



# Intergenerational perspectives on refugee children and youth's adaptation to life in Norway

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## Abstract

Refugees from the Global South face many challenges when they arrive in Europe, not least having their subjectivities and beliefs questioned as part of requests for them to adapt to the norms of the destination context. Although there has been much critical research on migrant integration and adaptation, few of these studies have used an intergenerational lens to investigate the experiences of refugee children and youth. This article addresses this research gap using a social navigation theoretical framework and qualitative data obtained from focus group discussions with Eritrean and Afghan unaccompanied minors, young adults, and parents. The findings demonstrate how challenges and resources associated with adaptation identified across generations were related to (a) the frequency and nature of interactions between refugees, their compatriots, and Norwegians; (b) learning the Norwegian language; (c) comprehension of Norway's bureaucratic welfare systems; and (d) accepting Norwegian cultural values while maintaining transnational cultural ties. Notably, unaccompanied minors, young adults, and parents all navigated dual cultures as part of efforts to achieve normative Norwegian markers of successful migrant adaptation. Significantly, the older generational groups had the most difficulty “breaking” into Norwegian society. Overall, it is argued that to understand better the challenges migrants face when they are required to adapt to a new life in a destination context and the implications of these challenges for their aspirations, it is important to include both a focus on how they move through the society (social navigation) and the interactivity between generations (intergenerational perspective).

## KEYWORDS

children and youth, Norway, qualitative, refugees, social navigation, transnational

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Migration into Europe has become a significant topic since the influx of people from conflict-ridden regions in the Global South in 2015.

Norway has not been exempt from migration flows, and in early 2018,

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Statistics Norway (SSB, 2018) reported that 14.1% (8.6% from Global South) of the population are immigrants. In 2016, 63% of the total number of people that migrated to Norway were refugees fleeing conflict, particularly civil war, in countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Somalia (SSB, 2017). In 2015, Norway accepted 5,050

unaccompanied minors (UAMs), the fourth largest number out of the 28 European countries that accepted refugees and almost five times more than they had accepted in 2014 (Byrne & Bech Hansen, 2018). Most refugees and asylum seekers have had traumatic experiences in their home countries, often followed by hardship and deprivation on the journey to Norway (Lindert, Carta, Schäfer, & Mollica, 2016). On arrival in Norway, they face adjustment to a new culture, language, values, social expectations, and legal frameworks and uncertainty about whether they will be allowed to remain (Lindert et al., 2016).

Mobility is movement through space. Cresswell (2010, p. 19) defines it as "... the fragile entanglement of physical movement, the socially shared meanings ascribed to such movement and the experienced and embodied practice of movement ...". The term "politics of mobility," comprises social relations produced by mobilities that involve the production and distribution of power. Cresswell (2010, p. 21) underlines that these relations are complex and include relations between classes, genders, ethnicities, nationalities, religious groups, and—we would add—across generations. Transnational mobility focuses on the movement of people across national borders and the subsequent production of and changes in social relations. The European Union's opening up of borders to enable free mobility for those within Europe (i.e., the Schengen countries) and the closing and tightening up of borders for those coming from without after the 2015 influx illustrates the complexities of mobilities in relation to migration (Cresswell, 2010). Mobilities are not only related to the transnational movement of people, but also to movement within borders.

The movement of young people from the Global South to the Global North is not new, yet what has changed is the sheer numbers of young people seeking refuge and, in particular, growing numbers of UAMs from specific regions fleeing conflict or instability. The large influx of migrants has posed significant economic, social, and political challenges to European countries that were already facing challenges such as low economic growth, high unemployment, increase in terrorism, and an associated rise of right wing ideology, to name a few (Etzioni, 2018). It is essential to understand the interaction between state responses to the influx of young people and the young people's navigation through social space as they negotiate their way through unfamiliar social, cultural, and political spaces. Because these young people are not embedded in family units during settlement, we should not only focus on transnational family relations and interactions within nuclear family units that have migrated together (Ptashnick & Zuberi, 2018), but also on young unaccompanied migrants' perspectives. These young people may be theorised as leading "unchildlike childhoods" (Kesby, Gwanzura-Ottmoller, & Chizororo, 2006) as they do not fit into the standard transnational categories of child and youth migration, which are usually linked to family mobility. They travel "alone," usually with no kin at the receiving end (at least no kin that they can acknowledge if they hope to gain asylum) (Pérez & Salgado, 2018).

International law highlights the need to provide safe havens for UAMs. Problematically, nation states prioritise the protection of their borders and citizens from those making false claims or those

suspected of being potential threats to the state (Koser, 2007; Pérez & Salgado, 2018). UAMs are therefore often met with suspicion and must not only submit to age assessments to prove eligibility for asylum but also their need for protection (Koser, 2007). On receiving asylum, they become wards of the State, incorporated into the welfare system with similar rights to their national peers. However, there is no accommodation of their need for contact with their transnational families (Pérez & Salgado, 2018). Therefore, gaining insight into how these young people transition and successfully adapt to their new homes, under these challenging circumstances, is important to understanding their experiences of transnational mobility.

