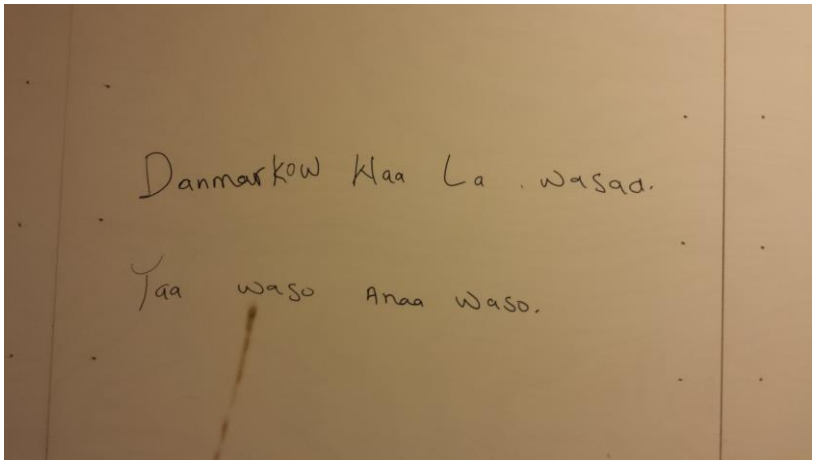
Not knowing and feeling powerless to influence what is to come makes it very uncomfortable for Omar to think about the future, initially driving him to a depressive state. At the time of the interview it was not so dire, but it is clear from the excerpt that he still did not like to think about the future nor the following feelings of uncertainty, doubt and powerlessness.

Uncertainty isn't just present in regards to the actual asylum case. We witnessed how asylum seekers could be transferred from one center to another with almost no warning, based on various reasons such as moving a problematic resident, or structural changes in the demographics of a center (Field note 1, p. 100, book 1). Notably in our time there, the center was restructured from housing mostly single men, to housing mostly families (Field note 1, pp. 31-38). In regards to the Danish Immigration Services moving people with almost no warning, Lise had a clear opinion:

> (...) vi flytter lige Saddam med to dages varsel til Aalborg". Det er uværdigt. For hvorfor skulle han ikke sige farvel? Hvorfor må han ikke sige knus og kram og have en lille fest eller…? (...) Altså "Nu har vi heller ikke i vores (inaudible)system. Nu har vi ikke plads til den og den og den der, nu flytter vi dem derover, så vi kan få plads til dem og dem. Så ryger den familie pludselig ud og det er skoler og børnehaver osv.. // (...) we'll just move Saddam to Aalborg with two days notice". It's undignified. Because why can't he say goodbye? Why can't he say hugs and squeezes and have a little party or…? (...) Like "Now we also don't have in our (inaudible)system. No we don't have room for that or that or that one, now we'll move them over there so we'll have room for those and these. Then that family gets send away and it's school and kindergarten etc.. (Appendix C, 2074-2092)

When a person or family is moved from one center to another it means a change in social life, living conditions and routines. As Lise describes there's often little notice and no time for ceremonious goodbyes. When the asylum center changed from housing mostly single male residents to families it was done quickly, and without ceremony (Field note 1, p. 38-42, book 3). We saw many tear-filled faces - both those that were moved and those that stayed, when they had to say goodbye to, for some, the only people they had really gotten to know

since coming to Denmark. Afterwards we went to see the now-abandoned trailer-barracks where the frustration was literally written on the walls, as seen below, which roughly translated from Somali to English means: “When Denmark fucks me, I fuck Denmark”



Picture 6: Frustration on the wall

When we were invited into rooms by their occupants, we noticed that they were sparsely decorated with whatever the asylum seekers could bring with them and what furniture was provided to them by the asylum center, but not much beyond that (Field note 1, pp. 20f, book 3). In the following excerpt Lise talks about her perspective on home making in the asylum center:

> Det med at jeg ved de skal være her længe, skabe et hjem. (...) print nogle billeder ud fotos ud, så vil jeg laminere dem op på din væg og gå på ’second-hand’, find nogle tæpper eller gør et eller andet.” I det øjeblik de så får afslag, så må de have 23 kilo med. Så alt det vi har bygget hjem om, det må de ikke engang få med. // I know they’ll have to stay here long, make a home. (...) “print out some pictures, then i’ll laminate them on your wall and go to ‘second-hand’, find some rugs or do something”. As soon as they get rejected [their case], they can bring 23 kilos. So everything we’ve build a home around they can’t even bring with them. (Appendix C, 2120-2128)

She shares her own thoughts on what the residents could do to make it homely, but acknowledges the futility of it if their case gets rejected. The uncertainty of one’s case and the temporariness of the asylum center can make it feel pointless to make a room feel like a home or, like in the mass-transfer example, make friends. The asylum seekers’ situation could change the next day or the next week, requiring them to build it up again elsewhere if they’re transferred, or to leave most of it behind if their case gets rejected. Uncertainty permeates many aspects of seeking asylum, and can make it hard to achieve stability, creating the sense that

being an asylum seeker is like being an ID-numbered puzzle piece that gets moved to fit the bigger picture (Field note 1, p. 100, book 1).

6.2.2 Coping with life in the asylum system

Our two asylum seeker interviewees both mentioned how they employed strategies for managing their mental health through positive thinking and doing activities. Hakim in particular was very outspoken about his perspective on how keeping busy was good for his mental health, when asked about what he occupies his time with in the asylum center:

> To always, mm, busy, because when I no working, no busy, ehm maybe I get sick, or I thinking about, ehm, negative points, so it is better we always thinking positive and focus on positive. But if we- we have entertainment if we are busy it is good for our health physically and it is good for our mind, and it is good for society. (Appendix A, 179-186)

In this excerpt Hakim explains how he tries to prevent himself from sinking into negative thoughts or coming down with some form of sickness by working and keeping himself busy. His preoccupation with trying to focus on the positive and thinking positive is also formulated as a way of stopping himself from worrying to much about "negative points" in his current situation. These "negative points" could have something to do with his asylum claim since he later in the interview states that "When I got negative for example, I never thinking negative. It's Denmark's decision, but I never go Afghanistan because I die [laughs]" (Appendix A, 1006-1009), when asked whether he always keeps his mind positive. He is referring to how his asylum claim was initially met with a negative decision by the Danish Immigration Service but seems to try to accept the situation. His statement that "It's Denmark's decision, but I never go Afghanistan because I die." seems to indicate that he doesn't directly dispute Denmark's decision but still maintains that the option of ever returning to Afghanistan is out of the question because of the dangers awaiting him there. In order to not dwell too much on the risk of being sent back to Afghanistan he tries to keep his mind positive. Omar also tried to keep his mind positive and avoid worrying thoughts as the following quotation shows:

> Omar: So. Like, eh, it- it's- eh, I- I always keep myself from thinking about this stuff [his asylum claim]. Just, eh, shorthand goals. And that what I'm trying to do now. Hm. That's it. Hm. Eh. It helps. Eh, not to keep thinking.

> Interviewer: So to- to *change* the thoughts?
> Omar : Mmm. Yeah. 'Cause actually is- it is stressful. It is very very stressful. (Appendix B, 1112-1128)

Omar seems to be trying to cope with the stress of being unsure about whether he will be granted asylum or not by focusing on the present and on what he can control through setting up "shorthand goals" for himself. Omar elaborated on how he tries to keep his day busy and set up goals for himself:

> Eh, well I have kinda plans, you know? Like, eh, I'm trying very hard now to learn the language. And, eh, and to keep my time- my day busy. All the time. So I try not to have a free day just to stay in the room. That's gonna be bad. I try to go out all the time. You know? Keep my day busy keep my, you know, week busy. Hm. Eh. Not sure what I'm gonna do in, eh, in the summer holiday. That's gonna be [sigh] hard for me if- if I didn't find something to do. (Appendix B, 961-977)

Aside from trying to learn Danish, Omar also attended boxing lessons and went to the gym several times a week, so he made an effort to engage in activities to keep himself busy (Field note 1, p. 55f, book 3). What being busy and not alone in his room seems to accomplish for Omar is made apparent as he brings up the possibility of lacking something to do during the summer holidays and how this is "gonna be [sigh] hard for me". He seems to be dreading the possibility of not having something to occupy his time nor his mind with and having to just stay in his room with his thoughts as he is actively trying to prevent this situation from happening since "That's gonna be bad". Much like Hakim, Omar seems to cope with the bad thoughts that might arise from being in the uncertain position of awaiting his asylum decision by occupying his time with activities and not being alone in his room.

Another way of coping with the stress of having fled to Denmark and awaiting one's asylum decision, which was mentioned by neither Omar nor Hakim but by Lise, is that of religion. Lise mentioned how she has many clients which talked a lot about religion and how religion had helped one of her clients, a Somali woman, find a sense of calmness:

> De taler *meget* om religion. Rigtig meget religion. Og jeg opfordrer da også til dem, at de (inaudible) kommer på banen. Men jeg en somalisk kvinde, som simpelthen ikke kunne få ro, hun er vist blevet sendt retur nu. "Så hvad er det, der virkelig giver dig ro?" "Jamen det er mine bønner. Det er når jeg beder til allah.". (...) Så sad hun

> så- så kom hun med sin yndlingssura 'Sura Krau' hed den, så sang hun den for mig. Jeg var fuldstændig smadret altså, fuldstændig smadret også fordi hun sad- jeg kunne se hun faldt til ro. Så siger jeg "Når du så er bange, så er det den du synger. // They talk about religion *a lot*. A lot about religion. And of course I also encourage them to, that they (inaudible) get on the field. But I- a Somali woman, who simply couldn't find a sense of calmness, I think she's been sent back now. "So what is it that really gives you a sense of calmness?" "Well that would be my prayers. That's when I pray to allah.". (...). So then she sat- then she brought her favorite sura 'Sura Krau' was its name, then she sang it to me. I was a wreck, I mean, a wreck also because she sat- I could see she was finding a sense of calmness. Then I tell her "When you are afraid then that's the one you sing". (Appendix C, 2606-2624)

The woman, who Lise is talking about, had apparently been trapped in a state of distress as she "simply couldn't find a sense of calmness" according to Lise. However when Lise prompted the woman to explain what was able to give her a sense of calmness she mentioned her prayers. It became clear to Lise, upon seeing the calming effect that the sura had on the woman, that this prayer was an effective coping tool for this woman which could be used whenever she felt distressed or afraid. Seemingly the woman felt a sense of calmness when she was connected to allah which was hard to find in her everyday life.

