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## Mobilising memories and practices from the past: Refugees' belonging in the Norwegian outdoors

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### ABSTRACT

The article explores the ways in which refugees engage with memories and practices from the past when practising and experiencing belonging in the Norwegian outdoors. Based on empirical material generated from walking interviews and field observations in two rural municipalities in north-western Norway, the following question is addressed: How are memories and practices from the past mobilised in refugees' efforts to create belonging through participating in *friluftsliv*? The author argues that the Norwegian concept of *friluftsliv* presents opportunities for refugees to explore, develop, and engage with elements of familiarity. Familiarity connects symbolic similarities to the past through the activation of memories. However, attention is drawn to how belonging is performed against a backdrop of normativities that expect refugees to follow majority norms in the outdoors. The author concludes that reproducing these normativities allows for recognition, whereas contesting them through alternative practices creates a space in which refugees can create belonging in the Norwegian outdoors on their own terms.



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### Introduction

As the number of forced migrants from the Global South seeking safety in the Global North has increased in recent years, so too has the academic focus on refugees' experiences of belonging and social inclusion in their host societies (Savage et al. 2005; Yuval-Davis 2011). In this context, interest has grown in the role played by public spaces in creating and facilitating social inclusion, as many towns, cities, and local communities in the Global North face suffering from what is understood in public discourse as parallel societies and social dissolution if efforts to increase social inclusion are not successful (Rishbeth & Finney 2006; Nelson & Hiemstra 2008; Brown 2012). In this light, interest in migrants' use of the outdoors, such as greenspaces and national parks, has grown at the same time as attention has been turning to how migrants' use of the outdoors affects both their well-being and social inclusion (Rishbeth et al. 2019; Biglin 2021).

In Norway, outdoor recreational activity – *friluftsliv* – has received some of the attention, as *friluftsliv* is assumed to be an important arena for social inclusion activities (Norsk *friluftsliv* 2016; Pitkänen et al. 2017; S. Anderson et al. 2023). *Friluftsliv* has, in fact, come to play an integral role in the Directorate of Integration and Diversity's Introduction Programme (Integrerings- og mangfoldsdirektoratet n.d.), which is a compulsory, two-year full-time civic integration programme for newly arrived refugees once they have been settled in a local municipality. The programme aims to provide participants with the cultural capital and language skills that they will need to enter the workforce or educational system and to become financially independent (Integrerings- og mangfoldsdirektoratet n.d.). At the local level, often in cooperation with the Introduction Program, organisations such as the Norwegian Trekking Association (DNT) and Norwegian Red Cross also regularly utilise *friluftsliv* as an arena for inclusion.

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Common justifications for using *friluftsliv* in inclusion efforts stem from the assumption that it allows refugees to 'learn both Norwegian culture and the Norwegian language' (*Norsk friluftsliv* 2016, my translation). This assumption is based on the role played by *friluftsliv* as a collective memory in the building and production/reproduction of a common national identity (Gurholt 2008; Ween & Abram 2012). It is under this pretence that *friluftsliv* has become a representation of what it means to be/become Norwegian (Ween & Abram 2012).

Three key issues are implicit in the assumption that *friluftsliv* has become a representation of what it means to be/become Norwegian. The first is that normativities, in the form of unwritten rules and regulations, regulate what is 'right' and 'wrong' or 'good' and 'bad' in *friluftsliv* (Flemsæter et al. 2015). Refugees are new to *friluftsliv* (i.e. the Norwegian outdoors as a national collective memory and national identity project), and therefore adhering to these norms and expectations requires skills and knowledge that refugees are not familiar with (Pitkänen et al. 2017) and often transgress (Singleton 2021).

Second, the assumption neglects the fact that refugees have their own outdoor cultures, practices, experiences, and memories (Buijs et al. 2009; Head et al. 2019). This is often overlooked in the planning and management of outdoor activities for inclusion purposes and can potentially come into conflict with the norms that exist in the ways in which *friluftsliv* 'ought to be' performed (Flemsæter et al. 2015).

Third, it is assumed a singular belonging that is done in the confines of the Norwegian nation state and the local communities where the refugees reside, thereby ignoring the plurality of the scale of belonging (Horst et al. 2020). I draw on the work of scholars such as Rishbeth & Finney (2006), Rishbeth & Powell (2013), and Mathisen & Cele (2020) to understand belonging as at once a feeling, process, and performance (i.e. belonging is something that one *does*). Furthermore, in their everyday lives, refugees perform belonging simultaneously both in local communities within the host nation state and in transnational communities that are not fixed within a single nation state (Horst et al. 2020).

Against the above-presented background, and although both belonging and *friluftsliv* are multifaceted and can be conceptualised in a myriad of ways, in this article I borrow from Ween & Abram (2012) and Flemsæter et al. (2015) to understand *friluftsliv* as a national and normative collective memory and a practice of 'good citizenship' (Horst et al. 2020). I use these concepts to explore the ways in which refugees draw on the past in their efforts to create a sense of belonging in the Norwegian outdoors. I draw on qualitative

interviews and field observations among refugees settled in two rural municipalities in north-western Norway to investigate the following question: How are memories and practices from the past mobilised in refugees' efforts to create belonging through participating in *friluftsliv*?

I answer the research question by first outlining previous studies addressing belonging in the context of migration as a framework for the analysis. I then offer a conceptual understanding of *friluftsliv* as a national collective memory and identity project, before describing how the materials were produced and analysed. This is followed by a presentation of the empirical material, before I discuss and conclude how the refugees mobilise their pasts in their interactions with the outdoors, and how this impacts their efforts to create belonging.

