



## Narrating Paradox Affects: Unaccompanied Minor Asylum-Seekers in Austria

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### Abstract

Asylum-seeking unaccompanied children and youngsters are situated at the crossroads between exclusionary and repressive asylum policies, on the one hand, and relatively inclusive and caring child welfare policies, on the other. This is the ‘asylum-child welfare paradox’ (Dursun and Sauer 2021). In this article, we explore the role of affect, feelings, and emotions in how unaccompanied minors respond to and process but also co-construct and resist this structural paradox through their ‘affective narratives’ (Bargetz and Eggers 2022). Based on qualitative interviews conducted with (former) unaccompanied minors in Austria in 2015, we observe that minors mobilize a set of feelings of fear, disappointment, frustration, and uncertainty due to experiences of rejection or loss of control; but unaccompanied minors also express feelings of confidence, joy, hope, and solidarity vis-à-vis their new environment and their future. Furthermore, the highly affective issues of belonging and non-belonging to their host country, of proximity and distance to other human beings hold an important place in their narratives as well as the ordering of time. We conclude that, rather than merely reacting to paradoxes that structure their social positions, minors actively shape such paradoxes and render them tangible and workable by means of narrating contradictory feelings and emotions and by mobilizing affectivity.

*Keywords:* unaccompanied minors, Austria, narrative, affect

## Zusammenfassung

Unbegleitete geflüchtete Kinder und Jugendliche befinden sich im Spannungsfeld zwischen einer ausgrenzenden und repressiven Asylpolitik einerseits und einer relativ integrativen und fürsorglichen Sozialpolitik andererseits – dem ‚Asyl-Kinderfürsorge-Paradoxon‘ (Dursun and Sauer 2021). In diesem Artikel untersuchen wir die Rolle von Affekt, Gefühlen und Emotionen bei der Art und Weise, wie unbegleitete Minderjährige in ihren ‚affektiven Narrativen‘ (Bargetz und Eggers 2022) auf dieses strukturelle Paradoxon antworten und es verarbeiten, es aber auch konstruieren und sich ihm widersetzen. Unsere qualitativen Interviews, die wir 2015 mit (ehemaligen) unbegleiteten Minderjährigen in Österreich führten, zeigen, dass unbegleitete geflüchtete Minderjährige Gefühle der Angst, Enttäuschung, Frustration und Unsicherheit aufgrund von Erfahrungen der Ablehnung oder des Kontrollverlusts mobilisieren. Unbegleitete Minderjährige drücken darüber hinaus Gefühle der Zuversicht, Freude, Hoffnung und Solidarität aus. Zudem nehmen die hochgradig affektiven Themen Zugehörigkeit und Nicht-Zugehörigkeit zum Aufnahmeland sowie Nähe und Distanz zu anderen Menschen einen wichtigen Platz in ihren Erzählungen ein, ebenso wie die Ordnung der Zeit. Wir schließen aus unserer Studie, dass die Minderjährigen auf die strukturellen Paradoxien, die ihre soziale Position prägen, nicht nur reagieren, sondern dass sie diese Paradoxien aktiv mitgestalten und sie durch das Erzählen widersprüchlicher Gefühle und Emotionen und durch die Mobilisierung von Affektivität greifbar und handhabbar machen.

*Schlüsselwörter:* unbegleitete Minderjährige, Österreich, Erzählung, Affekt

## Introduction: the research objective

There is an abundance of narratives surrounding refugees and asylum in Europe and Austria. This article is interested in narratives by refugees in Austria and the affects associated with them. Right-wing discourses revolve around third-country nationals, from Muslim-majority countries in particular, who allegedly burden the national welfare systems and threaten ‘European’ or ‘Austrian values’ such as gender equality.<sup>1</sup> Right-wing political actors, now joined by conservatives and even social democrats, routinely suspect refugees of fraud, labelling them ‘bogus asylum seekers’ or ‘economic refugees’ who should be denied asylum status.<sup>2</sup> Discourses employed by liberal actors – including international organizations, politicians, and activists – recognize asylum and a human right to flee war and persecution. These groups further