6.2.3 Expectations for life in Denmark

During the interviews with Lotte and Lise, they both mentioned how they have experienced that some clients have been misled in regards to what to expect when choosing to seek asylum in Denmark. When these expectations aren't met, it can lead to complaining as Lotte explains in relation to what some of the main problems brought up by her clients are:

> Så er der nogen der brokker sig over faciliteterne, ikke altså? Fordi der er mange af dem der har fået at vide, at når de kommer til Danmark, så er der jo nærmest gaden, der er belagt med guld og så får du en computer og alt mulig mærkeligt, ikke? Altså det sker jo ikke. Men det er specielt araberne. Araberne er meget forventningsfulde over og få. // Then there are some who complain about the facilities, right? Because there are a lot of them who have been told that when they come to Denmark, then there is almost the street, which is paved with gold and then they get a computer and all sorts of weird things, right? I mean, that doesn't happen. But it's especially the Arabs. The Arabs are very expectant in regards to receiving. (Appendix D, 488-493)

In this quote, Lotte explains that one of the subjects which are brought up by especially her Arabic clients has to do with complaining about the facilities provided to them as asylum seekers in Denmark. They have been told by someone before coming to Denmark, that they are entitled to things such as a computer, when arriving in Denmark. However this doesn't happen in reality which probably leads to the aforementioned complaining. Lise similarly recounted how she has experienced frustrated and disappointed Syrian men because of this same disconnect between the expectations for and the reality of being an asylum seeker in Denmark. She attributes the frustration felt by some asylum seekers over not being given material goods, to an expectation, created by human smugglers, that they would be able to quickly continue their lives when arriving in Denmark instead of being stuck in an asylum center for an extended period of time:

> (...) der kommer den der som er fælles menneskelig for os alle, at jeg troede lige jeg skulle have et liv og [makes noises] "Det skal du stadigvæk have, det bliver bare et andet." // (...) then this appears which is shared humanity for all of us, that I thought I was just going to have a life. "You are still going to have that, it'll just be a different one.". (Appendix C, 1161-1163)

While Lise brings about an empathic view through attributing the frustrations expressed by some of her clients, over not having their expectations for Denmark met, to a basic human need to live one's life, she also points out how having an overly optimistic and often unrealistic view on their chances of getting asylum can have consequences for their attitude towards life in the asylum system:

> De gider ikke strukturere deres dagligdag, de gider måske ikke gøre noget ekstra for børnene, fordi hvis- "Hvorfor sidde og høre på Lise eller lytte hver gang når vi alligevel skal i ophold og har vores eget hus om tre måneder?" // They don't want to structure their daily lives, maybe they don't want to do something extra for their children, because if- "Why sit around and listen to Lise or listen every time when we are going to be getting asylum and have our own house in three months?" (Appendix C, 973-976)

What Lise is referring to here is how some of the people she meets through her practice are completely convinced that they will gain asylum and as such don't see a point in participating in the activities appointed to them by the staff or listen to her advice in regards to their

mental and physical health. Furthermore this quote once again illustrates how some people, coming to seek asylum in Denmark, have been somehow given false information as to which benefits to expect to receive when arriving in Denmark.

To put Lotte's and Lise's experiences with false expectations into perspective it is worth noting how Hakim explained that his main reason for seeking asylum in Denmark was that there appeared to be a better chance of getting help compared to Germany:

> I want to believe in Deutschland, but inside of camp person told me- he from Iran, "let's go and ehm, Deutschla- Germany is more rush more refugee, maybe can not help for all so let's go Denmark." Then I say ok let's go Denmark. (Appendix A, 376-380)

Despite Hakim emphasizing a higher probability of gaining asylum as a deciding factor in his choice to seek asylum in Denmark, similar to some of Lise's clients, he didn't express any expectations that Denmark would provide him with material goods. It seems Hakim was primarily focused on gaining safety for himself and his family. In fact Hakim's expectations for his possible life and future in Denmark revolved around being able to improve the conditions for his family:

> But I never (inaudible) picture become president of Denmark. I can manager of one (inaudible) good factory in Denmark, because it is impossible for me. It is impossible I don't have this. I want to help for my sons, it is very strong pos- responsibility for me to help for son. But I can not help to (inaudible) on people. Yes I help my area, I work safety, I work- I get money and spend for family, this is my responsibility. So my future is depend in my sons' future. (Appendix A, 1413-1424)

Hakim positions himself as having the responsibility to help his family and particularly his sons by working and making money. He doesn't expect to or envision himself as ever becoming the manager of a factory or achieving some other lofty position such as being president of Denmark, since he sees this happening as being "impossible for me.". Instead he seems to view himself as being a sort of stepping stone for his sons to have more opportunities in life than him, seeing how he says that "my future is depend in my sons' future.". So his main expectation for his possible future life in Denmark seems to be that of being able to provide a stable and safe life for himself, his sons and wife. He doesn't seem to believe in

the likelihood of himself gaining a prestigious career in Denmark which is a sentiment shared by Omar:

> In my home country or just came it's- it's not maybe-maybe, it's not as hard as now because [deep breath]. I- you know I've never been- knew what am I going to do in my home country and that, eh, I'm now here and it's the same. But it's deep- deeper because you don't have anything, you know? Like in my country I have something, you know? I have like, okay let's say, certification, language, you know? You can- it's easier for me, you know, to deal with this. But here, nothing. (inaudible) my certification you can just, throw it away. Nobody is- can use it. And, well, you have nothing. So [laughs] it's harder now. (Appendix B, 1158-1180)

Omar is talking about the differences in facing the future after college in his home country, Gaza, and in Denmark. Omar graduated college in Gaza before coming to Denmark and as such is referring to his college education when mentioning that he has certification in his home country. He sees his education and certification as useless in Denmark which seems to have a major impact on his expectations for career possibilities in Denmark. Like he says "it's deeper because you don't have anything" when referring to the difference in perceived possibilities for himself in Denmark compared to Gaza, despite him having a clear-cut career plan in neither Gaza nor Denmark. He emphasizes how he would have more resources for dealing with his uncertainty in regards to his future work life in Gaza compared to Denmark, because he would have both a valid college education and be able to speak the language. Omar seems to express an understanding that he will be starting from scratch when or if he gains asylum and faces the challenge of creating a life for himself in Denmark. So contrasting the attitude witnessed by Lise and Lotte in some of their clients neither Hakim nor Omar seem to hold overly optimistic or unrealistic expectations for life in Denmark.

6.3 Theme three: Maneuvering the social arena of the asylum center

6.3.1 Group making

> Oh, yeah. All people are racist. That I have discovered. Like if you are Syrian, you go with Syrians. If you are Syrian-Kurdish, you go with Syrian-Kurdish. If you are Iran- from Iran, you go with Iran people. That's it. (Appendix B, 575-579)

This was Omar's answer when he was asked how he thought the residents treat each other across groups and nationalities. He describes how people in the center usually divide themselves into groups based on nationality, and it can be inferred from his "all people are racist" comment that he feels discrimination is happening between the groups. In his interview Hakim too talked about group making as both happening and as problematic:

> I always say for refugee "it is not good we- you are making gr- you are making party. Because you must think about your country, your country make several parties several groups, now this things is destroyed, damaged, conflict, war, everything. And we killed all of persons. So here in Denmark. We must live safety, we must live together, not we make party against another party, for example Iranian make one party, Afghani make one party, Arabs make one party, it is very shameful for our- for us. (Appendix A, 584-596)

He frames the groups being made, both in countries of origin and here, as the cause of much destruction and trouble. At the center Hakim feels that people are dividing themselves into groups and bringing with them the tensions and unrest that exist between them at home. While he doesn't call it racism like Omar, he talks about the group making as a problem and an inhibitor for peace and safety at the center. In the above quote he speaks *to* the other refugees, inferring that he does not himself want to take part in group making. He however still calls it shameful to "us", likely referring to either the refugees in the camp as a whole, or his own ethnic group. By doing so he recognizes that he might be attributed some of these negative qualities by outsiders, even if he actively tries to avoid being part of a group.

In regards to the kind of challenges experienced Omar says, when asked if there are many problems between groups:

> Sometimes. It's most of the time about religion. They fight about that, you know? And... the... and some people they just hate another people 'cause where they are from. Like are from this country "I hate you" "Why?" "'Cause you- you're just from this country. You have this religion, I hate you". Yeah. Wh- what do you call this? Eh, stereotyping? (Appendix B, 602-614)

Similar to his comment about racism in the former quote, he seems to attribute the problems to the prejudices that people in different groups might hold about each other, both in regards to ethnicity and religion. He seemingly agrees with Hakim that people are fighting over in-

tercultural issues - sometimes literally according to Hakim: “Today I talk with two peo- person “Why you make group?” they say “If I not group, if I'm from Iran, if I not group maybe Afghani- all of camp fight with me, I am alone”” (Appendix A, 799-803). Reading from Hakim’s earlier quote it’s not unlikely he thinks some of the group making is based on stereotyping. In his example with the two Iranians however, it seems like safety could be another less malicious contributing factor. That people seek safety in the groups they know to guard themselves from perceived threats from other groups is rather ironic considering Hakim’s point on group making being the cause of the fighting.

Positions of power in the asylum center can also be the source of troubles among different groups. In relation to bike rental in the asylum center Hakim says: “Afghani, Irani working in bicycle, some Irani come, and Irani praktik- work- working, ehm, submitted to Iranian, Afghani to submit to Afghani, like, without money” (Appendix A, 1029-1032). The bikes are owned by the government, but the handling of money and rental is administered by asylum seekers, in this case Iranians and Afghans, which according to Hakim means that they give people who are members of their own group preferential treatment by letting them rent bikes without paying a fee.