### Belonging through memories and practices from the past

According to Yuval-Davis (2006), within a context of migration, belonging can be understood as three-pronged. Firstly, it can be understood as mutual acceptance and recognition of and within a local community, with common social practices and networks (Ahmed 2000; Anthias 2008; Nelson & Hiemstra 2008; Yuval-Davis 2011; Rishbeth et al. 2019). Secondly, belonging can be a personal emotional relationship to people and places (Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis 2011; Mathisen & Cele 2020). Thirdly, belonging forms part of a structural and geopolitical system of state citizenship (Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis 2011; Horst et al. 2020). In this article, I am primarily concerned with how refugees mobilise the past through memory and practice in their personal experiences of belonging. Crucially, this takes place within a context where both state citizenship and not least recognition from others define the background against which belonging is experienced.

Individually experienced belonging was long understood metaphorically as *roots*, meaning that people belonged through being firmly embedded in a fixed place (Tuan 1977). However, this metaphor has been challenged by more recent scholarship that has drawn attention to how 'roots' can define refugees as being 'out of place' (i.e. rooted somewhere else) (Christensen & Jensen 2011; Mathisen & Cele 2020). The shift away from understanding belonging as something fixed has been fuelled by attention to the embedded disjunction in the roots metaphor, whereby roots are seen as important for a sense of belonging, yet simultaneously lead to exclusion of newcomers (Mathisen 2020).

An alternative to the roots metaphor is that of *routes*, which contends that belonging is dynamic and mobile.

According to Gilroy (1993), the concept of *routes* deconstructs the fixedness of rootedness and recognises two essential aspects of migrant belonging. The first is that mobile populations have lived histories from more than one place, and that these histories are actively involved in efforts to create a sense of belonging. Studies addressing the past in creating belonging for migrants have uncovered a common theme, namely that cultural values and practices are both adapted and continued in new settings, and these values and practices influence processes of belonging. Probyn (1996, 19) described this hybridity of belonging in a mobile context as an ‘inbetweenness’ between being and longing, and ‘belonging in constant movement’. This constant movement makes belonging, to quote from Mathisen (2020, 46), ‘a dynamic process that includes moving back and forth from a past that is not forgotten to a present that is not yet fully known’. The second aspect is that *routes* recognises that populations are mobile, both physically and emotionally, as feelings of belonging can also exist in several places at once. Belonging can be performed both in local communities (which are embedded within a nation state), and within transnational communities at the same time, producing ‘simultaneity of both spaces of participation and scales of belonging’ (Horst et al. 2020, 79). In other words, belonging takes place simultaneously both here and there, and in the past and present, in refugees’ lived lives. Based on this, Horst et al. (2020) question which collectives are being referred to when practising belonging. They suggest that practising belonging in communities that are unbound to a nation state or local community can result in belonging within the local community and, indeed, within several local communities at once.

In this article, I refer to refugees’ ‘pasts’. Crucially, in using this term, I recognise that memories, practices, and lived lives are non-linear, as the past and the present interact (Tolia-Kelly 2006). In furthering this shift away from linearity, it is crucial to recognise the blurriness of the line between ‘here’ and ‘there’, as migrants interact with both the past and other places. In other words, the past, present, and both ‘here’ and ‘there’ are in continuous dialogue in migrants’ efforts to create belonging. How these dialogues unfold in the Norwegian outdoors, and the connection between outdoor memories, belonging, and *friluftsliv*, are unpacked in the following section.

### Contentions between normativities and belonging in the Norwegian outdoors

When honing in on the role of the outdoors in migrant belonging, Tolia-Kelly (2006) found that the outdoors

can be an active device in a process of identity reconstruction for migrants. In her study, she found that migrants actively drew on memories and objects from the past, such as plants, to create a sense of both belonging and ‘cultural nationalism’ that allow for alternative expressions of national identities. Furthermore, Rishbeth & Powell (2013) found that practising familiar activities in outdoor public spaces was an important factor in the creation of a sense of belonging, as it helped to prompt memories and to develop connections between the past and present.

Although the term *friluftsliv* is often translated as ‘outdoor life’ or ‘outdoor recreation’, the term encompasses much more than that. *Friluftsliv* is officially defined as ‘residency and physical activity in open air during leisure time with the aim of providing change of scenery and nature experiences’ (Meld. St. 18 (2015–2016), 10; my translation). Importantly, there is an integral link between *friluftsliv* and Norwegian culture and national identity, which is understood as a philosophy, a way of life, and a collective remembering of a national Norwegian narrative (Sörilin 1999; Ween & Abram 2012).

In this article, I engage with *friluftsliv* as two intertwined concepts. First, I conceptualise it as the practice of collective memory. Through *friluftsliv*, a narrative of the outdoors as a national symbol of romantic ideals of natural purity and rural idyl (Gurholt 2008; Ween & Abram 2012) is reproduced through the embodied performance of a collective past. Traditions and memories of an idyllic rural connection to the outdoors are preserved through *friluftsliv*, and are reproduced through practices and habits that re-enact a collective set of memories and traditions to which some people belong (Ween & Abram 2012). This collective memory is constructed and maintained at the state level (Flemsæter et al. 2015), and produced/reproduced through everyday outdoor habits and discourses (Ween & Abram 2012; Flemsæter et al. 2015; S. Anderson et al. 2023), thereby furthering national and dominant narratives of the Norwegian outdoors.