Although there is a plethora of research on young migrants in Norway (Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015) and Europe (Pérez & Salgado, 2018), research utilising an intergenerational perspective to gain insight into the strategies refugees use to successfully navigate Norwegian society is limited. Adaptation to a new society is crucial for survival and well-being, especially for those who have moved from conflict-ridden places (Strang & Ager, 2010). Using an intergenerational lens, we aim to explore and critically examine the strategies used by refugee children and youth as they attempt to achieve normative Norwegian markers of successful migrant adaptation. The article is structured as follows: The next section provides an overview of debates over intergenerationality and migrant integration and adaptation. This is followed by an outline of Vigh's theory of social navigation, which is used as an analytical framework for the findings and discussion. We then provide a detailed account of the research design informing this study. Our empirical findings are presented in Section 5 and draw attention to themes such as migrant engagement with state bureaucratic systems, the importance of social networks, and shifting aspirations. Conclusions follow this.

## 2 | INTERGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND ADAPTATION

Intergenerationality is defined by Hopkins and Pain (2007, p. 288) as "the relations and interactions between generational groups." They argue that identity is produced through social interaction and through generational "differences and sameness" and call these "relational geographies" of age (Hopkins & Pain, 2007, p. 288). Considering the recent increase of research in children's geographies, it is important to conduct these studies in context and not exclude the important relations and interactions between generations (Hopkins & Pain, 2007). Vanderbeck (2007) argues that within geography, intergenerational studies have predominantly focused on family migration and social reproduction, highlighting difference, conflict, and what separates generations (Vanderbeck, 2007). This approach is not limited to geography; intergenerational conflict has been of particular interest in psychology, intercultural, ethnic, and migration studies (Frounfelder, Assefa, Smith, Hussein, & Betancourt, 2017; Tingvold, Middelthon, Allen, & Hauff, 2012; Wilson & Renzaho, 2015). Vanderbeck (2007, p. 202) states that how "space facilitates and limits" extra familial intergenerational relationships is under researched. This is especially

relevant in the case of research with refugees. The movement across space conceptualised as transnational mobility brings with it additional challenges and opportunities from both individual and political perspectives. For refugees and asylum seekers, leaving their home countries does not mean severing relations and there are usually enduring social and cultural ties that keep them connected to their places of origin (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013). It is important to consider these transnational bonds when attempting to understand refugees' and asylum seekers' adaptation to their host nation (Ptashnick & Zuberi, 2018), as well as the intergenerational relationships they develop in their new environment. So, intergenerationality can be considered in different ways: in relation to time, age, family relations, and age cohorts (i.e., people born within a specific interval in time) (Vanderbeck, 2007).

Refugees' and immigrants' adaptation to the receiving countries is often conceptualised in connection with acculturation. The definition of acculturation is contested, but simply described as referring to "the changes that arise following contact between groups and individuals of different cultural backgrounds" (Berry & Sam, 2016, p. 11). Acculturation has been conceptualised in a range of ways: from being synonymous with assimilation and the melting pot ideology to being a process consisting of different strategies, with integration and multiculturalism as the ideal (Berry & Sam, 2016). Bhatia and Ram (2009) have criticised acculturation as a universalist concept that assumes that all migrants progress in a linear way through the acculturation process. They call for an ecological approach that takes political structures and historical experiences into account as well as the heterogeneity within groups. They highlight that immigrants continue to have contact with their home countries, and thus, in the process of acculturation, there is an on-going negotiation between "here and there, past and present, homeland and hostland, self and other," which must be considered (Bhatia & Ram, 2009, pp. 141–142). Despite the critiques, acculturation as a concept is useful for examining research on how refugees adapt to receiving countries.

Integration has been problematized in several ways: First, integration is seen as a politically grounded term, where governments use indicators to "measure" immigrants' integration through participation in the labour market, mastering language, attaining socio-cultural knowledge, and so forth (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013). There is little space within this integration agenda to consider immigrants' transnational ties and their roles and meaning in their lives. Second, integration is usually presented as a one-way process with the onus being on the immigrants to adapt to the ways of the receiving society and the majority group only embracing non-threatening cultural influences such as food and music (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013). Third, integration is conceptualised as an endpoint for migrants to work towards, implemented through social policy (e.g., numbers in work and education). The socio-cultural aspect of integration has received less attention because it is complex, less tangible, and difficult to quantify. The transnational nature of migration is seen more and more as a threat by receiving states, and there is a reluctance to understand immigrants' need to maintain ties with their countries of origin (Pérez & Salgado, 2018). Erdal and Oeppen (2013) present transnationalism as a spectrum; at one end is the alarmist view that represents

transnational ties as increasing the potential for radicalisation. This lack of trust results in suspicion, limited contact between majority and minority populations, and the increased need for minorities to strengthen their transnational links. At the opposite end is the pragmatic approach, which acknowledges that most migrants have a nuanced relationship that falls between assimilation and transnationalism, transnational relations exist alongside integration and that there is no need for an either or alternative (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013). We use Sam and Berry's (2010, p. 476) definition of integration, "maintaining one's original culture while having daily interactions with other groups."