Group making and intergroup problems are clearly issues that both Omar and Hakim find in the center. While that might paint a picture of strong group cohesiveness there are intragroup problems as well. In the following quote Lise talks about groups in the asylum center:

> Men det er fordi de er flygtet fra 'vi'et'. De er jo flygtet fra det de troede var kendt,så kommer de op og så er det den samme gruppe her, der er også iranere i Danmark. Så det er ”fandme om vi vil arbejde med dem”. Altså, der er tør simpelthen ikke, og det- jeg synes de er altså somaliere, iranere stikker hinanden (...) De er så afhængige af at kunne være i gruppe, selvom de ikke vil være i gruppe (...) altså ja det er et underligt paradoks et eller andet sted, fordi de er ”Jeg er alene her, men jeg er en del af stammen. Men jeg vil ikke være en del af stammen fordi altså” // “But it’s because they’ve fled from the “we”. They have fled from what they thought was known, then they come up here and it’s the same group, there are also Iranians in Denmark. So it is “I’ll be damned if I’m going to work with them. Like, they do not dare, and that- i think that Somalian and Iranians snitch on each other (...) They’re so addicted to being in a group even if they don’t want to be in a group (...) in some ways it’s a strange paradox, because they’re “I’m alone here, but I’m part of the tribe. But i don’t want to be part of the tribe”. (Appendix C, 1371-1377)

What Lise describes here is how some of her clients, in spite of group membership, show resistance to being in that very group. Unlike Hakim and Omar she ascribes the reluctant group membership to be at least partly a consequence of hailing from a collective culture, or a "we-culture" as Lise describes it. The asylum seekers Lise talks about are left in a paradoxical situation where they on one side are dependent on the group, but at the same time express disdain of working with others in the same group because they're afraid they might be snitched on if they do anything disliked or culturally inappropriate. In extension of the former quote Lise says:

> Hvis nu jeg tog kvinder som sidder og snakker sammen de måske har en kærlighed eller et eller andet, så kan den kvinde godt sige "når ja hvor er det hyggeligt" og gå en og sige "Ved du hvad, hun har faktisk en mand derhjemme, men hun er også kæreste med ham" så kører den jo." // "Take for example two women talking together where they might have a lover or something, and one woman can say "Oh yeah, that's nice" And then go back and say "You know what, she actually has a husband at home, but she's also got a boyfriend here" And then it starts. (Appendix C, 1381-1386)

From Lise's hypothetical example of the two women she seems to suggest that gossip about something outside the norms of the groups is a common occurrence. That even, or especially, within your own group you can't speak too freely. Something which Omar agrees with: "They snitch about each other. Like, they talk about each other all the time that's what I hate. I don't know, they just like to talk about each other. Like you can't keep a secret here never. Everybody's talking." (Appendix B, 583-591). Both by explicitly stating that he hates it and, similar to Lise's statements, by calling them snitches he conveys his anger and frustration in the constant "snitching" he sees happening in the center. If "Everybody's talking" he can never trust anyone there enough to tell them anything in confidentiality. Perhaps this lack of trust contributes to Omar's superficial connection with other residents and his feelings of loneliness which will be explored in the following section.

6.3.2 Social network

Hakim fled Afghanistan with his wife and two sons while Omar fled from Gaza on his own and as such was living alone in a single-room in the asylum center. Perhaps due to this difference in available social relationships, Hakim didn't talk about missing his friends or fami-

ly during the interview, while Omar almost immediately mentioned missing friends, when talking about what he missed from home:

> First of all I missed f- being around friends. (inaudible) Gaza just go to the streets and you find friends, you know? Find people just to talk to and, eh… Maybe 'cause, like I grew up there, you know? So I- I know my- my hood. (Appendix B, 764-773)

What Omar seems to be relaying here is a feeling of missing the familiar social surroundings of being at home. The possibility of randomly bumping into acquaintances when walking around the streets is something that is missing for Omar during his stay in the asylum center. When Omar was asked about how he socializes with the other residents, he talked at length of the difficulties he experienced, when trying to establish a social network in the asylum center:

> Eh. Not that- not that much and not that good I- I guess. Well, eh, 'cause here yo- you can't find like, eh, or it's very hard to find, like people with the same, how am I gonna say? Well they think like you and are the same age and- same age, think like you and speak the same language. That's very hard to find. Especially here. When you like in different place like in a school or something you have like the age, same and the language, same. You just want to find, like people, thinking like you. That's it. And you are in the same, like, level of thinking, you know? Tha- that's much easier. But here you find many lunatics and stuff. (Appendix B, 455-471)

What Omar essentially seems to be saying in this quote is that he is having trouble finding like-minded people in the center. He explains how he perceives the difference in age and language barriers between himself and the other residents as a challenging factor in his endeavor to find people, who are at the same level of thinking as him. According to him this endeavor would be less challenging in a school, where you have the same age and language as your fellow students, which would then bring you to a more equal level of thinking. Furthermore he brings up how "you find many lunatics and stuff" at the asylum center, which could be part of the explanation for why he apparently has minimal interaction with the other residents. His minimal social interaction with the other residents coupled with missing his friends from Gaza leads to a feeling of being isolated in Omar, as he sums up his relationship with the other residents: "So I- I'm... I don't communicate much with people. But I- I also, like, not very isolated, you know? In between." (Appendix B, 473-478). Omar emphasizes how he doesn't communicate much with the other residents while also not feeling complete-

ly isolated, as he still feels like he can talk to other people at the center, if he wants to. However he did express how he would sometimes feel lonely: “Yeah. Eh, so actually you feel- you feel lonely. (...) Feel lonely sometimes. You feel, eh, you just need a guy days, you know? Just some guys to…” (Appendix B, 289-293). While Omar doesn’t finish the sentence “Just some guys to”, it seems like he is expressing a feeling of missing a possibility of getting away from the stress and loneliness of the asylum center through “a guy days” - just having fun with friends. This wish is further substantiated by Omar at a later point in the interview as he answers a question in regards to how he tries to treat the other residents:

> I just. I- I'm looking for a funny guys I found. Just you are funny and you don't mention or bring like bad stuff or, eh, sad stuff, you know? I'm just trying to get avoid this stuff, so you know? Keep myself dist- or keep my- my mind positive don't think about (inaudible) things. So I go with funny guys, you know? So. You don't have to speak anything but if they look funny I'll go with them. (Appendix B, 546-555)

In this quote Omar explains how he chooses to interact with people in the asylum center based on his perception of their level of ‘funny-ness’. He is looking for people, who can help him maintain a positive state of mind and not bring up bad or sad stuff. He even goes as far as to proclaim that he doesn’t need to be able to communicate with them as long as they look funny. The above statement seems to illustrate just how important positive social interactions are for providing Omar with a resource for avoiding negative thoughts. As such having some form of social network becomes a way of coping with some of the challenges of being an asylum seeker for Omar - a sentiment which was shared by other residents at the asylum center as well (Field note 2, p. 22, book 1). However as expressed to us by Omar both during the interview and regular conversations, he found the task of creating and maintaining a social network within the asylum center troublesome. Omar’s troubles with creating a social network were due to both the lack of like-minded individuals as well as the uncertain nature of the asylum system. He told us during one conversation, how he had a hard time establishing close relations to people, since he had no way of knowing if or when they would be transferred to a different asylum center, be granted asylum or sent back to their home country (Field note 1, p. 16, book 5).

6.3.3 Translators

Resident translators, residents with English or Danish language skills assigned to interpret for the staff as their praktik, were a key resource for enabling communication across lan-

guage barriers between the staff at the asylum center and the residents (Field note 7, p. 53, book 1). This sentiment was shared by Omar, who pointed out how not being able to make oneself understood, as a resident asylum seeker, could be a cause of difference in received treatment from staff according to Omar:

> Actually sometimes, eh, they [the staff] treat people different (inaudible). Of course it's- it's like they are human beings, you know? But- but not big things, you know? Maybe- maybe if you... like for example I can speak to them, you know? I can describe my problem very well to them like when I have one I: ”blablabla”. But other people can't. Then they won't get the help that I- maybe I can get. 'Cause I can describe my problem very well to them. Maybe that's the obstacle here. I guess. But I guess if everyone can s- know- you know, can communicate with them or they can describe what they- what they really want. I think it's- they gonna be treated the same. (Appendix B, 381-402)

Omar was quite adept at English and therefore could easily make himself understood when talking to the staff. However, as Omar mentions in the quote above, people who weren't as fortunate could have a difficult time when trying to make themselves understood to the staff and therefore might not receive the help they were actually asking for. “That's the obstacle here” as Omar says and points out how he think that the possibility of being able to communicate with the staff and “describe what they really want” is the key to “be treated the same”. As such both the staff and the residents who spoke neither English nor Danish were dependent on the resident translators when it came to communicating matters regarding a person's asylum case, interpersonal conflicts or other individual issues (Field note 3, p. 8, book 4). According to Hakim this key role put a lot of power into the hands of the resident translators, which they tried to use to position themselves as having authority over other residents:

> Iranian translator, Arabic translator, Afghani translator. These are say outside of camp these say for refugee “I have authority”. The staffs (inaudible) is very good, but translator is very very bad. Because- yea, they say “I have authority. I say, you must do. If you not must do I go to complain in office, office hear my speech, not your speech”. (Appendix A, 618-631)

Hakim is describing how he has experienced or heard of resident translators making demands of other residents and threatening them with sanctions from the staff (“office”), if

they failed to comply with these demands. Hakim's perception of amount of power held by the resident translators and the connected possible consequences for the other residents was also shared by the center leader who, during one of the daily staff morning meetings, said: "It's no good that they are running around feeling like they run the center. They are actually in an asylum center." (Field note 4, p. 11, book 5). What the center leader seems to be describing is how the authority, which the translators feel like they have in the center, doesn't match the power they are meant to have in the center.

Hakim went on to touch upon the subject of being able to trust the translators to truthfully convey one's message to the staff:

> So this is motivated bad for people. Now some people cannot ehm, tell for office, or if I say complain to translator, maybe make translator make problem for me. Indeed problem is make group these translator in this camp. (Appendix A, 636-641)

According to Hakim, the translators are having the opposite effect of what their appointed position entails, since they are making other residents weary of contacting the office, especially if they want to complain about the translators, since they have to complain through the translators. Furthermore he points to the translators as the instigators of group making in the camp, which he sees as being in direct contrast with how you are supposed to act when being in Denmark: "Here is not Afghanistan, here is not Syria, here is not Iran, here is Denmark. Denmark never wants conflict, Denmark never wants you [translators] make a group of people against another people(…)" (Appendix A, 708-712). By positioning the norms of behavior in Denmark as contrasting those of the translators, Hakim is making it clear how he views the translators as being the main cause of problems within the asylum center. In Hakim's perspective, the translators are doing pretty much the opposite of what they were assigned to do, as they are creating borders between both the different nationalities within the center and between the staff and the residents.

There were also examples of suspicions among the staff members regarding the truthfulness or completeness of the translations provided by certain resident translators which incidentally was based on information from the other resident translators (Field note 2, pp. 73-77, book 3). One example of such a suspicion was related to a conflict which happened outside office hours, which meant that only the guard was present at the center (Field note 2, pp. 73-77, book 3). During this conflict the guard tried to work out what the problem was between the two parties - something which he described as being impossible without the assistance of

two resident translators. However the next day one of the translators explained to the staff, how the other translator had purposely failed to translate everything the guard said to the conflicting parties and vice versa because the translator had personal ties to both parties. This example illustrates both how dependent the staff members were on the help of the resident translators as well as the potential power this position afforded them and how this might be used to either improve or worsen the conditions for other residents.