emphasize European states' responsibility in effectively fighting the root causes of flight. The United Nations and European Union have traditionally focused on factors (e.g., corruption, dictatorial regimes, poverty) considered internal or endogenous to the countries of origin, but do so without tackling global inequalities and the role European colonialism has played in their formation.<sup>3</sup> A comparably marginal discourse on the left end of the political spectrum centres on global inequality and (neo-)colonial structures of exploitation in explaining migration movements from the Global South. This position is taken by capitalism-critical politicians, activists, and scholars<sup>4</sup> who draw our attention to exploitation in the Global South – a process that ensures a high living standard and wealth consolidation in the Global North. Currently, a mix of right-wing and (neo-)liberal discourses dominate public narratives about refugees and asylum in Austria.

This article takes an interest in counter-narratives told by refugees themselves rather than by state actors, politicians, NGOs, and activists. We maintain that these counter-narratives hold important analytical and political potential both as sources of critical knowledge produced by refugees and as interventions vis-à-vis dominant narratives upheld by hegemonic social groups. We focus on a specific group among the refugee population, asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors, who hold a uniquely precarious social location due to their age, and whose claims to protection are questioned within common 'anchor children' (*Ankerkinder*) discourse. Such discourses accuse families of using their children as a gateway to Europe, therefore denying that minors who flee can and do have agency.<sup>5</sup> Based on qualitative interviews conducted with unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Austria, we study their accounts of themselves, their experiences, and prospects; and, in doing so, we take an affect-theoretical perspective that pays close attention to the role emotions and feelings play in the constitution of these narratives. Building on our previous work, we take as a starting point the 'asylum-child welfare paradox',<sup>6</sup> describing unaccompanied minors' situatedness in two significantly different national policy regimes in Austria: the repressive asylum regime which grants migrants only limited social rights; and the more caring and inclusive child welfare regime based on international regulations and (to some extent) takes care of the best interest of the child. Yet, this paradox turns unaccompanied refugee minors into second-class children, as their migration status often undermines the efforts to care for their needs.<sup>7</sup> We ask which affects are employed by unaccompanied minors while narrating their experiences in the context of asylum, and how they enable these subjects to process and potentially resist this institutional and structural paradox. We observe that minors mobilize a set of similarly paradoxical feelings of fear, disappointment, frustration, and uncertainty as

well as feelings of joy, hope, and solidarity when telling their stories. Furthermore, the affectively-charged issues of belonging and non-belonging to the host country, of proximity and distance to other human beings, hold an important place in their narratives. We thus conclude that mobilizing affectivity is key to narrating and making tangible, as well as workable, the asylum-child welfare paradox.

In the following, we first elaborate on the Austrian asylum-child welfare paradox to outline the political and institutional context of our study. We then present the state of research with a focus on the growing field of study, exploring the meaning of affects and emotions in the context of migration and asylum. Next, we elaborate on the theoretical considerations which guide our study and reflect on the method we used to gather and interpret our data. The subsequent section discusses our findings, and the article concludes with some remarks on the added value of affect theory and life narrative.

### **Unaccompanied minors in between asylum and child-welfare regimes: an Austrian institutional paradox**

Existing EU legislation on asylum recognizes and includes provisions on unaccompanied minors as a vulnerable group with age-specific needs.<sup>8</sup> ‘Best interests of the child’, first formulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), is incorporated into the Common European Asylum System<sup>9</sup> as a guiding principle in asylum procedures. These are especially salient in connection with ‘family reunification possibilities, the wellbeing and social development of the minor, safety and security considerations, in particular in cases of human trafficking, and the views of the minor in accordance with his or her age and maturity.’<sup>10</sup> Despite the comprehensive supranational legal framework in place, implementing these directives and regulations has to confront certain challenges, as it remains the task of individual Member States to implement them. To make matters even more complex, the overall political atmosphere has been changing since 2015, culminating in increasingly restrictive and questionable practices in the EU vis-à-vis unaccompanied minors. Such practices include pushbacks at borders, age assessment procedures, and legal obstacles which additionally complicate family reunification.<sup>11</sup> We also notice strengthened partnerships with third countries. One such partnership concerns the agreement reached between the EU and Turkey, officially called the EU-Turkey Statement. This was a statement that crystallized in 2016, according to which Turkey shall receive financial disbursement, visa liberalization for Turkish citizens, and a revitalization of Turkey’s accession process to the EU in return for stopping the flow