The second way in which I conceptualise *friluftsliv* is as something normative, meaning it is riddled with normativities that regulate behaviours, groups, and individuals into those who belong and those who do not (Ween & Abram 2012; Flemsæter et al. 2015). Both written and unwritten norms and expectations are upheld at a national level (Flemsæter et al. 2015), as well as through on-the-ground regulation of behaviours and activities directed towards newcomers (S. Anderson et al. 2023). Hence, ‘correct’ practices often require access to a collective memory and performance of a national identity that is passed down through generations (Odden 2008;

Ween & Abram 2012; Flemsæter et al. 2015), which refugees, as newcomers to *friluftsliv*, either have not obtained or not yet obtained (S. Anderson & Setten 2023). Using *friluftsliv* as a tool for social inclusion and civic integration therefore embraces the notion of *friluftsliv* as a performance of ‘Norwegianness’ (Ween & Abram 2012).

Thus, it is somewhat paradoxical that *friluftsliv* is ‘thought to enable people to meet as equals regardless of background’ (Ween & Abram 2012, 165). Accordingly, *friluftsliv* activities for migrants often focus on teaching migrants about ‘sameness’ (Gullestad 1990), which concerns how to engage in *friluftsliv* in the same way as Norwegians. Crucially, the migrants’ own outdoor experiences and histories are often left behind.

Participation in *friluftsliv* is presented in both Norwegian discourse in general and to refugees in the Directorate of Integration and Diversity’s Introduction Programme in particular as a ‘duty’ (Baklien et al. 2016), ‘good citizenship’ (S. Anderson et al. 2023), and ‘good for you’ (Gabrielsen & Fernee 2014). Whilst Norwegians are already assumed to be active *friluftsliv* citizens, migrants are expected to demonstrate and prove their ‘good citizenship’ by attending to the duty of being outdoors in ‘the Norwegian way’. This leads to a central question, as posed by Brown (2012, 816): ‘Who ought to work hardest to attune to the movements, senses, emotions and hybrid desires of others?’ Indeed, majority norms become ‘universal’ (Horst et al. 2020), whereby the normativities extend certain bodies into space and do not leave room for others (Ahmed 2006). Tolia-Kelly (2006) refers to this situation as ‘exclusionary landscapes’ and points out how such landscapes, and their representations of national culture (Murray 1997), are central to the exclusion of people who do not identify with them.

Furthermore, Crang & Tolia-Kelly (2010) find that interactions between national collective identities and cultures that differ from the dominating norm create both tensions and possibilities, and that migrants negotiate their feelings of belonging within these tensions. Drawing on Honneth’s concept of intersubjective recognition (Honneth 1995), Koefoed & Simonsen (2012) describe how ‘the quest for recognition’ is centred on gaining confirmation from other members of a community, where social status and belonging are achieved through being valued for skills and abilities within certain contexts. This draws our attention to how belonging and recognition become relational. To quote from Leung et al. (2021, 12), they ‘are relational processes that can take place in parallel, intersecting and evolving over time’. Returning to the simultaneity of belonging

across scale (Horst et al. 2020), I question how these belongings are practised in the Norwegian outdoors. This aspect of creating belonging has received little focus to date, and it is this research gap that I aim to address. However, I first describe the methodological choices relating to the knowledge creation from which I draw in this article.

## Materials and methods

The material I draw on in this article was generated through a combination of walking interviews with refugees and field observations in two rural municipalities in north-western Norway, conducted between February and October 2018. During that period, I carried out 21 in-depth one-to-one interviews. I also joined 10 organised outdoor activities that had been arranged for refugees by members of the local communities. The outings included hikes, cross-country ski trips, overnight visits to mountain cabins, and snowshoe trips. During these group activities, I conducted ad hoc unstructured interviews and made participant observations. Journal notes from the group activities and ad hoc interviews both facilitated recruitment to, and informed my loose interview guide for the 21 interviews, and together with the ad hoc interviews and observations, provided the primary data for my analysis.

The 21 refugees who participated in the in-depth interviews ranged in age from 17 to 55 years, comprised 9 women and 12 men, and came from Syria, Eritrea, Iran, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Palestine. They had lived in Norway for between six months and five years. Some had initially arrived as asylum seekers and had spent up to several years in asylum processing centres, with low access to inclusion activities within local communities, before being settled in their host municipality. Others had arrived directly from refugee camps as part of a quota programme. Their commonality was that their legal status was ‘newly arrived refugee’, which means that they had been granted refugee status, had been settled in one of the case municipalities within the past three years, had not yet been granted Norwegian citizenship, and were attending the Directorate of Integration and Diversity’s Introduction Program at the time when I did my field research.

Of the 21 in-depth one-to-one interviews, 17 comprised a combined walking and sit-down interview, each of which lasted for between one and two hours and was conducted in outdoor locations selected by the interviewees. The walking component was followed by the sit-down component in order to address any



topics that had been missed, as well as to revisit topics that had arisen during the walking component, thereby allowing for a more in-depth enquiry into the refugees' experiences and reflections (Brown & Durrheim 2009). The remaining four in-depth one-to-one interviews comprised a place-based sit-down component only, in order to capture the experiences of refugees who either did not wish or were unable to participate in a walking interview. A loose interview guide was used to inform the interview process. This addressed topics such as recreational activities in the past and present, previous experience of spending time outdoors, feelings and experiences relating to ideas of belonging and inclusion, involvement and interaction with and in the local community, and notions and feelings of home. As J. Anderson (2004) argues, walking and place-based interviews allow for open-ended conversations that create space for lived experiences in data collection. Crucially, the interview guide was developed to allow for our surroundings and movements to influence the interview process (J. Anderson 2004; Riley & Holton 2016). The sit-down components of the one-to-one interviews were recorded and transcribed, and extensive notes were taken in a field journal immediately after both the unrecorded walking and recorded sit-down interviews. The combination of audio recording and note taking based on participant observation allowed for descriptions of elements of the interview that were not captured audibly, such as body language and surroundings, thereby enabling a better understanding of the lived and sensed experiences of the refugees (Herbert 2000; Crang & Cook 2007). Furthermore, note taking enabled the capturing of the ad hoc interviews that took place during group activities, which were not possible to record due to environmental limitations. In these situations, notes were taken immediately following the interviews, to capture the citations and dialogues as I remembered them.