6.3.4 Living conditions

Living conditions in asylum centers vary significantly in both location and layout. The one we did research at was a former military base in a remote location consisting of a few barracks with an office, a barrack with washing machines and a gym, a couple of newly built trailer houses for families and a row of container sized rooms, including bathroom and a kitchen - also for families. Except for the row of rooms, the living conditions were reminiscent of a dormitory consisting mostly of single and double rooms including a fridge and TV, with shared bathrooms and kitchen.

Omar lived in a single room of a barrack and Hakim lived with his family in one of the trailer houses, which afforded them both some privacy. They both seemed content with the rooms they were assigned to when asked about living conditions, Hakim said: “(...) I'm so happy to live building X, and room number Y. Because this building room is including bedroom, kitchen, and a loo, all family- for one family.” (Appendix A, 1080-1082) and Omar saying: “For me it's the most important thing it's there the gym and the single room.” (Appendix B, 81-82). Notably Hakim lists access to a private kitchen, bedroom and loo as reasons he’s happy with his room, which is a key difference in his and Omar’s living conditions. Omar had to use a shared bathroom and kitchen where he and others users had a collective responsibility to keep it clean. He told us at one point that he disliked the bathrooms, that some act like animals in them and that he always used wipes to clean before using it (Field note 1, p. 16, book 5). This suggests that while he does appreciate hygiene, he might not feel the shared responsibility of keeping the bathroom clean since he thinks some people act like animals in them. Since lack of cleaning can lead to a reduction in pocket money (Field note 2, p. 14, book 1) it can lead to some disagreements. Hakim empathized with some of the issues that come from sharing these facilities:

> (...)But it is good for me, but another building is kitchen is for some rooms cooking, maybe it is problem for people. In my opinion it is good to separate rooms, including

> bedroom, including- like my room, because these buildings no fight, no complaining, no anything, it is good" (Appendix A, 1086-1093)

"These buildings" in the excerpt refers to the row of rooms, which include bathroom and kitchen, where Hakim lives. He seems to thinks that availability to private use of these facilities, and the privacy they afford, is a major catalyst in preventing fights and complaints, inferring that sharing them leads to the opposite, like Omar's complaints about the collective bathrooms. Lise provides an example of different ways she has heard the bathroom being used, which might cause disagreements:

> Nej, det altså, mændene (inaudible) iranske mænd. Dem der er meget renlige. De tisser jo i håndvasken. Så kan de lige vaske pikken bagefter. (...) somaliske mænd de sidder jo nærmest og skider på brættet eller også så sidder de og skider på gulvet, altså der har nogle kulturer, man tænker måske skulle de lige have en manual. / Nej it's like, the men (inaudible) iranian men. They are very cleanly. They pee in the sink. That way they can wash their dick afterwards. (...) Somali men are almost sitting shitting on the toilet seat or else they're sitting shitting on the floor, like there are some cultures, you think maybe they should get a manual. (Appendix C, 2206-2211)

As seen in the excerpt, according to Lise there can be significantly different approaches in how to use the bathroom. She might be generalizing, but still it's not hard to imagine why Omar might have issues with the way some other people he lives with might use or leave the bathroom afterwards.

While both Hakim and Omar seem content with their living arrangement, that's not the case for everyone. The residents have very little control over which center and what room they'd like (See section 6.2.1). Hakim's wife was less happy with the center than he was on account of the milieu there stressing her out (Field note 1, p. 66, book 1), causing her to request the office for a move to another center because she had friends there. At the time of our departure the request had not been granted yet. While requests could be made, moving residents mostly happened due to structural changes in the center or to transfer problematic residents elsewhere. It was a fairly common threat to residents who caused problems, that they'd be moved to an infamous asylum center consisting only of tents (Field note 1, p. 38, book 1). So while Hakim and Omar, to some extent, were content with their living arrangements it was

mostly due to fortunate circumstances, which people who were less content, like Hakim's wife, where almost powerless to change.

6.4 Summary of findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of being an asylum seeker in Denmark. Through an interpretative phenomenological analysis of the interviews with asylum seekers Omar and Hakim and therapists Lise and Lotte, three overarching themes were found to be central in the asylum seeker participants' statements and to the research question. These themes were: 1. Power in the asylum system. 2. Living in limbo. 3. Maneuvering the social arena of the asylum center. The main issues brought up by our participants in regards to these three central themes will be summarized in the following.

After applying for asylum, the asylum seeker enters into a system that exerts power over them in many different aspects, like the decision on asylum cases and what the asylum seekers must, can or cannot do. The asylum case is central to having asylum seeker status, and one of the aspects where Hakim and Omar felt a sense of powerlessness was that of their asylum case. For Omar, worrying about the decision and about what to say to convince the authorities of his legitimacy as a refugee became all-consuming. For Hakim a concern with having a legitimate reason for asylum was also present even though he seemed more optimistic about his chances of convincing the Danish authorities than Omar. Both of them were uncertain about how the system worked, and how the decision would turn out for them - an uncertainty that caused confusion and frustration for both of them.

In seeking asylum, the applicants have a lot of interaction with people in different positions of authority. Trust was an issue brought up in relation to authorities, with Hakim praising the work of the Danish police and their capabilities to maintain a peaceful environment while Lise had experiences with asylum seekers, who had major issues with trusting authorities. Furthermore both Omar and Hakim made it clear how they are dependent on the staff at the asylum center when it comes to gaining information about their asylum case or resolve issues with other residents.

The agency and autonomy of the asylum seekers were framed as limited in different ways. Their days consisted of either school or a praktik which were not chosen, but assigned to them by the staff. The way pocket-money was received meant the asylum seeker had to re-

turn every other week to collect it, which Omar felt was akin to being in an open prison, limiting his ability to take a vacation or do extended visits outside the center. This was further exacerbated by the remote location of the center, which made travel expensive and severely limited most residents' mobility due to the amount of pocket money received.

The inherent uncertainty of seeking asylum makes life in an asylum center feel like being in limbo - a place of waiting. One consequence of this uncertainty was the inability to plan for one's future. Not knowing whether you would be moved to a different asylum center at a moment's notice or have your asylum claim rejected made it difficult to commit to a plan and even caused Omar to go through a period of depression. In order to cope with being in this state of limbo, our asylum seeker participants tried to keep themselves busy as a way of preventing negative thinking. While neither Hakim nor Omar talked about religion as a coping strategy, Lise mentioned how others sought refuge in their prayers to cope with their current situation.

The understanding of what and what not to expect of life in Denmark was another issue brought up by our participants. Lise and Lottes experiences with people coming to Denmark expecting instant material goods and being able to start their new lives was contrasted by Hakim and Omar, who both seemed to have an understanding of the possible challenges of building a life in Denmark, if they were granted asylum.

The formation of groups based on nationality was a common occurrence in the asylum center and an issue according to Hakim and Omar. The groups brought with them the tensions that exist between them in their countries of origin, which sometimes lead to both verbal and physical fights, which ironically were what some were trying to keep themselves safe from by joining groups. Intragroup problems in the form of trust issues and gossiping behind other group members' backs were also apparent in the center. Hakim placed the responsibility for group making on the resident translators. As he and some of the staff saw it they frequently abused the position of power they had in enabling communication between other residents and the staff, in order to make things happen the way they wanted it. For Omar, a single man, who didn't seem to belong to a bigger group, loneliness was a clear issue. The lack of like-minded people and the uncertain nature of the asylum system made it difficult for Omar to create and maintain a social network.

Both asylum seeker participants seemed pleased with living in relatively private quarters they didn't have to share with strangers. This was not completely true however for Omar

who shared a bathroom and kitchen with others, which seemed to be the cause of several issues in both use and in whose responsibility it was to clean it. Hakim's wife was stressed out by the center, but it was apparent that asylum seekers had very little to no power in deciding or changing their living arrangements.

7 Discussion

In this master's thesis we have sought to contribute to the growing body of research on asylum seekers by highlighting how two asylum seekers in Denmark experience the asylum process and life in the center. In this endeavor we have also included the perspectives of two therapists who provided valuable insight into the challenges related to life as an asylum seeker in Denmark expressed by their clients. In this section we will examine the results of our analysis through the lens of the accumulated research introduced in our literature review. The resulting discussion will seek to clarify potential similarities and differences between our findings and existing research and try to explain what they mean, or what perspective they might bring in relation to our study. The structure of the discussion will follow the same lines as the analysis to allow discussion of each major theme through the connecting subthemes to individual completion.

7.1 Power in the asylum system

7.1.1 The asylum case

A central theme in our analysis was the asylum case. The asylum case acts as a focal point for every asylum seeker both in term of legal status and on whether they will get to stay or be sent back. Omar and especially Hakim indicated that to obtain a positive outcome on their asylum claim, they had to prove or convince the government that they are in legitimate danger and cannot safely return home. Constructing danger, legitimate or not, has been the interest of several studies included in the literary review (Goodman et al., 2014; Kirkwood et al., 2013; Beneduce, 2015). Talking in discourses relating to danger and safety is notably done by Hakim. He talks about his own problems as real and frames his perilous situation as positive relating to his asylum case. This is similar to the findings of Goodman et al, which showed how asylum seekers draw on notions of safety when questioned about returning to their country of origin. Both in the section, where his experiences in relation to the asylum case

are presented and in the section on coping, where he says "...but I never go Afghanistan because I die" it's evident how Hakim constructs both his own situation and, like the findings of Kirkwood et al (2013) on safety/danger discourses of places, his country of origin with elements of danger. While we cannot comment on the veracity of his story and claims about the dangers of his place of origin, it's crucial for an asylum seeker like Hakim to both tell and be believed in such discourses to obtain a positive outcome. Truth can become fluid as asylum seekers are pressured into tailoring their stories to fit the refugee convention (Beneduce, 2015). The decision on the outcome of an asylum case is binary and as such, according to current research (Goodman et al., 2014; Kirkwood et al., 2013; Beneduce, 2015), the asylum seeker might be motivated to exaggerate or outright fabricate the element of danger that is so crucial for a positive outcome of the asylum case.