Research on intergenerational perspectives to immigrants' adaptation has mostly focused on family relationships between parents and children. Studies have investigated how these relationships have led to conflict as different generations adapt at different paces. Children's accelerated adaptation and parents' hierarchical and authoritarian parenting styles, parents' slower adaptation to host countries and the demands, for parents from collectivist societies, of raising children in individualistic contexts, result in conflict (Burgos, Al-Adeimi, & Brown, 2017; Frounfelker et al., 2017; Tingvold, Middelthon, et al., 2012). However, parents have exhibited the ability to find strategies to adapt to these challenges, for example, by adopting certain norms, changing their parenting styles, or reaching out to extended family members (Renzaho, Green, Mellor, & Swinburn, 2011). When it is not possible to access help from kin, parents seek advice from non-family members in their ethnic communities, reflecting an adherence to the collectivist way of parenting. However, pressure from kin and compatriots to adhere to the home country's socio-cultural parenting norms (Renzaho, Green, Mellor, & Swinburn, 2011; Tingvold, Middelthon, et al., 2012) may interfere with parents' ability to adapt their practices (Cook & Waite, 2016; Renzaho et al., 2011).

A number of resources and positive factors contribute to young migrants' successful adaptation. Although the studies above point to real challenges that families face when adapting to new contexts, especially for those coming to the North from collectivist societies in the South, they also point out that positive family relations, connection, and communication are important for young people's adaptation (Burgos et al., 2017; Cook & Waite, 2016). Additionally, the intergenerational perspectives that are highlighted by these studies point to the importance of maintaining a balance between the parents' need to impart cultural values from the home country to their children and the children's need to adopt and adjust to the receiving countries' norms and values. Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, and Stein (2012) reviewed studies on risk and protective factors for displaced and refugee children and highlighted the ability to integrate into the host society while maintaining one's cultural identity as being a protective factor. They emphasised language acquisition, parental support, family cohesion, support from friends, and same ethnic foster care as protective factors (Fazel et al., 2012). Regarding UAMs, Fazel et al. (2012) found that fewer relocations during the settlement process and high-support living arrangements were protective factors. Pérez and Salgado's (2018) participatory study in Spain with UAMs aimed to examine how they fulfilled the social, emotional,

and identity needs that could not be met by the social care institutions. They found that the young people maintained transnational relationships with their families in their home countries or elsewhere, although this was not facilitated for by the carers in Spain. The continued transnational links and communication with family members provided socialisation and relational and emotional ties that helped the young people to continue to feel connected as they adapted to the new environment (Pérez & Salgado, 2018). Furthermore, a Norwegian study with UAMs found that young people who reported having transnational family social support had lower levels of mental health problems (Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015). These studies reflect that for UAMs, adaptation is not only about the contacts and about help they get in the receiving country but also relies on continued transnational family links.

The adaptation process is complex and many factors come into play (Frounfelker et al., 2017). The situation of children and young people who have undertaken the journey to Europe from the Global South without family and the challenges, strategies, and resources they use during the resettlement process is not as well covered in literature on intergenerational adaptation. In the light of these research gaps, the overall aim of our study is to explore intergenerational perspectives on successful adaptation by refugee children and youth in Norway. In particular, in adapting to a new society, first, what challenges do children and youth experience and, second, what strategies and resources do they draw on?

### 3 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social navigation, in general, refers to the way people act in their respective social worlds. However, the theory of social navigation brings together two social scientific perspectives on movement through space and time. These are “the movement and change of social formations and societies, and the movement and practice of agents within social formations” (Vigh, 2009, p. 426). The concept directs attention to a situation of fluidity and change and can be helpful when studying how people act in difficult situations where a range of different social forces are at play. In order to maximise social opportunities, people use a repertoire of tactics, strategies, behaviours, and socio-cultural assets. The repertoires are acted, adjusted, and attuned in relation to the way people “experience, imagine and anticipate the movement and influence of social forces” (Vigh, 2009, p. 420). Social navigation is constantly being attuned; the concept encompasses both present challenges and possibilities that people face as they move across a shifting environment and how they make an effort to plot a course into an uncertain and fluid future. The way people imagine opportunities, pathways, aspirations, and goals is negotiated and flexible (Vigh, 2009).

Social navigation as an analytical concept allows a perspective that captures the interactivity at “the intersection between agency, social forces and change” (Vigh, 2009 p. 420). It is attentive to how social forces shape people's agency as they negotiate their immediate social and spatial positions, while simultaneously encouraging an

examination of how those same social forces influence people's imagined social and spatial positions. Importantly, in many societies, and perhaps more so in the Global South, many of these processes are “deeply embedded in generational dynamics” (Vigh, 2006, p. 56). Focusing on generational dynamics makes it possible to grasp how youth envision life trajectories in their efforts to attain adulthood or realise themselves as social beings.