Participant observations were utilised during both the walking interviews and group activities, as an interview setting is 'a world apart from everyday life' (Evans 1988, 203), and what people do in the field is often not articulated, as "doings" are often unconscious or unarticulated practices' (Watson & Till 2010, 129). Moreover, field notes taken immediately following the activities or interactions offered a contextual understanding and allowed for insights into aspects of the refugees' interactions with the outdoors, which were not expressed during the more structured interview setting.

Walking interviews facilitate a shift in power relations (Brown & Durrheim 2009), which allowed

me and the refugees to engage in and with the world together. The knowledge produced between me and the participants was thus impacted by my positionality, which called for high levels of reflexivity (Lichterman 2017). I am a woman, a mother, a migrant to Norway, and I have experienced being new to *friluftsliv*, both as an activity and as a collective memory. I am, however, also a 'non-visible' migrant in that I am of European descent and speak fluent Norwegian in a local dialect. I am also now familiar with the norms that are embedded in the Norwegian outdoors. All of these elements (although not exhaustive) of who I am influenced both the ways in which the participants and I interacted, and the knowledge that was generated by the study.

All participants gave verbal consent to participate in the study and were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Interviews were conducted in Norwegian and translated into English by me. All participants spoke conversational Norwegian, although when language problems arose, a third person was invited to join the conversation to offer ad hoc translations when needed. Occasionally, there was consultation of translation apps on participants' mobile phones. All of the generated data were transcribed, coded, and analysed in a dialogical 'back-and-forth' between the data and theories of belonging and normativities. The research project was approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (Sikt), thereby ensuring data protection and the participants. The recordings have been stored in accordance with Sikt's guidelines for the purpose of being transcribed. In this article, all of the refugees who participated in the study are given fictitious names.

The landscapes in the municipalities where the fieldwork was conducted are typical of north-western Norway, where there are steep, snow-capped mountains, deep fjords, and valleys. Many of the group trips took place in terrain that was identified by the organisers as easy, although it was experienced by some participants as challenging. I discuss these landscapes in the following subsections.

### Memories, familiarity, and the performance of place norms

Three interconnected themes emerged from the collected material: *connecting the present with the past*, *fitting in*, and *contesting outdoor norms*. The themes show how memories and practices from the past are activated in efforts to create familiarity and belonging, and are used as a tool to fit in with established norms,

and as a method of forging alternative outdoor practices.

### *Connecting the present with the past*

The Norwegian outdoors triggered memories of home for many of the refugees, where connections to the past were made through familiar practices and landscapes. Cultivated outdoor landscapes featured several times in field observations and interviews. I walked with Perveen, an older woman from Afghanistan, who had lived in Norway for just under two years, during a group trip organised through a Norwegian language course. We stopped at the side of a field of potatoes and Perveen knelt at the edge of the field and took some leaves from the potato plant in her fingers, and while moving her hands through the soil she said:

Potato. Same as home. In my village back home, my family, we grew potatoes. Here, everything looks so different from home, but the potatoes are the same, they remind me of home.

In this case, the potato field offered a moment of familiarity for Perveen, in a setting where everything else was foreign. This kind of familiarity emerging from landscapes that were similar to home was directly linked to feelings of belonging for another refugee I interviewed – Rekan, a Kurdish man in his thirties who had been in Norway for approximately three years. He told of how he had first lived in another part of Norway during his time in asylum reception centres. Unlike most asylum seekers, who experience isolation from the local community during their time in asylum centres, Rekan had developed tight social networks

through his engagement with members of the local church. However, he felt a stronger sense of belonging in the mountainous fjord region of north-western Norway, due to the familiarity it invoked in him:

When you look at such mountains, there are good memories for me, from my home country. I'm not so concerned with my home country, so to speak. Here, there is much nicer nature. I grew up there. It's kind of nice feelings, I think. You see the sun, right, whether you're in your home country [...] or here. It's the same, and the moon and the stars, they are the same as at home. Here, we do not see so many stars, but the mountains they are the same.

What he described was also illustrated to me when he later sent a photograph that he had taken outside his village (Fig. 1) and compared it to where we were at the time of the interview (Fig. 2).

Both of the above examples demonstrate how the outdoors can trigger feelings of belonging through either fleeting moments or prolonged experiences of familiarity in Norway's outdoor landscapes. However, for others, the same outdoors can trigger memories of trauma related to embodied experiences of being in familiar outdoor spaces, thereby highlighting how experiences of familiarity do not always equate to feelings of belonging or to feelings of positivity. Some of the refugees talked about their experiences during conflicts in their homeland that had caused them to flee, such as having to sneak through fields and forests to avoid being discovered by militia, or of having to run from armed forces. Aylar, a young Syrian woman who had been in Norway for about 18 months, was living with her mother and sister. During a walking interview, she told me how her sister avoided outdoor recreational



**Fig. 1.** An area frequently visited by Rekan (pseudonym) outside his home village (Photo: Rekan, 2013)



**Fig. 2.** A photograph of a valley in Western Norway that reminded Rekan (pseudonym) of the area around his home village (Photo: Thomas Sagvik, 2023, reproduced with permission of Visit Nordfjord)

activities due to the physical exertion needed and how her sister experienced the exertion as a trigger for memories of previous trauma:

Her journey to Norway involved travelling by boat. She took a boat from Egypt to Italy. The crossing was dangerous, and they [fellow boat passengers] almost died there, so now she gets very scared very easily. It's OK for her to do small amounts of walking, but not hard exercise that gets her heart rate up. That is too difficult for her because she was so scared, and because of that she doesn't like to walk around in the mountains or the forest. [...] She gets scared her heart will stop [...] It's the same as when she was on the boat.