Omar didn't speak much about how he framed his story in his asylum interviews, and didn't speak much about danger. He did however talk about the depression, doubt and ruminations that came in relation to what to say and the enigmatic nature of the asylum case. While danger is a required focal point of asylum stories (Beneduce, 2015), what exactly grants asylum or what story is believable is mostly a mystery to many asylum seekers (Szczepanikova, 2012). Szczepanikova found that this lack of knowledge let to collaboration among asylum seekers with vastly different experiences on what works in regards to the case, causing other less experienced asylum seekers to seek out and act on the confusing conclusions. This could be seen as a measure of gaining control or influence on the asylum case, to not just be a passive chess-piece to be moved around and denied agency. Perhaps this similar lack of control over his own situation experienced by Omar is what let him to such an apathetic and depressive stat while stuck in the limbo of his asylum case.

7.1.2 Authorities

One study has connected asylum seekers in Greece and the UK with a long-lasting fear of authority figures possibly abusing their power (Griffiths, 2001). Policemen were pointed to as being central, but not exclusive, causes of feelings of fear by some of Griffith's asylum seeker interviewees, who reported how they felt a need to flee,

hide or fight when encountering a policeman. The attitude towards authority figures reported through these findings pairs well with Lise's account of how some of her clients are too paranoid to talk openly with her during therapy sessions due to fear of being found by the oppressive authorities from which they had fled. As such this finding isn't surprising but emphasizes the role of past trauma in how asylum seekers interact with and perceive their surroundings and the importance of being sensitive to these past experiences, when seeking to conduct therapy or research with this vulnerable group of people. What was surprising however, at least based on how fear of and distrust in authority figures are prevalent among some asylum seekers, was that Hakim displayed neither of these when talking about police in Denmark.

When looking at the expressed state of fear by participants in Griffith's study and Lise's clients, if they were to be put in a position where they are forced to rely on the aid of the police in order to seek asylum, it could be an intimidating endeavor for them as they are required to blindly trust the good intentions of an authority figure which might have been less trustworthy in their country of origin. However Hakim constructed the police station as being a safe place, despite it being his first meeting with the Danish authorities according to himself, and the process of making the asylum claim for himself and his family through the police as going smoothly. He even goes on to proclaim how proud he is of the Danish police in their striving to keep the asylum center a peaceful place. One possible explanation for the difference in Hakim's attitude towards the police compared to Lise's clients and Griffith's asylum seeker participants is that when Hakim is telling us about his first meeting with the police, he is answering a question about how his first day in Denmark was. So maybe he simply didn't talk about his feelings because we didn't ask explicitly about his feelings. However with both interviewers being Danish it's also possible that Hakim was trying to be polite and display his appreciation for the Danish authorities as a way of providing convincing evidence for his willingness and dedication to becoming a lawful good Danish citizen, as seen in his interview when talking about his future in Denmark (Appendix A, 1393-1409). Despite our numerous assurances that we had no power or authority over his asylum claim, the interview situation might resemble the asylum interview situation and thus influence Hakim's answers causing him to be less critical than if he had been talking to his fellow residents. It's also pos-

sible that he just doesn't experience paranoia or distrust when it comes to authority figures in Denmark.

According to Omar and Hakim, the staff members at the asylum center is another central authority figures in the lives of asylum seekers in Denmark and one which they directly or indirectly interacted with on a frequent basis. The relationship between staff members at asylum centers and asylum seekers isn't always of a positive and understanding nature, as the one portrayed by Omar and Hakim. Szczepanikova (2012) reported that, the control executed by staff members over residents in relation to their living conditions and through surveillance was noted by residents as having a distancing and distrusting effect on the relationship between themselves and staff members. While Omar, Hakim and the other residents at the asylum center of the present master's thesis was given greater freedom, at least in relation to their eating habits, compared to the participants in Szczepanikova's study, they too were dependent on the help of staff members when seeking news about their asylum case and subjected to surveillance and control in regards to their living conditions, which some of them were outspokenly critical of (See section 6.1.2). Hakim and Omar displayed somewhat positive attitudes towards at least some of the staff members at the center despite apparently being knowledgeable about their dependency on staff members when wanting to acquire news about their asylum case or needing help with interpersonal conflicts or other problems. In regards to being under surveillance, Hakim even seemed to view surveillance at the center as a potential resource for both staff members and asylum seekers rather than an oppressive tool employed by the staff members, which seemingly contrasts the views expressed by the asylum seekers in Szczepanikova's study.

Although Hakim's proposed use of surveillance footage as a way of helping residents with their interpersonal conflicts could be seen as a critique of the staff members not living up to their responsibility as caretakers and peacekeepers, this still seems to be a display of acceptance in regards to the power imbalance between staff members and residents as well as an indication that he trusts the staff members to not abuse their power. Hakim's expressed attitude towards the control imposed on him by the staff thus seems to reflect the perception reported by staff members in Szczepaniko-

va's (2012) study, that more control gave them better opportunities to help the residents.

Why didn't Omar and Hakim display a critical attitude towards the staff members unlike other residents at the center and in contrast with Szczepanikova's findings? Once again our potentially perceived allegiances with the staff in the center is worth highlighting as it's possible that Omar and Hakim didn't trust us to keep any criticisms relating to the staff to ourselves, thus keeping them from making overtly critical remarks during the interviews. If that is the case then their distrust of us as authority figures made them refrain from making explicit any distrust they might feel towards the very authority they perceived us to be part of. Furthermore our questions regarding the staff members were mostly focused on what Omar and Hakim thought the functions of the staff were and as such perhaps didn't invite them to reflect on their relationship with the staff. Omar was even a little confused as to what we wanted him to reflect on and was rather hesitant in his answers when presented with this specific question. However both him and Hakim decided to make positive remarks regarding specific staff members while talking about the function of the staff - an indication that they were perhaps indirectly displaying a politeness towards us as perceived authority figures, which according to Griffith (2010) can be related to the tendency of some asylum seekers to be overly polite as a way of managing their paranoia of authority figures. Another possibility is that Omar and Hakim simply didn't experience any distrust towards or had critical comments to make about the staff. However Hakim's apparently trusting demeanor towards both the police and the asylum center staff as well as Omar's lack of negative comments about the staff indicates that not all asylum seekers necessarily experience paranoia or distrust of all authority figures encountered while living in asylum centers, despite existing research and some of our own findings.

7.1.3 Agency and autonomy

The asylum center is an institution which holds a great deal of power over its residents, but how much does that limit the asylum seekers agency and how is it experienced? One aspect of agency is mobility which is often very limited for asylum seek-

ers due to a number of reasons (Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016; Griffiths, 2014; Rainbird 2012 & 2014). We found in our analysis that the primary dimensions of the limitation of mobility was based on the remote location of the center, the infrequent and relatively expensive public transport and a lack of control of accommodation in both choice of center and room. These findings are similar to the one found in Christensen & Lauridsen's (2016) study of a different asylum center in Denmark. Christensen & Lauridsen delved further into how the free bus of the asylum center, and its route, affected agency and found that while the asylum seekers were not bound to the center, they encountered invisible walls.

While we don't have any data on the free asylum center bus and its impact on agency in our study, the reality for our participants was similar to the one experienced by the participants in Christensen & Lauridsen's (2016) study. The center was remote and the end station of the asylum center bus was a small nearby city. One of our participants, Omar, mentioned a preference for bigger cities in his interview, and he might have felt the same invisible walls in his de facto freedom of movement. The issue of public transportation and mobility is seen in both studies (Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016, p. 46) as being related to the limited income and suggests that the dependency on pocket money is a measure of control which adversely affects the asylum seekers' experience of mobility and agency.

In addition to the obfuscated borders created by the amount of money received, we learned through Omar that the frequency with which the money was given out, once every second week, was limiting his sense of agency. Being forced back to the center every other week means that he cannot leave the asylum center for an extended period of time. Firstly due to the hard time limit created by the frequency with which pocket money is given out and secondly because the mandatory collection of pocket money forces him to spend money on transport he might not have otherwise, making it harder for him to visit his aunt or girlfriend often, or for an extended time. To him, like the participants in Christensen & Lauridsen study (2016), this might not be too bad in a normal week, but is greatly exacerbated during summer vacation, when there's nothing to do in the remotely located center.

Omar's main reason for wishing more mobility was to visit his family and girlfriend. In Hakim's case, his wife and family lived with him in the center. This might be a possible explanation for why Hakim didn't mention the limited mobility of asylum seekers as an issue in curbing agency for him. His wife however felt that the particular asylum center was stressful to her and desired to move to another center since she had acquaintances there. Regarding accommodation it was evident in our study that the wishes of the asylum seeker, like Hakim's wife, on relocation were prioritized lower than the wishes of respectively immigration services and the staff of the center. Lack of agency and uncertainty on accommodation can affect asylum seekers negatively as seen in a study by Griffiths (2014) where the participants in the asylum center had no control and were never sure whether there'd be a sudden change in accommodation or they'd be stuck in what was perceived as a never ending stasis. Based on Griffiths findings it's likely that having little to no agency regarding living conditions is stressful to some asylum seekers, and perhaps exacerbates the feelings of uncertainty and disempowerment that comes from waiting on a decision of the asylum case. Interestingly this wasn't talked about by Hakim and Omar who both appeared content with their living arrangements based on their level of privacy. We didn't ask specifically about mobility and accommodations in our interviews, which might explain why the interviewees didn't mention the subject. Perhaps this limitation of agency simply wasn't a significant problem to our asylum seeker participants when viewed in relation to other asylum seekers (See section 6.3.4). Unsurprisingly the negative components were much more apparent on Hakim's wife whose wishes to move clashed with the plan of the Danish Immigration Service.

A seemingly unique finding in our study is how agency is very limited in choice of everyday activities. The asylum seekers, including our participants, were assigned to either praktik, school or alternating between the two. While the asylum seekers have little choice in assignment, agentive action could be found in the way the assignment was approached. Other than his tasks in the honey project Hakim's praktik didn't seem to be that exhilarating, but he actively chose to view and do them in a positive way, adhering to his stated 'thinking positive' mindset (See section 6.2.2). Omar's praktik, when not in school, consisted of being a translator (See section 5.4). In his reluctant or resistant approach to his praktik he transformed his task into an almost reserve-position, only being called upon when no one else was available.

Agency for asylum seekers residing in asylum centers is generally very limited in key areas such as mobility, personal economy, accommodation and choice of assigned activities. A combination of a remote asylum center location, expensive and infrequent public transportation and a low income in the form of pocket money makes it hard to venture outside the limited range of the free bus assigned to the center. Like income, limited agency is apparent in regards to assignment of accommodation which is controlled by the Danish Immigration Service and the staff at the asylum center. The negative component of this limitation seems to much more adversely affect someone on whom it's actively imposed due to a clash of will, as opposed to a more passive acceptance. In regards to everyday tasks and occupation there is little choice, but agentive action can still be found in the way the task is approached by asylum seekers.