Social navigation links very well with a relational approach. According to Huijsmans et al. (2014, p. 167), relational thinking ties together actors, dimensions, and forces and emphasises “relationships, networks, frictions, interaction, negotiations, the everyday and power.” Relational approaches, in particular, take into account how people over time experience relational movements. Comstock et al. (2008, p. 282) define relational movement as “the process of moving through connections; through disconnections; and back into new ... connections with others.” The relational approach also considers, in addition to connections with other individuals, the importance of institutions shaping people's lives. The level of connection to a host society will influence the ability to act in constructive ways (Hodgkinson, Pouw, & Le Mat, 2018). Importantly, over time, unaddressed feelings of disconnection from the society in which one resides may have a variety of serious negative outcomes.

### 4 | METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The Norwegian welfare state has established an elaborate framework to ensure the successful integration of refugees, including young people. The Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) is responsible for settlement of refugees and migrants once they receive permission to remain in Norway. UAMs are settled through two routes: First, children aged 14 years and under are the responsibility of the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth, and Family affairs (BUFETAT) (IMDi, 2018). They are primarily placed with foster families (IMDi, 2018) and have the same rights as native Norwegian children (Olwig, 2011). Second, UAMs between 15 and 18 years fall under the care of IMDi and are subject to a variety of care arrangements depending on their needs. These can be group homes, independent living in small apartments, or small apartments in family homes where families take some responsibility for the young person (IMDi, 2018). Youths over 18 years and adults are assigned to a municipality where they receive help to find housing, work, enrol in education, and so forth. As refugees, they are obliged to take part in a 2-year introduction programme where they are taught social studies and Norwegian to help prepare them for further education and employment, so they can fully participate in Norwegian society (County Governor, 2018). Although this is a comprehensive and well-organised system, it is essentially top down and provides limited space for flexibility concerning individual needs (Byrne & Bech Hansen, 2018). Strang and Ager (2010) emphasise that for successful settlement, it is not only important for immigrants to adapt to the host country's systems but for the system to also take into account the new arrivals' perspectives and adapt accordingly.

A qualitative approach, exploring processes, insights, and meanings, was the most appropriate way to achieve our aim to explore intergenerational perspectives of refugee children and youth's successful adaptation to life in Norway. The study was conducted in one of the larger cities in Norway that was purposefully selected for logistical reasons and its migrant statistics. Our participants comprised three groups of settled refugees from Eritrea and Afghanistan: 13 UAMs aged 16–18 years; eight young adults (YAs) who were in work or education and could speak some Norwegian; and nine parents who had brought children into Norway and so had experienced parenting both in their home country and in the host country. We used a variety of recruitment methods, because of the complexities that come with accessing such participants. We recruited UAMs through gatekeepers at the municipal child welfare system; YAs through organisations such as the Red Cross, as well as through networks and snowballing; and parents through networks and snowballing. All Afghan UAMs and YAs were men and the parents were women, whereas all generational groups from Eritrea comprised both men and women, reflecting the wider populations of these national groups in Norway. Our approach is to look at discrete age cohorts—groups that are not necessarily biologically related.

Data were collected between February and September 2017 using focus group discussions with a semi-structured interview guide. Focus group discussions were conducted in English, Norwegian, Tigrinya, and Pashto. In the focus groups, we addressed various themes related to what helps such groups of children and youths adapt. We explored the challenges young people experienced when adapting to a new society, as well as the strategies and resources used. Each of the authors was involved in at least one focus group interview. With consent from participants, we used an audio digital recorder to record the discussions. In two focus group discussions, we used an interpreter. All recordings were transcribed and translated to English where necessary. The authors collectively coded the data using Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network analysis. We formed thematic networks by grouping codes first into basic themes, second into organising themes, and third into global themes. The last phase of the analysis was deductive where we reflected back to our research questions and linked the global themes to the objectives of the research. We used challenges (linked to context of adversity), strategies, and resources (as forms of adaptation) as the frame to identify aspects of adaptation.

Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data. Informed written consent was obtained from all participants. It was made clear that participation was voluntary; anonymity and confidentiality were assured. We had two facilitators in each focus group, and we analysed data as a team. Our research team was multicultural, from Botswana, Eritrea, Norway, United Kingdom, and Zimbabwe. This contributed both to participants opening up and relaxing during discussions, identifying with several of us as fellow immigrants, and to a richer understanding of participants' narratives. Throughout the whole process, we reflected on how to maintain rigour. We continuously discussed possible bias related to sampling methods and challenges related to language and reflected on

researchers' own positions and possible preconceptions in meeting immigrant youth and parents.

## 5 | FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

For many migrants, transnational mobility involves adaptation to a new geographical location, including comprehending new language, engaging with a different state bureaucratic system, new social networks, and perhaps changed aspirations. In the discussion that follows, we explore how these and other issues play out in the Norwegian context among Eritrean and Afghan UAMs, YAs, and parents.