Fatima, another young Syrian woman who had come to Norway with her husband two years previously, revealed how trauma during flight was triggered by activities in the Norwegian outdoors, causing her to isolate herself from others and avoid such activities:

I spent one month on foot walking through the forests in Hungary and Bulgaria when I came from Turkey. I had snow up to here [indicating to her hips], and we had to hide during the day so we wouldn't be caught. We walked at night to make it to the border. One time, I was chased by a wild boar! For a long time after coming to Norway, I avoided the forest because of that.

For Fatima, as well as for Aylar's sister, familiarity created negative associations, and led to avoidance and isolation, rather than belonging. This highlights how refugees have had outdoor experiences that challenge the Norwegian understanding of *friluftsliv* as being something that is therapeutic (Gabrielsen & Fernee 2014) and 'good for you' (Baklien et al. 2016).

### Fitting in

The refugees conveyed how they deliberated over and adapted their behaviour and expectations to fit with the norms and expectations embedded in the Norwegian outdoors in their efforts to create a sense of belonging. By drawing on memories from home, they made active choices to leave the familiar behind and to find new practices within the established norms of *friluftsliv*.

Kaled, a Syrian man in his early twenties who had been in Norway for three years, had been an active participant in most organised outdoor activities offered both through the asylum centre where he had lived before settlement and through the local municipality where he now lived, including through other volunteer organisations there. When asked whether there were any differences in how people behaved in the Norwegian outdoors and how people behaved in the outdoors in Syria, he reflected on the sociability that comes about in *friluftsliv*, and drew comparisons with the limited sociability in urban settings in Norway:

Kaled: I learned that when you're out hiking, you greet each other when you pass someone.

Researcher: What do you think about that?

Kaled: I think it's great, but they only do it out hiking! In Syria we do it all the time, we see people and we say 'Hi' and stuff. That's so great, but they don't do that here in Norway, only in the outdoors. I've been here for almost three years now, and I have ended up like that too [not saying 'Hi' to Norwegians in town]. So, when I go out and someone says 'Hi', I get a bit like 'Who the hell



is that? Why is he talking to me?', and that's how Norwegians are, but I'm like that too now.

Kaled's reflection draws attention to the similarities and differences in norms relating to sociability in Syria and in Norway. Kaled had maintained his level of sociability from home when in the Norwegian outdoors, and had consciously adjusted his behaviour in urban settings to fit in, both in the outdoors and in the town centre. Like Kaled, Rekan was asked to reflect on which practices were similar or different. Earlier in the interview, he had described the practice of building a campfire and 'boiling tea' during trips through the countryside. He spoke of the campfire as being a central aspect of sociability in Kurdistan, as a gathering spot for both travellers and hikers. It was not uncommon for strangers to stop at the fires that he had built, and to use the flames to 'boil' their own tea. It was a space where conversation with strangers came easily. When asked about outdoor practices at home and in Norway, he returned to talking about the practice of 'boiling tea' on the campfire:

I can't just make tea with Norwegians all the time. That would be weird for them. If I were to go for a drive or a walk with a Norwegian and suddenly just stop at the side of the road and built a fire to boil up some tea, that would be strange, but that's [the practice] what I am used to, and I love it. It's just the best experience.

Researcher: Have you tried [making tea on a campfire together with Norwegians]?

Rekan: No, I haven't, but I do take a Thermos with me!

Rekan had not abandoned his practice of drinking tea together with others in the outdoors. Rather, he had adapted practices from home to fit better with the norms and regulations (both written and unwritten<sup>1</sup>) of being in the Norwegian outdoors. Jamal, a Syrian man in his early twenties, who had been in Norway for 18 months, shared his thoughts about littering in the outdoors. He said that he had learned the rules about littering in Norway:

You see rubbish almost everywhere [in Syria], so it's not necessary to take your rubbish with you. However, here, when you see that there is nearly no rubbish lying around in nature, it's like, 'No, I won't leave my rubbish lying around here because it is really nice here'.

Jamal recognised how littering was accepted in one place, but not in another, and so he followed suit in

his behaviour by not littering in the Norwegian outdoors. His reflection testifies to the role of place in the act of littering, namely that 'it is acceptable there, but not here', because of what is accepted behaviour in each place. In other words, Jamal adapted his outdoor behaviours from home to fit in with outdoor life in Norway.

The empirical examples illustrate both abandonment and adaptation of outdoor practices from the refugees' homes in order to better 'fit in' in Norway, as the refugees demonstrated an awareness of their status as outsiders or newcomers to the Norwegian outdoors, which served as a barrier to belonging (S. Anderson & Setten 2023). However, as I show in the next section, holding onto practices from home can also generate feelings of belonging.