of refugees via Turkey to Europe.<sup>12</sup> Experts have challenged the EU's increasing recourse to non-binding return instruments for third-country nationals, as they weaken the capacity for the European Council to establish international commitments and the Parliament's capacity to oversee the formulation of such instruments,<sup>13</sup> casting serious doubt on their democratic legitimacy. One such instrument concerns the Joint Way Forward (2016), concluded between the EU and Afghanistan, to increase returns to Afghanistan. These practices become all the more confounding when considered against the background of the ongoing securitization of migration and asylum, which 'occurs when an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object – i.e., the state, incorporating government, territory and society.'<sup>14</sup>

Austria has not been an exception in this regard. After a short welcoming period in the midst of the so-called 'refugee crisis' in 2015, Austria's approach to asylum policy shifted from 'moral' to 'protectionist'. That is, the initial efforts to allocate available resources to the current crisis were replaced by a restrictive course which prioritized limiting the number of refugees entering Austria.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, a comprehensive legal framework which recognizes asylum seekers' rights and includes special provisions for unaccompanied minors remains in place in Austria. The Basic Welfare Support Agreement (*Grundversorgungsvereinbarung*), which was convened between the federal government (*Bund*) and the nine provinces (*Länder*) in 2004, currently offers the legal basis for reception conditions for and responsibilities towards persons seeking asylum in Austria.<sup>16</sup> The goal of the agreement is to comply with Council Directive 2003/9/EC on minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers and to ensure power- and cost-sharing between *Bund* and *Länder*.<sup>17</sup> The agreement covers immigrants in need of protection (asylum-seekers, asylum holders, and displaced persons who, for legal or factual reasons, cannot be removed) and furthermore entails special provisions for unaccompanied minors (see especially Article 7). Although the introduction of such provisions has significantly improved the reception standards for unaccompanied minors, it is widely reported that they are far from enjoying the same resources as their Austrian counterparts with respect to welfare services.<sup>18</sup> Experts have widely criticized the fact that the daily allowance afforded to unaccompanied minors under the Basic Welfare Support is considerably lower (max. 95 Euros) than that which is offered to Austrian children in the facilities of the Youth and Welfare Services (starting from 120 Euros).<sup>19</sup> Thus, although unaccompanied minors do enjoy additional care and protection compared to adults, they are denied the same resources as Austrian children. We consider this discrepancy an outcome of the asylum-child welfare paradox in Austria, which results in repressive measures towards unaccompanied minor refugees.

In this article, we consider the micro level of counter-narratives told by unaccompanied minors as it rests against the backdrop of this institutional paradox. By doing so, we intend to capture the affective character of migration processes, where emotions play a major role in discourses, practices, and embodied experiences.<sup>20</sup> We contend that counter-narratives which entail minors' multifaceted experiences in the context of flight and asylum are constructed and conveyed through emotions and feelings. At the same time, we attribute key significance to such counter-narratives in analytical-empirical terms, as they reveal asymmetrical power relations on which the Austrian and the broader European asylum regimes are built. In turn, account for the ways in which these experiences are narrated through affectivity. We also re-assess these narratives in political terms, since they entail notions and practices of belonging, solidarity, and mutual care, challenging the institutional neglect and carelessness vis-à-vis unaccompanied minors.