### 5.1 | The system and environment

Learning the language is an essential skill needed to navigate all other aspects of life in a new country. All generations of our participants reported that learning Norwegian was indispensable for adaptation. UAMs noted that the ability to speak Norwegian promoted participation and was essential if they were to associate with Norwegians. For YAs, learning the language was part of a web of simultaneous challenges they faced:

Yes, I had to study the language from beginning. ... and the other challenge was to find job because I need extra financial help, so that I can help myself and my family. (Eritrean YA)

Without exception, all generations focused on learning Norwegian as key to understanding the culture. UAMs, both Eritreans and Afghans, saw the dual advantage of learning the language and understanding culture:

If I always talk to them, be with them then I receive the language, so that's one thing. So I also get to know how they think and how they do things. (Afghan UAM)

An Eritrean UAM described how living with a Norwegian family enabled learning the language better and promoted cultural comprehension. UAMs also noted that Norwegian friends help you learn

You cannot learn Norwegian in school, not just in school. You have to hang out with people and speak Norwegian. (Afghan UAM).

One YA described adapting by accepting delays and finding alternatives

I have to accept the reality and the real world and I have to try to put extra energies to find a way or to solve the problem. For example, language is my

problem, so I have to use extra time to study and work.  
(Eritrean YA).

The comments of the younger generations in our study confirm findings in other studies. Fazel et al. (2012) contend that language acquisition is a significant protective factor that promotes successful adaptation as well as acculturation.

Parents commented on the need to learn the language in order to understand people in their children's lives:

We receive many letters from different departments ...  
and when you know the language you can talk with  
your children's teacher and it's a better way than to  
have translator beside you. (Afghan mother)

Our parent participants acknowledged that they are slower than their children to learn the language and understand the various rules and regulations. This was potentially problematic for intergenerational relations, which resonates with other studies that found conflict between generations in such situations (Renzaho et al., 2011; Tingvold, Hauff, Allen, & Middelthun, 2012). Parents' behaviour and practices were related to helping their children, for example, it was important for them to learn the language in order to understand teachers.

As described above, Norway has an elaborate system to promote successful integration of refugees. Such a system is an outcome of the welfare state (Bech, Borevi, & Mouritsen, 2017; Hollekim, Anderssen, & Daniel, 2016) and is a fundamentally different way of organising society compared with our participants' countries of origin. Moving to Norway requires, first, knowledge and comprehension of the new bureaucratic system; second, the ability to navigate between the different agencies within the system; and third, acknowledgement that the system often provides an alternative to use of social ties and networks.

Our UAM participants sometimes found it difficult to comprehend the system's provision of schooling. Whereas some were integrated into Norwegian schools, others had to attend a school dedicated to teaching Norwegian to foreigners, and one Eritrean UAM commented: "There are no Norwegian pupils or teachers ... which does not help with speaking Norwegian." Over time, the UAMs realised that they had a reliable resource in the system. An Eritrean UAM, when asked who she would turn to when she had a problem, replied "I would go and report to my caseworker." She understood that is the person who could assist her and added, "I do not have my family here." When people from the community offer to help UAMs, they too often go through the system, so the support family mentioned below would most likely have been arranged through the child welfare system:

When I was at the reception centre I had a support family. They helped me with homework, we went hiking together and did various other things. I wish I had a support family in Bergen too. (Eritrean UAM)

Several other Eritrean UAMs told similar stories regarding help received from support families. The UAMs in our study were not embedded in a family unit during their journey and resettlement (Ptashnick & Zuberi, 2018), and consequently, they lacked family support in their journey and resettlement that other studies have identified as important for adaptation (Burgos et al., 2017; Cook & Waite, 2016). However, they did interact positively with Norwegian adults such as their caseworkers and families. One of the protective factors identified by Fazel et al. (2012) is same-ethnic foster care; among our participants, both foster and support families were Norwegian and not of the same ethnic origin and yet clearly helped positive adaptation. The UAMs saw Norwegian bureaucrats (e.g., the caseworker) as a source of help in navigating the new environment and connecting constructively to the host society (Hodgkinson et al., 2018).

YAs acknowledged that the system treated everyone equally, but found it hard to understand that system "replaced" social involvement:

No matter your background you will be treated the same in the system. So the problem is with the society not with the system. They have built the system so that everybody is equal. In Eritrea it's the society who takes care of the old and the weak, but in Norway it's not the society it is the system ... so the system is making us equal but not the people. So they are two different things you know. For example I'm Norwegian on paper, so the system has made me Norwegian, but not the people you know; that's the problem, they say "no I'm not going to help him because he can go to NAV [welfare services]" (Eritrean YA)

One potential channel for social contact is through the voluntary sector in Norway. Several NGOs offer programmes and activities for refugees, and some of our participants had experience with them. An Eritrean YA described repeatedly participating in activities offered by the Red Cross:

They help us with so many things and explain how everything is in Norway. But still it's challenging what to expect in the culture.

YAs in our study were "successful" in the sense that they could all speak some Norwegian and were either in work or further education. These comments show clear comprehension of the Norwegian system, including the role of the voluntary sector, and yet, there are challenges to their adaptation and acculturation. This echoes Bhatia and Ram's (2009) observation that acculturation is not a simple, linear process but instead involves on-going negotiation between contrasting aspects of their transnational existence.

Completion of the introduction programme involved a move out of care and support frameworks, and this transition brought additional challenges for our YA participants.