### Contesting outdoor norms

During one of the group hikes organised by the Norwegian language course teachers, there was an altercation between one of the refugees, Mohammed, and the teachers, who were also serving as guides during the hike. Mohammed was in his late fifties and had arrived in Norway from Syria only six months earlier. He had learned very little Norwegian, and had a limited grasp of English, so communication between him and the teachers was difficult. I noted the event in my research journal based on field observations on 5 September 2018:

Just as we arrived back at the car park, there were about five or six quite large cows wandering around the area, quite close to the path we were on, and also surrounding the cars. There had recently been a fair amount of national media attention on attacks on hikers by aggressive cows, and this came up as a topic of conversation among the teachers and trip organisers. Two of the teachers instructed the refugees to keep a safe distance from the cows and not to approach them, and instead to stand still until they had passed. The teachers seemed a little bit nervous, and the cows became more assertive and aggressive. Mohammed, who had been a cow farmer back home in Syria, stepped forwards and approached the largest of the cows. One of the teachers yelled out to him to move away, but he continued to guide the cows up a bank, away from the car park. The teachers all stood silently, and quietly expressed their surprise that Mohammed, who had not yet to be able to communicate in any depth with the teachers due to his lack of Norwegian language skills, had helped them, and not the other way around.

The observed situation (see Fig. 3) provided Mohammed with an opportunity to show the skills he

<sup>1</sup>Bonfire use is regulated by law to certain times of the year and in certain locations to reduce the risk of wildfires (Justis- og beredningsdepartementet 2015).



**Fig. 3.** Mohammed (pseudonym) moving a cow away from people during group activity (Photo: S. Anderson, 2018)

had acquired with cattle from home in a setting that he had not yet mastered in the few months since his arrival, despite having been given clear instructions to keep his distance. In this respect, Mohammed directly challenged the hierarchy of what Singleton (2021) calls the ‘moral order’, in which the teachers were assumed to have more knowledge and experience. However, at the same time, this granted Mohammed recognition and status for having skills that were both useful and valued.

Another method for creating belonging through the adoption of familiar practices in new contexts was demonstrated during a wintertime trip to a cabin in the mountains for a group of young male refugees, organised by student *friluftsliv* guides from a local university college. The cabin was located about one hour’s travel time from the centre of the town where the young men were staying. It was a traditional Norwegian mountain cabin, with no electricity or running water, and only basic kitchen facilities. Meal planning had been delegated to the group of refugees, who had decided on lamb kebabs for dinner. Dinner was made by three of the men, all of whom had previously worked as chefs in Syria, and later in Russia during the process of fleeing. The *friluftsliv* students built a typical campfire area, with benches dug into the snow around the campfire, but the men had brought with them from their home country a barbecue and coal (Fig. 4), which they set up next to the campfire and used the coal from the campfire to heat their own coal.

The men gathered around the barbecue instead of on the benches, and only paid attention to the campfire when finding coal for their own barbecue. At one point, all of the men broke out into song, an old popular Arabic pop song from back home. I noted in the field journal that they all seemed oblivious to their physical surroundings at that time. When asked to reflect on the singing, Ahmed, one of the men who had been making the food, gave the following answer:

We used to do this all the time in Syria! It’s the normal way there. We still do it here, just not in the rain [laughing]. We often come together, every few weeks, in our backyards in [...]. We make food, tell stories, and sing songs from home, just like now. It’s how we like to do things.

Yet another example of relocating a practice from home and, by implication, contesting outdoor norms, was revealed during a field trip with Fikray, who had lived for many years in Egypt before coming to Norway as a refugee three years earlier. When I asked him to take me on an outdoor trip of his choice, we drove in his car to a small town in a neighbouring municipality, where large cruise ships often docked as a base for sightseeing in the fjords. In the car, he told me that when he lived in Egypt one of his favourite activities was to sit with his friends by the Nile and fish, while watching boats sail past. They never caught anything; they would just sit by the river and talk and joke. Fikray and I sat near



**Fig. 4.** Syrian men outside a cabin, making dinner on the barbecue they had brought from their home country (identifying factors have been edited out) (Photo: S. Anderson, 2018)

the port and talked for c.30 minutes before returning to the car. During the drive home, Fikray reflected on the similarities between the times he sat by the Nile with his friends and our visit to the port:

We just do the same as here. [We] sit and watch the boats, and talk and joke, like what me and you just did.

This example shows a conscious move by Fikray to bring forth practices from his past, which demonstrates how confidence in the practice itself can be instilled, even though the space in which the practice occurs is new and unfamiliar. The move was Fikray's way of being in and enjoying the outdoors. It reflected the norms of a community from his past, and differed greatly from traditional *friluftsliv* in Norway, where physical movement and experiencing nature are key aspects according to the official definition (Meld. St. 18 (2015–2016)).

Contested outdoor norms can also be seen in the following example from a hike to Galdhøpiggen, Norway's highest peak, which was organised as part of the Red Cross integration initiative 'Til Topps', which involves refugees and local team leaders from across Norway. The hike to Galdhøpiggen required a crossing a glacier, and it was recommended that the crossing should be performed with a guide and a rope team. During the trip, the refugees and team leaders from their own host communities were allocated a hiking guide, who

was to guide the groups from the starting point across the glacier in roped teams, and then up to the mountain peak. During the crossing, I became aware of a discussion between some of the refugees, the group leader, and the guide. Some of the refugees had not wanted to keep themselves attached to their rope team as they crossed the glacier. I noted the following in my research journal, based on participant observations on 30 June 2018:

The young men seemed annoyed that they had to stay in the rope team, and kept detaching themselves. They didn't break away from the group at this stage, but just kept walking next to the rope, unattached. The guide noticed this on one occasion, and after some back and forth [verbal exchanges], he convinced them to reattach their harnesses. On other occasions, the guide didn't seem to notice – or he did, but just ignored it.