7.2 Living in limbo

7.2.1 Having an uncertain future

Adding to existing research literature (Fontanari, 2015; Griffiths, 2014; Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016; Douglas, 2010) our asylum seeker interviewees, with Omar being particularly outspoken, reported experiencing uncertainty in regards to their present situation and future possibilities as a consequence of being in a position of waiting for a final decision on their asylum claim. The state of limbo inherent to this position of waiting was experienced by Omar as hindering his possibility to plan for the future since he had no way of knowing whether he would be allowed to remain in Denmark or be sent back to his country of origin. This state of limbo has been compared to being on the threshold of gaining entrance to society and personal rights (Fontanari, 2015). A lack of rights and knowledge of what the Danish society would be able to afford him seems to be what Omar is expressing frustration over not having when he brings up how in his home country he at least knows what the possibilities are. In his home country he knows his rights and he knows the society, while in Denmark he is experiencing a waiting position with an unknown duration and outcome during which he is unable to work towards a clear goal. Due to this state of

being stuck in-between, the experience of time for an asylum seeker can be characterized by a sense of time slowing down while awaiting the asylum decision (Griffiths, 2014). If time is experienced as something to merely pass while awaiting the critical asylum decision, as expressed by Omar, and his future possibilities being dependent on this decision, then, in correlation with Griffith's and Christensen & Lauridsen's (2016) findings, he seems to perceive time as a hindrance rather than a bringer of opportunity while being in this position of waiting for the asylum decision. This was exemplified by his recount of going through a depressive state, and having no desire to do anything other than sleep, as a consequence of him worrying about his future. Douglas's (2010) observations, that asylum seekers experience a worsening in their mental health as a consequence of the restrictions imposed on them while they are waiting for an answer to their asylum claim thus seem to pair well with Omar's experiences.

Being moved within a few days' notice was a common practice by the Danish Immigration Service, which was observed during our fieldwork, and added to the feeling of uncertainty and lack of personal freedom among residents. This practice was mentioned by Lise as having consequences for her therapeutic work with asylum seekers. She had trouble encouraging her clients to try to achieve a sense of stability by creating a homely atmosphere in their rooms, since they saw no point in, or perhaps possibility of, doing this when faced with the potential temporariness and instability of their living situation within the asylum system on top of the uncertainty regarding the outcome of their asylum claim. With no way of knowing if or when they will be moved to a different center or being granted or denied asylum, homemaking can seem like a trivial matter or as something impossible to achieve for asylum seekers. As such our findings, adding to the observations presented in existing literature (Fontanari, 2015; Griffiths, 2014; Douglas, 2010; Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016), help illustrate how the experiences of an asylum seeker is shaped by a state of being in-between countries, citizenships and homes - and how being in this uncertain position can have a negative impact on a person's mental health.

7.2.2 Coping with life in the asylum system

Concrete strategies used by asylum seekers for coping with life in the asylum system were present in our results. Those mentioned by our participants were: Trying to focus on the present, doing activities, structuring their days, keeping a positive mindset and praying to their God. While Christensen & Lauridsen (2016) found similar strategies to be used among their research participants, they didn't report the mentioning of religion as a way of coping, which interestingly enough neither of our asylum seeker interviewees did either, as this particular strategy was brought up by Lise in relation to one of her clients. Rather religion was both reported by Christensen & Lauridsen's participants as well as by one of our participants as being a contributing factor to problems within the center (See section 6.3.1). This could explain why religion was brought up by neither Omar nor Hakim during our interviews with them as it could be seen as a source of trouble rather than sanctuary. That religion is a dangerous topic was shared by other residents at the center as well as by Omar (Field note 1, p. 13, book 5). Christensen & Lauridsen emphasized how another valuable coping tool displayed by their participants was the acceptance of one's powerlessness in regards to one's asylum case. While Hakim did recount how he had chosen to accept the initial negative outcome on his asylum case and continued to hope for a better outcome of his appeal, he also firmly stated that he would never return to Afghanistan. Hakim thus seems to be both accepting of his powerlessness in affecting the outcome of his asylum case, while displaying a sense of agency in regards to whether he will choose to return to Afghanistan or not. Ghorashi and colleagues (2017) illustrated how asylum seekers are sometimes able to think outside the norms and rules governing them in the country of asylum and thereby gaining a way of coping with the limitations and restrictions imposed on them by the immigration services. Following this Hakim's utterance relating to the possibility of staying in Denmark, or at least somehow avoid being sent back to Afghanistan, can be explained as being a result of him not being completely knowledgeable about the way negative asylum decisions are enforced in Denmark. Furthermore his perceived ability to think outside the norms and rules could also explain how he is able to maintain his expressed ability to think positively rather than succumb to the equally likely outcome that him and his family would be sent back to Afghanistan.

As Rainbird (2014) notes, the inherent liminality of the asylum seeker existence becomes the propellant of agentive action, which was clear in relation to both Hakim and especially Omar's choice to occupy their time with activities. Omar's choice to focus on the present and occupy his time with activities meaningful to him, and not appointed to him by the center staff, such as attending boxing lessons and working out at the gym showed how he was actively trying to cope with the stress of living in the asylum center and achieve a sense of freedom from his worrying thoughts. By being able to participate in boxing lessons outside the asylum center, alongside members of the local population, Omar was, at least physically, able to break free from the boundaries of the asylum center. Similar to the strategy used by some of Cuthill's (2017) participants, who situated themselves as 'students', Omar was afforded a weekly opportunity to re-configure the negative and stigmatising label of 'asylum seeker' by participating in an activity on equal basis with the other non-asylum seeker attendees. The coping strategies expressed by our participants thus seem to coincide with current research literature (Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016; Ghorashi et al., 2017; Rainbird, 2014; Cuthill, 2017) and add to the emerging picture of asylum seekers being able actors in addition to helpless victims. While our asylum seeker participants were unable to influence the restrictions and uncertainty imposed on them by the asylum system, they displayed a consciousness of the consequences these circumstances could have on their mental health and employed strategies to actively prevent these from occurring.

7.2.3 Expectations for life in Denmark

As illustrated by Ghorashi and colleagues' (2017) findings, asylum seekers' perceptions of their opportunities and potential life in the country of asylum are sometimes disconnected from the actual possibilities afforded to an asylum seeker. While Ghorashi and colleagues (2017) focused on how this could be used as a resource for achieving a sense of agency, our interviews with two mental health professionals working in the Danish asylum system revealed a different perspective. They viewed the lofty expectations for life in Denmark, held by some of their clients, as potential causes of neglecting therapy or daily activities before resulting in frustration and disappointment when the expectations weren't met. Ghorashi and associates (2017)

did comment on, how being in the asylum center for a prolonged period of time seemed to minimize the tendency of envisioning a, perhaps unrealistically, positive future in asylum seekers. As such the disappointment and frustration reportedly expressed by our therapist participants' clients could be explained by the process of being normalized by the structure, the asylum system, they are a part of and thereby having gained an understanding of the possibilities actually available to them given the circumstances of being asylum seekers (Ghorashi et al., 2017). This process could also account for why both of our asylum seeker interviewees displayed a vision of their potential future in Denmark, which was more modest and focused on the challenges connected with establishing a life in a new country, compared to the anecdotes of dissatisfied and disappointed clients told by Lise and Lotte. Furthermore Hakim's primary focus in choosing Denmark as the country of asylum was to provide a safe haven for himself and his family as quickly as possible which could be seen as Hakim constructing Denmark as a place of safety contrasting his home country, Afghanistan, as a place of danger thereby simultaneously legitimizing his asylum claim and displaying his survival-focused expectations for Denmark (Kirkwood et al., 2013). As such, possibly due to asylum seekers' knowledge of how the Danish asylum system works, or a lack thereof, expectations for the reception and possibilities granted to them could set them up for feelings of disappointment and frustration or in the case of Hakim and Omar, make them painstakingly aware of the challenges and limitations awaiting them in the future. This seems to add to the experience of living in limbo both being characterized by a longing for an end to the waiting and gaining an answer while simultaneously being hesitant and perhaps even fearing what the future will bring even if one is granted a residence permit. These findings are in line with some existing literature (Ghorashi et al., 2017; Kirkwood et al., 2013) but seems to warrant further research into which consequences unrealistic expectations for the host country in particular can have for the asylum seeker's attitude towards the host country and being put in the asylum seeker category.

7.3 Maneuvering the social arena of the asylum center

7.3.1 Group making

In our study we found that the residents of the asylum center primarily formed groups based on nationality. One of the therapists interviewed claimed that many of the asylum seekers came from collective cultures where one is more dependent on the group. This sentiment is shared in Douglas's (2010) article on living as an asylum seeker, in which she claims that "Interdependence and the identity of the group are sanctioned over an individual's personal identity…". In seeking a known collective of people, it makes sense that asylum seekers recreate the groups found in their country of origin. If identity is tied to the group, as Douglas says, the groups could be vital to the individual's sense of self. Our results suggest that this isn't always the case, as both our asylum seeker participants explicitly states that they're not part of any group, national or otherwise. While he doesn't construct himself as part of the Afghan group in the center, Hakim however still realized that he might be identified by others as part of it and states that the others behavior is shameful to this group.

Interestingly the study by Christensen & Lauridsen (2016) under similar conditions to ours found that neither nationality nor religion were significant factors in group making. While we did see plenty of interactions across nationalities and religion during praktik, where residents were assigned together, it was our own as well as our participants' apparent impression that groups were mostly based on nationality. A key difference between the studies is the amount of asylum seekers and demographics of the centers. The asylum center of our study had roughly 320 occupants, primarily families, while the center of hotel Vigsø (Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016, p. 27) had 30 residents, all single men. We argue that a smaller population such as hotel Vigsø allowed residents more interaction across nationality and religion, facilitating groups different from the ones we observed and were told about. Hakim argues that people seek groups as safety measure against 'the other', while Omar claims it's due to stereotyping. Both of these factors might however be thought to be mitigated in a center with a much lower amount of residents, since people are more likely to know each other and the since the potential for group making based in nationality would be reduced due to the number of each nationality likely being low.

Instead Christensen & Lauridsen found that the residents of Vigsø primarily formed groups based on common interests rather than nationality or religion, perhaps alluding that one of the reasons behind the particular group making we observed were a result of the size of the center.