### State of research

Despite the obvious omnipresence of affect and emotions felt throughout the process of migration, asylum-seeking, and integration – such as hope, fear or anxiety on the part of migrants; and empathy, resentment or anger on the part of the receiving societies – there is little social science research on the affective dimensions that accompany and frame the experience of relocation. In 2015 Paolo Boccagni and Loretta Baldassar perceived 'migrant life experiences and the migration process' as an 'under-examined field for social research on emotion'.<sup>21</sup> Since then, a number of studies have explored emotional experiences in the context of migration, found for instance in Asa Wettergren's account of emotional developments of 'unwanted' migrants.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, a series of special journal issues on transmigration, translocal subjectivities, and mobility point to the growing interest in affects and emotions in migration studies.<sup>23</sup> With regard to the Austrian context, we are aware of one detailed study on emotional experiences of immigrants with a focus, not surprisingly, on past labour migration from Turkey and former Yugoslavia.<sup>24</sup> In another study, Sieglinde Rosenberger and Miriam Haselbacher explore resentment against migrants and find that direct interactions tend to eliminate hostile feelings towards migrants.<sup>25</sup>

The field of research on unaccompanied minor migrants has been growing over the past few years, mainly focussing on the well-being of children.<sup>26</sup> A number of studies tackling the psychological well-being of (unaccompanied) migrant minors take emotions into account.<sup>27</sup> However, emotions are often referred to only marginally and are under-theorized.<sup>28</sup> In her study on asylum-seeking unaccompanied children in the

UK, Statham stresses the importance of family reunification for granting a sense of ‘security and belonging’ for migrant children and argue that safety ‘is about feeling accepted.’<sup>29</sup> Herz and Lalander challenge the concept of ‘unaccompanied minors’ and emphasize that they are not, *per se*, alone but become lonely in emotionally complex and challenging situations.<sup>30</sup> Neag and Supa base their work on a sophisticated notion of ‘emotional practice’;<sup>31</sup> they analyse ‘emotional practices of unaccompanied refugee youth on social media’ and conclude that social media ‘establish new social connections’ and ‘support structures’, express ‘emotional losses’, but also ‘emotional gains’ and thus help to negotiate ‘hope and ambition’.<sup>32</sup> Against the background of this rich literature, our article focusses on the paradox narratives of migrant children and the affectivity of and within these narratives.

### **Theoretical considerations: narrating structural paradoxes through affect and emotions**

We employ an affective perspective to the study of migration and integration processes. This perspective sheds light on what Ruth Simsa calls ‘affective integration’ in her discussion of relationship-building between Austrian volunteers, the local population, and migrants.<sup>33</sup> To do so, we draw on a wider theoretical framework, considering the role and meaning of emotions and affect in migration and integration. These theoretical approaches specify the political implications of emotional, affective, and embodied experiences of migration and integration, offering helpful insights for our investigation. We find one such approach in Nira Yuval-Davis’s concepts of ‘belonging’ and ‘politics of belonging’.<sup>34</sup> According to Yuval-Davis, social and political belonging are constructed, firstly, along people’s social locations (e.g., gender, race, class, other social categories, and their various intersections); secondly, along people’s identification with and emotional attachments to various groups; and thirdly, along ethical and political value systems.<sup>35</sup> A politics of belonging then ‘involves the maintenance and reproduction of the boundaries of the community of belonging by the hegemonic political powers [...], but also their contestation, challenge and resistance by other political agents’<sup>36</sup>. This is why the affective narratives about the (individual and collective) self told by the latter are important to explore and understand in analytical and political terms.

To substantiate our analysis of the importance of affect and emotions in reflecting, contesting, and resisting the structural paradox migrant children face in Austria, we draw on a wide body of literature on affectivity, emotion, and feeling structures in cultural studies, sociology, and political science. Combined these discourses constitute

the 'emotional' and 'affective turn' in the social sciences.<sup>37</sup> A focus on affect and emotions highlights the involvement of the body and the corporeality of feelings, thus stressing the bodily experiences within narratives and going beyond rationality and cognition. In contrast to Brian Massumi,<sup>38</sup> we do not strictly distinguish between affect (unconscious and asocial), feelings (conscious bodily experiences) and emotions (visible and reflected expression of affect). Instead, like Sara Ahmed,<sup>39</sup> we stress the conscious and bodily perception and interpretation of affect and emotions, recognizing these dimensions as socially-constructed and expressed.<sup>40</sup> Affect and emotions are embedded in, and interwoven with, meaning and values, since perception and cognition always include affect. Furthermore, affect and emotions help to order time; they can make the past (for instance, the flight to Europe) comprehensible by giving it meaning and significance. Affect and emotion can also give meaning to the present (i.e., life in Austria) and allow for an imagining of the future. Affect and emotions create atmosphere (i.e., affect-laden spaces); and they also connect or disconnect people, which might create feelings of belonging or non-belonging.