When I arrived it was such that I received help for everything possible. I had no need to pay for anything, everything was arranged like that. But suddenly when I turned 18, then I had to move out and live alone and then things quickly became difficult. I had to pay accounts, I had to cook, I had to go to school, actually I had to do everything. And it was challenging for me. I became sick of school, stayed at home a lot—and that made it get really tough for me. (Afghan YA).

Several of our YA participants found it difficult to get the job they wanted. For example, a young Eritrean man was teaching mathematics to refugees but would rather have been an electrician as he had been back in Eritrea; in Norway, he could not meet the criteria and requirements to practice as an electrician. One Afghan YA spoke about the difficulty of getting work in spite of actively seeking paid employment:

I have been hunting for a job for nearly four or five months now. I have applied, I can say, more than 300 times. And I cannot get one. ... Sometimes I think I should change my name. (Afghan YA).

Transnational mobility can involve qualifications from country of origin being irrelevant or at least not recognised in the new host country (Bech et al., 2017). Mobile youths may also face racial prejudice (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013) as hinted by the participant above.

Parents faced dealing with bureaucracy not only for themselves, but also for their children. One Eritrean father told how it took 3 months after family reunification before their children started school—they were sent back and forth between his and his wife's contact persons:

Finally I felt pressure and the children were stressing me by saying “why do not we go to school” because they were enthusiastic to start school. After that I took them all with me to the introduction centre. I said to my children, tell them yourselves “we need education.” And when they saw them they were shocked and after a week they told them to start school. (Eritrean father)

This father had to navigate between different bureaucratic agencies before eventually achieving the desired solution: educational participation for his children.

Many of the parents reported that they were confused by differences in parenting practices between their country of origin and Norway. One example concerned the difficulty for parents to regulate their children:

Here they get too much freedom. We have to be careful about them not to spend their time in playing games (Eritrean Father).

An Eritrean mother stated “... here in Norway I do not know who is responsible for the children.” An Afghan mother commented that everything was different in the education system, including style of teaching and the relationship between teacher and students. Although parents were confused, children were quick to learn the language—and the laws and regulations—enabling them “to try to trick and abuse their parents” (Eritrean father). Several studies report that parents are slower than children to understand and adapt to the demands of raising children in an individualistic context—often resulting in intergenerational conflict (Frounfelker et al., 2017; Renzaho et al., 2011). Children's quicker connection with the new environment leads to feelings of “disconnection” among parents (Comstock et al., 2008).

Parents realised that they would need to learn different ways of parenting in the new system

You should make your child your friend, you should know his/her secrets and you can only know your child's secrets when you have contact and communicate well with them. You have to spend your time on it. This is the biggest weakness I have observed here in Norway. You have to call them constantly on the phone especially when they become teenagers to check their whereabouts, not to stress them, but in a friendly way (Eritrean mother).

This example is linked to the question about who is responsible for children in Norway; parents understood that in Norway, responsibility for children is not collective as in their country of origin and they were beginning to comprehend what this implied for their own parenting practices. Hollekim et al. (2016) reflect on the issue of the state as “co-responsible” for the well-being of children and what this implies for parenting. Parents in our study were prepared to adapt and change their parenting style, for example, by “following” their children more and being friends with their children even though this was regarded as poor parenting in their own culture. Renzaho et al. (2011) likewise found that adjusting parenting style is one of the strategies adopted by parents to function in a new culture.

## 5.2 | Social networks and educational spaces

Transnational mobility requires new ways of relating not only to people of the host culture, but also to different generations of the home culture now living in the host culture. All our participants commented on the differences in norms, particularly regarding social interaction. The UAMs commented on norms regarding who to turn to for help with a problem. “Well, in Eritrea, if you face any problem, it does not go much outside of the family” (Eritrean UAM). Young Afghan adults commented on how unusual it was to be alone in their home culture; instead, the norm was to have people around you. Another young Afghan commented on experiencing pressure from peers to be “acceptable”:

With those I see at school in my class, they asked me on the first day, 'do you smoke or use snus<sup>1</sup> or such?' I knew they would ..., I said 'now and then' but I do not do that. I just said it; we have to do some things to stay in with them. (Afghan YA)

Eritrean YAs found it hard to grasp relevant cultural codes on how to behave respectfully towards officials and other adult Norwegians. They mentioned that when they met with them in their offices, they did not understand what was required of them. The intergenerational differences are interesting: Among peers from the host nation, the YAs found a way to navigate that enabled them to "stay in with them," to keep open the option of social interaction, but dealing with the older generation from the host nation was much harder. In analysing social life, Vigh (2009) identifies two movements: changes in social formation over time and movement of individuals within social formations. Social navigation is the intersection, or interactivity, of the two, what Vigh (2009) calls the "third dimension," "motion within motion." Our participants show that when more than one aspect of the social formation are in motion (here, generation and culture), social navigation is more difficult.