Contrary to the findings by Christensen & Lauridsen (2016), we found that it wasn't uncommon for people to collaborate with each other by sharing information on the asylum case about what to expect and how to prepare for their own case (Field note 1, p. 7-8, book 2). This can be seen as well in a study by Cuthill (2017) on distrust and collaboration among asylum seekers. She too found that asylum seekers collaborate with each other on the case, while at the same time harboring distrust towards each other in regards to access to perks and the legitimacy of others' asylum claims, which is seemingly caused by the competitive nature of obtaining the coveted asylum. Contrary to this finding we primarily observed distrust in connection with the fear of being told on. According to Omar everyone was snitching on each other. A point corroborated by Lise who added that such snitching could cause problems for the asylum seeker and his social circle or family back home, both socially and in what the government of his home country might do to the family of the asylum seeker. Hakim does however exhibit distrust, similar to participants in other studies (Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016; Cuthill, 2017), towards his fellow asylum seekers in regards to the asylum case, as evident in his suspiciousness of the legitimacy of others' asylum claims: "So- and also some people make wrong certificate, wrong proof documents (...)". Like Christensen & Lauridsen (2016), Cuthill (2017) suggests that the distrust in regards to others' cases doesn't necessarily stem from any real knowledge of misconduct or lies from other asylum seekers, but from the threat that others pose to one's own asylum case. Based on their findings it can be argued that Hakim's perception of several others as being lying illegitimate refugees has roots in his own ruminations on his case, and while it almost certainly has no effect on the case of others it might serve to reassure him about the legitimacy of his own case and his chances of asylum.

Group making, which our participants actively tried to avoid, in the asylum center of this study was found to be primarily based on nationality. This is in contrast to a sim-

ilar study (Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016) where it was based on common interests, and we argue that the amount of asylum seekers is significant for which groups will be formed. Inside these groups there was collaboration on the asylum case, but also distrust among members. We found that the distrust was commonly based on both a fear of having secrets revealed and the possible social consequences of that, and a competitive dimension in regards to the asylum case which could sow doubt about other asylum seekers' stories or motives, to reassure or secure one's prospect of a positive outcome in the asylum case.

7.3.2 Social network

Our asylum seeker interviewee Omar was particularly outspoken about his wish to have a social network at the center while also expressing frustration over the difficulties in meeting like-minded individuals and getting himself to invest resources in and develop closer relationships with other residents in light of the looming possibility of himself, or them, being moved to a different center or receive a final decision on their asylum claim. As a result of this Omar chose to remain socially distanced from the other residents and mainly engaged in smalltalk and banter as a way to occupy his time and keep his mind positive despite missing and wanting friends at the center. Growing up in an interdependent culture, as is experienced by many asylum seekers from the Middle East can increase the need for creating a social network as a way to cope with the loss of group memberships and subsequent challenges to one's identity (Douglas, 2010). Based on this, Omar's expressed desire to establish a social network at the center could also be his way of coping with a loss of identity as a result of separation from his family, friends and separation from Palestinian society in general. Furthermore the somewhat superficial relationships he recounted having with other residents at the asylum center could be his way of protecting himself from experiencing another loss of social network and identity-creating group membership similar to the one he possibly experienced as a result of his act of leaving Palestine and seeking asylum in Denmark. It's also possible that, similar to the strategies employed by Rainbird's (2012) participants in regards to repositioning, Omar is seeking to categorically distance himself from being like the other people at the center with whom he shares the label "asylum seeker" by choosing to tell us how he mainly en-

gages in smalltalk with the other residents and mentioning how there are “many lunatics” within the center.

Following the conclusions made by Rainbird (2012), it's possible that Omar is experiencing an oscillation between both seeing himself as being a part of and distanced from the other residents, as his comments about not being among like-minded individuals at the center, while still choosing to interact with people despite language barriers and having different world views, could indicate. Nevertheless what seemed to be the main concern for Omar, in this regard, is how to cope with his lack of having a social network and the following feelings of loneliness while experiencing a hesitation in regards to opening up to and getting involved with the other residents due to the uncertainty of both his and their future. Omar’s utterances can serve as an illustration of how living among a cacophony of people with different worldviews and nationalities than oneself, while being subjected to the uncertainty inherent to the asylum seeker position, can be connected with experiences of loneliness and frustration over the difficulties of daring and trying to establish connections with one’s fellow asylum seekers. Omar is missing his social network from home and his acts of not engaging in deeper conversations, but still prioritizing people who bring fun and positivity into his life, despite language barriers, seems to be his way of maneuvering around the perceived negative presence of lunatics at the center while trying to cope with the experienced uncertainty and deindividualization of being an asylum seeker.

7.3.3 Translators

Omar pointed out how being able to get help from the staff and them treating people equally depended largely on whether or not the person was able to make him- or herself understood to the staff members. While Omar himself was quite good at English others were largely dependent on other residents who acted like translators. This dependency on the resident translators both by other residents and staff members alike were pointed out by Hakim as being a problem. According to Hakim, the translators would abuse their position of power to make other residents do their bidding by threatening to relay false and incriminating information to the staff about them if they refused. He even pointed to the translators as being the instigators of group

making within the center and thereby acting directly, according to him, against Danish norms. Despite Hakim being quite verbal about the supposed abuse of their position, Omar didn't mention any translator-related problems. This could be due to Omar not needing a translator because of his excellent English skills, but Hakim was also able to make himself understood in English and we were able to conduct an entire interview with him without a translator, so he didn't appear to need the translators' help either. Of course Omar was sometimes used as a translator and thus somewhat belonged to the group of people, whom Hakim was so critical of, so perhaps this could explain why Omar didn't mention any negative behavior from the translators while Hakim did. Furthermore Omar seemed to not belong to any particular group and for the most part kept somewhat to himself, so it's possible that he was able to avoid some of the conflicts between residents within the center and thus be less affected by the supposed abuse of power displayed by the translators compared to Hakim, who at least by affiliation seemed to be part of the Afghan group.

The abuse of power displayed by the resident translators according to Hakim seemed to weigh heavily on him, as he brought it up while talking about the function of the staff: "The staffs (inaudible) is very very good, but translator is very *very* bad" (Appendix A, 618-622). His displayed contrasting opinion of the staff and the translators are quite interesting when compared to the findings by Szczepanikova (2012) which illustrated how the constant monitoring of asylum seekers by the asylum center staff created a sense of mistrust and social distance between the parties. While Hakim seemed quite content with the video surveillance present at the center and trusting that the staff would use this to the benefit of the residents, unlike the participants in Szczepanikova's study, he instead explicated his distrust towards the translators and condemned their perceived abusive acts of power. Perhaps this difference in attitude towards staff members and translators can be traced to the lack of social distance between Hakim and the translators, seeing as they are at the center for the same reason; waiting for an answer to their asylum claim. This would explain why Hakim is more concerned with translators abusing their position of power compared to the staff, despite them being in a similar position of potential power abuse, since he sees himself as being equal to the translators and thus does not believe that they should

position themselves as authority figures, since this isn't what their function is meant to be (Appendix A, 699-717).

Hakim's stated concerns that the translators would be able to manipulate the staff members into believing that he or other residents had been misbehaving or otherwise broken the rules or norms of the center and Danish society could be explained by him worrying that this could potentially damage his asylum case. This can be connected to a similar display of mistrust between asylum seekers in studies by Rainbird (2012) and Christensen & Lauridsen (2016) which was attributed to them essentially being, or at least feeling like they were, in competition with each other for gaining asylum. Based on these findings (Rainbird, 2012; Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016) it's possible that Hakim believes that the translators are abusing their position of power not just to gain an advantage within the asylum center but within the asylum system, by making themselves look better in the eyes of the staff members. The staff members attempted to inform the residents that they in fact didn't have any influence on the outcome of their asylum case (Field note 1, p. 49, book 1) but nonetheless Hakim could still be convinced that they had some power over this. In a sense he might be right, since the staff were required to report illegal activities to the police (Field note 3, page 34, book 4), which could have a negative impact on a person's asylum claim and if the translators came across as trustworthy and convincing to the staff while being able to manipulate or threaten other residents into backing up their story, they could potentially hurt another person's asylum claim. However this wasn't likely to actually happen, as the staff members were also suspicious of whether the translators always told them everything the resident, who they translated for, said and aware of the potential power over other residents provided to the translators through their access to other residents' personal information. It's quite possible that Hakim was unaware of this, as he didn't socialize with the staff members in the same manner as us, which could explain his worrying comments on the translators' demeanor within the center.

While we have tried to connect existing research with the attitude towards resident translators displayed by Hakim, we have been unable to find literature mentioning the specific topic of the staff using asylum seekers in an asylum center as translators.

The one Danish study (Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016) didn't even mention anything about this other than that the researchers themselves used residents as translators in some of their interviews. This is quite interesting, as this could be a unique practice employed by staff members at the asylum center central to the present master's thesis in which case further inquiry into why and how this practice developed in this particular asylum center as well as why it isn't used in other Danish or European asylum centers is warranted. Of course it's also possible that residents were also used as translators by staff in the asylum centers being investigated by other researchers but that their study either didn't focus on the phenomenon or wasn't brought up during their data collection. Nonetheless we found Hakim's voiced criticisms of the potential power abuse of resident translators to be a quite intriguing finding, which we would have liked to explore further had this been made known to us at an earlier time during our internship.

7.3.4 Living conditions

In the asylum system there is little to no choice in what kind of center and what kind of room one will be assigned to. We found this to be issues that our participants dealt with in one way or the other. Living arrangements of asylum seekers have been explored in a few studies (Fontanari, 2015; Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016), and privacy is among the chief concerns. In Fontanari's study the asylum seekers didn't have access to single rooms, but instead lived together in rooms that held between two and six people. This allowed them no privacy, and felt more to them like a prison, underlining Hakim and Omar's point on their appreciation of having a private room, or one that is only shared with family. Since all other parts of the asylum center is public space their rooms are the only places where asylum seekers can find privacy, if even there. One man in hotel Vigsø (Christensen & Lauridsen, 2016) almost confined himself to his room which, while perceived as strange by others, was the only place he could find some privacy.