Later, I conducted a one-on-one walking interview with Haani, who was one of the young men who had detached himself, and I asked him about the incident. Haani said that in Syria he was used to having much greater freedom to decide for himself than in Norway, and that in general he did not like others making rules for him. With regard to the incident with the rope team, he gave the following explanation:

When someone says we have to do something, we just don't want to do it! We don't see these kinds of rules



as necessary. We don't like them and so we refused to follow them, but we were forced to by the guide. Yet why should we have to use the rope? I mean, we were told that maybe there were holes and cracks in the glacier that we could fall into, [and] that they could be very deep, but we could see in the snow where all the others had walked, and we could just follow the path there, and we saw that there were no cracks! We saw others crossing on their own, not roped up, so we took ours off too, but when the guide saw that, they said we had to put the harness back on. However, when they turned around again, we'd just took it off.

Haani described the frustration he experienced because he was required to be roped to other team members, despite not seeing any clear reason to do so. This, as well as observing other private groups who were crossing the glacier on their own without using ropes, caused Haani and his friends to react against the idea of the rope team as a safety precaution. Haani's observation that the requirement to cross the glacier in a rope team applied to all participants in 'Til Topps' but not to all hikers crossing the glacier caused him respond in a negative way. This finding is consistent with what Singleton refers to as the hierarchical moral ordering of refugees that requires them to follow instructions (Singleton 2021). It also illustrates the higher moral standard of 'good citizenship' that refugees are expected to comply with in the outdoors (S. Anderson et al. 2023). When this difference of opinion is seen in connection with Haani's earlier comments regarding his discontent with being controlled more in Norway than in Syria, it can be seen that Haani had brought with him the freedoms he was used to at home and why he expressed frustration regarding the limited permission to exercise independence and the freedom to decide for himself. His negative response created tension, familiarity, and confidence, which contributed to his feeling of belonging in the Norwegian outdoors, since he was able to exercise agency and make independent decisions.

### Refugees' belonging in the Norwegian outdoors

I used the empirical material to explore how the outdoors can trigger both familiarity and novelty for relatively newly arrived refugees, and how the past is actively engaged in the creation of belonging. To make sense of and experience belonging in new outdoor environments, some refugees actively establish a sense of familiarity in their new surroundings, which, according to Rishbeth & Finney (2006, 294), 'stimulate links between home and here'. This suggests that engaging

the past helps them to 'rebuild and develop familiarity when they encounter people and places that are different from their own' (Wang & Collins 2016, 91). In the following discussion I break down the role of the outdoors in the refugees' efforts to create belonging into two interconnected aspects: the outdoors as a trigger for memories, and normativities regarding expectations of 'how to be' in the outdoors.

### Outdoor memories

The outdoor landscape appears to be more symbolic than tangible. Rather than being identical to something from the refugees' pasts, elements of the Norwegian outdoors trigger memories in 'an experienced emotional connectivity' (Rishbeth & Powell 2013, 174) that acts to connect the refugees to the Norwegian landscape of the present. Rishbeth & Powell (2013, 174) state, 'by talking about the tangible, we glimpse something of the intangible: values resonances, aspirations'. These symbolic similarities trigger memories of a place that can be recalled in its original form, and become an acknowledgement of typical patterns representing social, cultural, and emotional elements of the past (Rishbeth & Powell 2013). The refugees were observed appreciating and commenting on the familiar plants and vistas that triggered nostalgia, reminding them of times past and homes elsewhere. Discovering and hanging onto elements of familiarity from elsewhere suggests that these familiar elements in the Norwegian landscape offer glimpses of normalcy in the lives of refugees, which are otherwise impacted by substantial upheaval. Familiar details in the outdoors that connect the past to the present engage the simultaneity of community belonging (Horst et al. 2020), thereby providing situations where refugees can, to quote Rishbeth & Finney (2006, 294), 'build confidence in their ability to be accepted and contribute' to their host society. This claim is consistent with Tolia-Kelly's findings that the outdoors and the smells, sights, sounds, textures, and sensations that constitute human experience contribute to a sense of symbolic identification and are important in creating belonging (Tolia-Kelly 2006). In identifying and establishing such symbolic reminders of the past, refugees find familiarity in new outdoor spaces, which seems to help them conceptualise their position in their new society. This can ease processes of fitting in and facilitate the transfer of practices from the past. Therefore, using both memories and belonging from elsewhere to create belonging in a new host community underlines the notion that belonging is a constant creation and recreation of memories and practices collected through refugees' everyday lives.



### When memories from elsewhere meet normativities from here

Normativities within the Norwegian outdoors create a complicated coming together of emotions, places, and memories, as well as other members of the community (Flemsæter et al. 2015; S. Anderson & Setten 2023). This aspect of the outdoors has a significant impact on refugees' efforts to create belonging by mobilising lived experiences. My findings revealed that the refugees were both retaining practices from their past and creating new practices as a way of practising belonging. At times, this involved actively reproducing the social norms that are embedded in the Norwegian outdoors. Indeed, gaining access to *friluftsliv* as a collective national identity can require an active creation of such memories when they are not passed down through the refugees' own generations. This finding is in line with Mathisen & Cele's finding that belonging is created through the 'performativity of place norms' (Mathisen & Cele 2020, 2; for other examples of how place norms are performed, see Savage et al. 2005). Nelson & Hiemstra (2008, 337) argue that the boundaries between those who belong and those who do not lie along the lines of mutual recognition: 'Spatial dynamics [can either] produce invisibility or provide opportunities for mutual recognition and respect.'