All generations found it difficult to make Norwegian friends. An Eritrean UAM said "To speak frankly, we have not really started mixing with Norwegians. So far, mostly we associate with other Eritreans and also other foreigners." All generations noticed that Norwegians keep to themselves and found it hard to make contact with them. Several YAs described not having a single good Norwegian friend. A young Eritrean adult recounted an incident where he had invited some Norwegians to his home to have something to eat; the next day, they treated him as if they did not know him. YAs attributed the difficulty in making Norwegian friends to the fact that they have little in common:

What I've noticed, for example at school, is that I cannot just connect with everyone. I tried to do that. For example, they are 16–17 years and I am 22, maybe that's the reason. Also they talk about some things that I never experienced growing up. I grew up with many problems. So we have nothing in common when I try to connect with them (Afghan YA)

They had clearly thought about the issue in some depth, and one Eritrean YA expressed it as "It's difficult to break this code you know." Many of the YAs also commented that to fit in, to be accepted, and to make Norwegian friends, they had to behave like them and participate in "Norwegian" activities, which typically involved drinking and smoking. The YAs concluded that those who did these activities seemed better integrated, but those who did not participate remained alone. Eritrean YAs stated that on the few occasions that they went to clubs, they found the Norwegians sociable because they were

drunk. Although the younger generations were able to navigate the new social formations among peers, their "unchildlike childhoods" (Kesby et al., 2006) have hindered their ability to "connect" in the way expressed in the relational approach (Comstock et al., 2008). Hodgkinson et al. (2018) contend that this could undermine constructive adaptation.

In spite of difficulties connecting with Norwegian society, our participants identified many positive strategies in their on-going attempts to connect with the host culture. All generations spoke of the need to actively engage with the society around them, though the nature of engagement differed between generations. UAMs learned to ask for help when they needed it:

I think it's good to help those who are new. For example, I will explain my own experience. So even though I lived with others who had experience, I did not get any help. But of course, I did not ask for help from them. I expected them to come and help me. (Afghan UAM)

Eritrean UAMs commented that Norwegians are always busy, but agreed they would help if you asked them. They spoke of the experience of feeling frightened and noticing that the local people did not want to approach them so that it was doubly important to *be brave* and initiate contact. One Afghan UAM explained this need to take the initiative when making friends:

Yes, like if I'm sitting here, and say that I want that boy to come over and talk to me like, say hello to me. If he does not come over, and if I do not go over to talk to him either, then you will not get to know him. (Afghan UAM)

The younger generations explained that participation in activities helps them to cope. Eritrean UAMs living in a group home run by child welfare, described playing football or training, or simply drinking tea together. The younger generations also reflected on their cultural norms that have helped them in Norway:

I think we have good culture in Eritrea. We like to help each other and other people, to cooperate, for example, we try to behave well and respect others, especially older people. So, on the bus for example, we give the seat to older people. And the people thank you respectfully and some just look at you and just take the seat—not everybody is the same—but you know you did like that because you believe that's the right thing to do, so it does not matter. (Eritrean UAM)

Eritrean YAs agreed that a strong aspect of their culture is respect for old people. Afghan YAs commented that an aspect of their culture that helped them was hard work. This resonates with Fazel et al.'s

<sup>1</sup>Snus is a small pouch of tobacco that is inserted under the lip.

(2012) finding that integration while maintaining one's cultural identity is protective.

Our participants not only had difficulty making Norwegian friends, but also in connecting with people from their own cultures. Afghan UAMs and YAs reported very little contact with older generations of Afghans in Norway. One Afghan UAM commented: "Those who come before are a little stuck up." Consequently, they found it difficult to make contact. One of the Afghan YAs had a more detailed explanation:

Yes, those who are older, they are more religious than us, for example. They think that we just drink alcohol, for example, smoke hash or something else. ... but we are not like that. ... So they do not want to connect with us. We know what they think, so we do not need to press them. (Afghan YA)

Similarly, the Eritrean YAs and UAMs replied that they do not have much contact beyond greetings with older generations, even at church—unless they are related. In order to counteract the loneliness, the younger generations stressed the importance of being with other people. An Afghan UAM put it like this:

Yes, we sit together with friends, and we start to talk. And we change the thoughts in our heads, so that we think about other things. You know, the longing that we have.

Eritrean UAMs talked about the importance of having a plan to avoid being alone, to distract themselves from feeling lonely by being with others. YAs had comparable experiences:

There is nothing at home that keeps me home: I have no family, I have no one to talk with at home. In a way, I have to go out. (Afghan YA)

One young Afghan adult gave more details:

You should try to keep in touch, be social to succeed, actually. You should have contacts everywhere ... so that, quite simply, you are not at home. If you are home a lot, it can become difficult. Go out, go to school, find a job, be with Norwegians, be with folk from your homeland. Then I believe it will go well. (Afghan YA)

These comments describe "moving through connections; through disconnections; and back into new connections ..." described by Comstock et al. (2008, p. 282). Disconnections involve physical separation from families in the home country, perceived disapproval from present same-culture older generations, and difficulties connecting with people in the host country. The importance of connecting, being with others, and making contacts reflects our participants' relational thinking.

### 5.3 | Aspirations

Our participants described their aspirations for their life in Norway as well as their hope for their relations with family in the home country and fellow residents in Norway. Both Eritrean and Afghan YAs mentioned that the hope that their problems would disappear once they got to Norway were soon dashed:

We've had many problems. When we came here, we had some days beautifully free. Then suddenly it came again, that you have to cope with everything again (Afghan YA).