Facilities vary significantly between centers, and while privacy in the asylum center might seem binary in the case of Christensen & Lauridsen (2016), we found in our study that one's living conditions can afford certain levels of privacy. A 'room' in

the asylum system can range from something including all the amenities of an apartment, to a simple room with nothing but one or several beds (Fontanari, 2015). Obviously a shared room does not afford much privacy, but even a single room can, and does in the case of Omar, lack facilities where privacy can be valued, such as a kitchen or a toilet. From Omar's and Lise's comments on how people from different cultures might use the bathroom differently, we suggest that these different approaches to the bathroom might make it feel less private. If Omar witnesses, to him, unusual behavior or leavings in the bathroom it becomes more explicit that it's a space shared with others. Other than issues of privacy, these different approaches to the bathroom and shared spaces was a source of disagreements and frustration between the residents that shared them. The fact that the responsibility of cleaning the common areas, such as the toilet, was shared and that the quality of, or lack of cleaning impacted the pocket money of all the residents in that area very likely exacerbated these conflicts. This is a point not identified by us in existing literature in the field of asylum seekers, but seemed significant to both Omar who was experiencing it and Hakim who was happy he wasn't.

Living conditions in the asylum center sets the physical frame for asylum seekers. In both ours and similar studies privacy was a coveted thing explicitly sought after, while the lack of it prompted some to describe an asylum center like a prison. Different approaches to shared facilities, such as the toilet, can be a source of conflict if the residents dislike each other's habits. Disagreements in responsibility for cleaning these areas can add to the problem, enhanced by the fact that they all lose part of their pocket money if the shared areas are not clean.

7.4 Limitations of the study

The condensation of field notes, therapist and asylum seeker interviews have provided us with interesting findings uniquely shaped by this particular mix of data and these particular peoples' perspectives and experiences. However considering that the focus of the present master's thesis is on how being an asylum seeker in Denmark is experienced, it would have potentially provided us with even greater insight into these experiences if we had conducted more in-depth interviews with residents at the

asylum center. Given the central position of resident translators it would have been particularly interesting to include the perspectives of these people on life within the center, since they seemed to be in a position somewhere in between that of a staff member and a resident. Despite an attempt to interview residents who acted as translators for the staff on a daily basis, we were unable to both due to time limitations and incompatibilities between our schedule and that of the translators', whom we approached.

Had we been able to interview women and possibly older children at the center this would undoubtedly have provided valuable insight into how life in an asylum center is experienced by these groups. The choice of excluding children's' perspectives in the present study was made based on ethical and experiential considerations in regards to the interview procedure for children, which was deemed to be outside our skills. The lack of in-depth female accounts of life in the asylum center is grounded in our position as men and our understanding that most of the women at the center were subjected to norms, which prevented them from freely interacting with unknown men as well as our wish to respect the boundaries we perceived them to have. For instance there were instances where we were invited in for a meal by the husband only to find out that the wife would neither be joining us during the meal nor wished to shake our hand.

The sampling of our study could thus have been considerably broader and more tailored to the research question, which could have provided valuable perspectives on how being in a Danish asylum center is experienced by the residents. However both due to the limitations of our experience with interviewing children, the in-center restrictions of our gender and bad timing, the accounts of women, children and translators at the center weren't able to be added to the presented results. Furthermore attempting to include all of these perspectives would probably have been outside our abilities based on the time limitations imposed on the writing of the present master's thesis. It would have probably still proved fruitful to include more interviews with asylum seekers, given the research question central to the study focusing on their experiences.

8 Conclusion

In this master's thesis we have examined how staying in a Danish asylum center is experienced by asylum seekers themselves and relayed by mental health professionals working in the asylum field. Through field notes and interviews we found three overarching themes on the main issues that were talked about: Power in the asylum system, living in limbo and maneuvering the social arena of the asylum center. Common across all the themes is the overarching uncertainty of the asylum case, a lack of agency and ways of handling or coping with these issues.

Power in the asylum system was fairly explicit and affected our asylum seeker participants in both behavior and agency. The asylum case was both a requirement to be an asylum seeker and a constant source of uncertainty on whether the outcome would be positive or negative. The uncertainty of the outcome made the future very unclear, leading one participant to a depressive state due to a lack of control, feeling like a chess piece being acted on by others. The fear of a negative outcome of the case was seen to affect the discourse of Hakim's reasons for seeking asylum by relating these to danger and safety as, making them more likely to meet the requirements of the UNHCR refugee convention, which meant that truth could become fluid.

Some people in the asylum system feel paranoia and mistrust when dealing with authorities, possibly from a fear of becoming targets of abuse of power. Our participants however appeared either indifferent or positive towards Danish authorities, both in the form of the police and asylum center staff. While these attitudes to authority seemed genuine it's possible that our relation with the staff made us seem as part of it and created uncritical responses. Lack of agency for asylum seekers became apparent in several key areas. Mobility was severely limited for residents in the center due to expensive public transportation relative to pocket money received, along with a limited range of the free bus available to asylum seekers. Money was both a limiting factor in amount received and in the frequency with which the recipients were required to collect them with, inhibiting travel or vacations lasting longer than two weeks. In regards to both accommodation and daily activities it was found that asylum seekers had little agency themselves, but instead was primarily acted upon by

immigration services and the staff who assigned them center, room and praktik. While there was little in terms of choice, agentive action could be seen in the attitude our participants had to their assigned praktik.

That asylum seekers experience a state of living in limbo was illustrated by our findings and connected with the long period of waiting for an answer to their asylum claim as well as a lack of agency over when or if they would be moved to a different center while awaiting this decision. This state of being in-between meant an uncertain future for our asylum seeker participants, which was met with frustration and depression by Omar as time became something to merely pass while awaiting the crucial decision on his asylum case and the possibility of gaining the basic rights to control his life. However it became evident that asylum seekers are not necessarily just helpless victims waiting and hoping for the mercy of the immigration services, but are also able actors who actively seek to deal with the perceived consequences to their mental health of being in this position of in-betweenness and uncertainty. Keeping busy, positive thinking, focusing on the present and praying were mentioned as coping strategies in our study. While our asylum seeker participants didn't mention religion as a coping mechanism, possibly due to the ambiguity of this subject within the center, their choice to consciously occupy their time with activities were seen as agentive actions and enabled the possibility for Omar to distance himself from the asylum seeker label. Furthermore Hakim's stated ability to always think positive, despite the possibility of being sent back to dangers in Afghanistan, was attributed to his potential ignorance of Danish rules and resulting ability to think outside these. Contrasting this apparent ignorance, being normalized by the structure of the asylum system was presented as an explanation for the disappointment of asylum seekers who have unrealistic expectations for life in Denmark and for why both Omar and Hakim displayed rather mundane expectations for their potential future lives in Denmark.

Maneuvering the social arena of the asylum center can be experienced as a difficult task to the asylum seekers living there due to a number of factors. Groups in the asylum center were found to be primarily based on nationality, possibly due to the size of center. Our participants actively tried to not become part of a group, though Ha-

kim still collaborated with the group of his nationality on outcomes and strategies regarding the asylum case. Distrust was also found to be displayed both from our participants towards other residents and groups and internally in the groups. The distrust was primarily based on fear of ones secrets getting spread, the social consequence of this, and on a competitive drive between asylum seekers which could make them doubt each other's stories or intentions to enhance one's own case. Neither Omar nor Hakim had a big social network, despite coming from what could be called interdependent cultures. Omar experiences loneliness in the center, but didn't really seek company in the other residents. We found that lack of relations such as this could be due to incompatible interests or worldviews between people, or as a consequence of the inherent uncertainty of the system, which could make it hard to convince oneself to create meaningful relations.

Few in the asylum center of this study spoke English well enough to get by and were dependent on translators, though not in the case of our participants. Through Hakim and the staff we found that the translators sometimes abused the crucial link they occupied in communication between asylum seekers and staff by controlling the flow of information. While Hakim didn't need a translator we argue that some of his complaints about them, other than the abuse of power, were due to the translators' de facto elevated status which is supposed to be the same as his.

Living conditions between centers vary vastly, but we found that availability of privacy, such as a single room, was coveted among asylum seekers, who could only find it in their rooms. Access to private facilities such as toilet and kitchen also significantly impacted the experience of the asylum participants. Shared areas could be a source of conflict both in use and responsibility of cleaning, which was exacerbated due to the fact that all residents in a given area would be economically punished if cleaning was lacking.

8.1 Implications for future research

While many of our findings coincide with those of extant literature, the small amount of available qualitative research on asylum seekers in Europe specifically seems to

indicate a need for further research into this group of people and their experiences while being inside the asylum centers. Aside from this general need for further research on asylum seekers in Europe specifically, we have identified certain areas, through our research, relating to the experiences of asylum seekers in Denmark, which might warrant further research. One of the findings, which we found to be most interesting, involved the potential abuse of power performed by residents acting as translators for the staff members within the center. Despite none of the identified literature focusing on or even including this topic, the presence of these resident translators seemed to have a large influence on how life in the asylum center was experienced by one of our participants. It thus seems to be a worthwhile endeavor to both further explore whether this practice of using residents as translators is employed in other asylum centers within or outside Denmark as well as how the potential presence of these pseudo staff members is experienced by the other residents at these centers. The inclusion of the perspectives of the resident translators could also function as a valuable perspective in this effort and give them a chance to explain things from their point of view.

Another valuable point of view which was largely omitted from the present master's thesis was that of asylum seeker women. Despite one of the therapist interviewees, Lise, telling us about some of the difficulties faced by asylum seeker women in regards to leaving their family, having to share bathrooms with men with whom they are not familiar with, as well as their potential future in Denmark, we were unable to gain a deeper insight into the experiences of this group of people at the center. Perhaps female researchers will be more successful in highlighting the experiences of this group of people as they would potentially be able to interact with them more freely, something we were largely unable to based on the perceived and expressed norms of interaction between women and unfamiliar men by women at the center. Both our own findings of certain unique issues faced by women as well as the general lack of perspectives of female asylum seekers in available research literature indicates that a need for more attention to this group is needed.

While we chose to conduct interviews with one Afghan and one Palestinian man, we didn't give much consideration to how coming from a particular country might play a

role in how they experienced life in the asylum center in our questions. If we had chosen to focus more on this, we might have been able to provide further information pertaining to how, or if, for instance our interviewees' nationality, and thus their perceived chances of getting asylum in Denmark, might influence their experience of being in the asylum center. As such future studies might wish to dive deeper into this topic. This might also serve to further illuminate our finding regarding asylum seekers' expectations for how they are going to be received in Denmark and whether there are differences between nationalities. Of course providing information on this subject might be used by states as proof that people from certain countries are undeserving of asylum despite this not necessarily being the case. Based on this it seems to be important that studies on this topic remain focused on how a person's perception of their statistical chances of gaining asylum affects their well being while being in an asylum center, taking care to not further marginalize already marginalized groups.

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