However, importantly, my findings also illustrate how the studied refugees sometimes contested pressures to perform 'Norwegianness', thereby potentially causing tension and conflict. For refugees, challenging place norms could help them to incorporate the past into the present. As Horst et al. (2020, 80) argue, adherence to place-norms 'does not acknowledge that different identity markers always influence how people participate in society and in which arenas or to which groups within the larger society they aim to contribute'. In the case of refugees in Norway, this form of contesting can be understood as refugees practising belonging to communities elsewhere, with their own sets of norms that differ from the norms within *friluftsliv*. This, in turn, can allow refugees to create confidence through familiar practice. Thus, community norms are reproduced, and belonging is both practised and sensed, although on a transnational level rather than through the performance of Norwegian national identity. In other words, refugees in Norway are practising 'good citizenship' and practising belonging on their own terms. Interestingly, this contesting of outdoor norms can also lead to the gaining of recognition and respect for valued skills, as demonstrated when Mohammed approached

the cattle in the car park. He challenged the norms and expectations of the situation, which was to leave the cows alone, and in so doing he demonstrated his skill set, thereby gaining recognition and status.

It is also important to note that past outdoor practices and past outdoor traumas can influence the ways in which refugees create/recreate new outdoor practices. They express their own 'alternative cultures of enfranchisement' (Tolia-Kelly 2006, 343), as they carve out their own spaces for outdoor practice, asserting differences and contesting pressures to assimilate the norms and expectations embedded in *friluftsliv*. Part of this process can include contesting the expectation of 'good citizenship' through either participation in outdoor recreational activities or engagement with certain types of outdoor spaces that trigger memories of past traumas. Where outdoor spaces are experienced by refugees as familiar due to a connection to traumatic events, familiarity works against, rather than towards, their sense of belonging. Together with other researchers, I have found that this aspect of refugees' outdoor experiences is not considered in initiatives designed to create inclusion and increase well-being through outdoor activities (S. Anderson et al. 2023), such as that of *friluftsliv*, which is normatively understood as positive in the Norwegian national collective memory (Baklien et al. 2016).

Actively contesting the norms relating to participation in *friluftsliv* creates a space for refugees to exercise confidence, independence, and empowerment, based on their own needs and on their own terms, which is 'crucial in understanding the cultures of resistance, or the creation of alternative cultures of enfranchisement' (Tolia-Kelly 2006, 343). In common with Tolia-Kelly, it can be seen that migrants' desire to establish alternative outdoor identities in their everyday lives in their host communities are formed and communicated through their interactions with the outdoors. These interactions reflect what Tolia-Kelly (2006, 345) calls 'alternative discourses of national and cultural identity', as a challenge to established norms and expectations, and as an establishment of the refugees' own alternative cultural identity.

### Conclusions

In this article, I have explored the ways in which refugees engage with the past to create belonging in the Norwegian outdoors. In this respect, *friluftsliv* presents opportunities to explore, develop, and engage with elements of familiarity, which allowed the studied refugees to forge links between their homes and their new

communities. Links were forged through the creative activation of memories to create familiarity and belonging in the outdoors, which offers symbolic similarities with times past. However, this process takes place against a backdrop of a collective memory that is based on narratives relating to national identity and have informed normativities and expectations of who belongs in the Norwegian outdoors. This finding allows us to see the roles played by these normativities in refugees' creation of belonging by engaging memories and practices from home in a space that is formed by, and based on, a national collective memory that newcomers do not have.

I have presented three key ways in which refugees activate memories and practices in their efforts to create belonging. First, memories create familiarity as a symbolic reminder of times past. I have explored how the past can either bring with it a creative reinvention of the familiar or can trigger memories of traumas from earlier outdoor experiences. Either way, memories are actively incorporated in the creation of belonging and familiarity in new outdoor spaces. Second, memories are actively brought forth, reflected upon, and either utilised or left out in processes where refugees navigate the normativities embedded in the Norwegian outdoors. I have shown how some of the studied refugees reflected on previous outdoor practices and actively distance themselves from them, recognising the role played by the reproduction of place norms in belonging. Third, place-norms are being contested by some refugees to create alternative outdoor practices within a setting that has otherwise left little space for alternative cultural expression and identity. Importantly, I argue that it is also in the challenging of *friluftsliv* normativities that refugees practise belonging. In line with Horst et al. (2020), who argue that belonging is not limited to nation state-bound local communities, I find that refugees practise belonging by reproducing norms that are bound to other communities to which they also belong.

Implicitly, my findings draw attention to the importance of incorporating experiences from the past in outdoor initiatives that target refugees, including alternative outdoor norms and practices. The findings presented in this article call for further research on how alternative understandings of the outdoors among mobile populations impact the well-being and mental health aspects of outdoor participation. This could nuance the understanding that the outdoors is inherently positive. Furthermore, the role played by previous traumatic experiences in environmental settings in refugees' efforts to create a sense of belonging should

be given more attention in research. Such research could offer insights that would better equip inclusion initiatives and state-run programmes to understand how trauma can be triggered in spaces that are normatively understood as 'good' and offer a better foundation for an understanding of belonging as a personal experience rather than adherence to a set of established norms. The findings of this study invite further research on *intentional* resistance of place norms as a way of creating belonging. This would help us to gain a better understanding of how agency and personal expression operate in refugees' efforts to create belonging in their host societies. Nevertheless, the findings I present in this article suggest that belonging can be facilitated by creating and reserving space for alternative outdoor practices. These findings therefore lead me to call for a challenge to the normativities concerning how *friluftsliv* 'ought' to be' practised. This could allow for refugees and other newcomers to Norway in general, and to *friluftsliv* in particular, to create familiarity with and engagement in the Norwegian outdoors on their own terms.

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