To combine a focus on affect with the concept of narration we refer to Brigitte Bargetz and Nina Egger's concept of 'affective narratives'.<sup>41</sup> Narrations (or stories) and narratives (the social process of storytelling) are embedded in space and context.<sup>42</sup> Bargetz and Egger emphasize three elements of a narrative: 1. the subject; 2. the narration; and 3. the interpretive and meaning-making reception. Along the lines of Paul Ricoeur's idea of 'narrative identity',<sup>43</sup> they conceptualize narratives as important elements of subject constitution in time and space. Narratives, like affect and emotions, articulate the past and the present, and activate the subjects' ability to transform themselves and their conditioning social structures.<sup>44</sup> Narratives are creative acts that produce meaningful contexts, even out of heterogeneous events and temporalities.<sup>45</sup> They provide information about subjects and subjectification, about individual and personal experiences, but also about social contexts.<sup>46</sup> Bargetz and Eggers conclude that the 'narrative design' of subjects 'oscillates constantly between keeping on writing and rewriting'.<sup>47</sup> Narratives bring forth affects and emotions, but they can also bind and restrain them.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, they can reduce indeterminacy produced by affectivity and emotions through guiding affectivity into one narrative direction.<sup>49</sup> 'Affective-narrative practices' form, according to the authors, 'a mediation between subjective experiences and collective understanding'.<sup>50</sup> Bargetz and Eggers highlight the 'narrativity of affect', meaning that narrating affect articulates and makes visible social relations and political power structures.<sup>51</sup> The entanglement of narrative processes of subjectivation and affective practices has to be conceived of in terms of



power relations<sup>52</sup>: cultural, social, and political forces structure emotional meanings, affective narrations, and bodily experiences, and affective acts may in turn transform power structures and thus contribute to social change.

## Material and method

The telling of a story is a relational and dialogical practice. As such, one suitable means of efficiently capturing narratives in qualitative social research is through interviews. In 2015, we conducted a total of ten interviews with unaccompanied minors<sup>53</sup> who (previously) sought asylum in Austria. The interviewees were contacted through the respective care facility and we carried out the interviews face-to-face with the permission of minors and their legal guardians. The interviews were conducted either in German or in English; a translator was thus not involved.<sup>54</sup> The minors came from different countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, Pakistan, the Chechen Republic, the Republic of Dagestan, and Somalia. One of the ten minors was female. To analyse our material, we used Jochen Kleres's 'narrative methodology'.<sup>55</sup> The underlying analytical assumption is that 'emotions are inextricably interwoven with the meaning dimension of texts to the point where the distinction between cognition and emotion becomes blurry.'<sup>56</sup> According to Kleres, affect and emotions are expressed through *affective words* (i.e., words which express an affect or emotion such as 'fear', 'I was afraid', 'I love'), through the *syntax of a sentence* (incomplete sentences, repetition), or through *prosody* (rhythm, stress, intonation).<sup>57</sup> Kleres's methodology therefore distinguishes between two dimensions: the lexical level of 'emotion words, which refer [...] *descriptively* to emotional states',<sup>58</sup> and the syntactical level where sentences point to emotional experiences. Thus, the narrative methodology makes visible non-conscious, unreflective affect and emotions. We applied this method to interpret our material, and to identify affectivity (the interplay of body and mind), emotions, and modes of anxiety, fear, joy, and belonging.

### Narrating the structural paradox through affect and emotions: experiences and practices of unaccompanied minors

This section presents our findings based on the affective narratives told by unaccompanied minors. They, in turn, made tangible for the interlocutor their negative experiences with the Austrian asylum-child welfare paradox, but also their relations with trusted adults and friends, as well as their hopes for the future.