An Eritrean YA described, after the rigours and trauma of the journey, he was "happy like a child when I came to Norway," but within a couple of months, he had to deal with new challenges. The younger generational groups spoke about the motivational importance of holding onto their dreams. In some cases, this involved focusing on their goal in order to get through the challenges. In other cases, it was a matter of just taking the next step:

But if you go out, you work, you are thinking of the kind of future you want. Like, you want to be an engineer, or doctor, right. Then you can think about that as well as I have to have my own car or own house. Then afterwards, I can go to my family, visit them or they can visit me. (Afghan UAM)

A strategy mentioned by UAMs was to adjust to reality. They realised that the longer they lived in Norway, the more experience they gained, they would "understand more about what you can do, and what kind of opportunities exist here" (Afghan UAM). An Eritrean UAM spoke of adjusting his goal of becoming a doctor to instead being a health worker—until his Norwegian was good enough to study medicine. Adaptation and acculturation are not linear processes (Bhatia & Ram, 2009), but rather require negotiation and flexibility (Vigh, 2009).

Some of our participants had to accept delays in realising their own dreams. Several of the young Eritrean adults mentioned multiple responsibilities both in Norway and back in Eritrea. One young man was particularly eloquent about his situation:

We do have lots of responsibility for our families. At the same time there is over expectation from family members in Eritrea. They think that life is easier in the west. Everything regarding finances is on my shoulders and definitely for the ones who are out of the country. ... I am the first child from the family of ten children. Other family members also followed to come out of the country. So it was a huge burden actually yes to be responsible for all their expenses for their smuggling to pay everything anyway. ... So we do not have any family member back home. I recently got married last

summer and my wife is working we have a short, medium and long plan together. (Eritrean YA)

This young man's perceptions of "spaces of possibility" and "available trajectories" (Vigh, 2009) limited him from getting married and "continuing" his own life until after he had helped all his siblings.

Our participants also had aspirations regarding their relations with citizens of the host country. Many wanted both cultures simultaneously. One Afghan YA reflected on his situation:

So here in Norway, on the one hand, is my country, and I have two feet, one of them here and one on the other side. I cannot have both feet on this side and I cannot go back to the other side. So that's how I am. Yes, and it is very difficult. ... You must think about your homeland and here in Norway. ... We have to do things in two different ways. That is very difficult. So I cannot say that I'm only engaged with Norwegian culture, and I'm also not only engaged with my culture—so here there is a third culture. (Afghan YA)

An Eritrean mother summed up what many of the parents said:

Yes, I would like them to have both of the cultures. As far as they are living here, they need the Norwegian culture to be able to go with the society and follow the culture and law. And I also want them to grow up with my culture. (Eritrean Mother)

Others described aspects of Norwegian culture that they like:

It's the way of thinking they give you—to speak freely—and that's something that we did not have in Eritrea, you know, to criticise, to just think about things critically ... and we did not have that right in Eritrea (Eritrean YA)

Others expressed the hope for a much deeper connection with Norwegian citizens:

For me integration is to have my own culture, identity, values and at the same time to be able to know and integrate in the Norwegian language and values and norms .... My expectation is whenever I interact with Norwegians, it should be a mutual thing, a two-way understanding about the issue, not that I should drop what I have and integrate in the Norwegian values starting from the language ... they have to somehow ... look at what I bring and ... mutual is both ways. (Eritrean YA)

Integration is often considered as a one-way process: Only the immigrant is expected to adapt (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013). This would make

"connections" in the relational approach (Comstock et al., 2008) almost impossible to achieve. This YA's understanding of integration is closer to Sam and Berry's (2010) definition mentioned above, that of holding onto one's home culture while still interacting daily with other groups.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

The overall aim of this paper was to explore intergenerational perspectives on successful adaptation by refugee children and youth in Norway. The Norwegian system of receiving and integrating refugees is strong and contributes to adaptation to the host country environment, although navigation between several agencies is required. The system supports acquisition of language skills and all generations reported that this is vital for adaptation as normatively defined in Norway. One aspect of the bureaucratic system that YAs experienced as problematic is the abrupt termination of support after a certain time has elapsed. Adjusting to the different system sometimes requires behaviours alien to their own culture, for example, in parenting.

All generations in our study found navigating social formations difficult, especially making Norwegian friends. Among our participants, transnational mobility has often produced disconnection between unrelated, same-ethnic generations, and conflict between generations within families. Adaptation involves making new connections; UAMs were the participants who had the most meaningful contact with adult Norwegians (e.g., their caseworker) that could facilitate assimilation. YAs reported connections to same-ethnic peers, but they have aspirations for deeper, mutual connections with Norwegians. Parents are slower to learn the language and understand the culture but are willing to adjust parenting practices to help their children adapt successfully.

Overall, this article extends debates in migration studies by demonstrating that to understand better the challenges migrants face when adapting to life in a new context, and the implications of these challenges for their aspirations, it is important to focus on both how they move through the society (social navigation) and the interactivity between generations (intergenerational perspective).

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