*Telling the past, present and future: Insecurity, safety, and normality*

In our interview material, we find that emotions of insecurity and safety are central to the narratives of unaccompanied minors in the context of flight and asylum. Talking about their reasons for leaving their homeland, they often narrated feelings of insecurity attached to being exposed to various risks such as terrorist attack, persecution, and forced military recruitment.<sup>59</sup> Karim<sup>60</sup> (14), who came from Afghanistan with his older brother Khalid (16), noted that they were escaping ‘from danger’ and from ‘bad things’, while Asif (16) stressed that the lives of people from Afghanistan and Syria were ‘in deep danger, especially the underage[d]’ who in these countries did not ‘have any future’. Salim (17) explained to us that if he had not been facing problems in his homeland, he would not have left it or his parents and siblings behind. Later during the interview, when asked how or when he decided to leave Afghanistan, Salim recalled his father telling him that he himself did not have any future. Salim was his future now, his father said, and that he wanted his son to go to another country and study. His father’s words seemed to be a main source of motivation for Salim, who was working hard to learn German and acquire a school degree.

In our interviews, we observed that safety — the counterpart of insecurity and various hazards arising from war, persecution, and lack of prospects — was a desired feeling closely linked to normality or to the notion of a ‘normal life’ among minors. Telling us about the problems his family experienced with the Taliban, Asif (16) said that at one point he thought to himself that ‘it is not normal and then I decide[d] to come’ to Europe. He believed that he had ‘a lot of life and time to survive,’ and asked himself: ‘why should I waste it here?’. We encountered the concept of ‘normal life’ in our interview with Karim (14) as well, who said that he ‘didn’t like money’. He only needed a certain amount of it ‘for solving my problems’, and just wanted a ‘normal life’. Even though Asif did not know about his future (since no decision had been made on his asylum application at the time of our interview), he felt safe in Austria; he said that it was ‘good to be here’ and believed that ‘I have a bright future if I study’. Karim (14) preferred Austria to such countries as Bulgaria, Serbia, and Hungary, where he spent some time during his journey. He said that ‘I don’t want to go from here [Austria]’ and wanted to live ‘in this land’ where everyone is good and there is no ‘fighting’, by which he likely means war. Rasheed (17) described what we interpreted as a longing for normality when, twice during our interview, he expressed joy over the fact that in Austria he was finally issued a document that had his name on it, referring to subsidiary protection.<sup>61</sup> In contrast to his precarious residence status both in Afghanistan and Iran, he said that in Austria he felt like a human being. Like

Asif and Karim, Rasheed felt good in Austria and thought he had made the best decision by staying here. He was particularly happy that he could escape Greece, where he had stayed for a year before coming to Austria and where he had witnessed physical violence against refugees.

At the time of our interview, Tahir (17) from Afghanistan had been living in Austria for three years. He liked that he could study and pursue job training as well as Taekwondo, whereas in his homeland there is 'always war'. Living in Austria changed him in that he had to take care of things on his own, since he did not have a family and, as a result, became 'independent'. Overall, Rasheed similarly gave the impression of satisfaction: he had a good command of German, held a secondary school degree (*Hauptschulabschluss*) obtained in Austria, as well as subsidiary protection. He worked as a kitchen assistant at a lunch restaurant five days a week from 10 am to 3 pm, and had plans to pursue vocational training as a chef. Neither Tahir nor Rasheed seemed to be as troubled as some other minors we talked to. Depictions of a scheduled everyday life and defined tasks and goals, conveyed through feelings of safety and confidence, stood in contrast to the feelings of insecurity and emergency. All the unattended minors we spoke to spoke of the experience that they positively perceived the contrast between the insecurity, the feelings of fear and danger in their country of origin and during their flight, on the one hand, and the feeling of safety, security, and normality in Austria, on the other. Affects arise from and modulate their sense of time: a safe present and a hoped-for good future, in which they can put the hostile past behind them.

*First encounters with the asylum system, experiences of rejection and loss of control*

Nevertheless, negative feelings did not only concern minors' pre-flight experiences; they were called up by how they were initially received by state institutions and officials in Austria. These encounters seemed to have set a negative affective tone for some of the minors in our sample. These dismissive affective attitudes that the young people confronted were the first experiences of their paradoxical situation in Austria. Asif (16) felt dissatisfied with how he was treated during his initial reception. Officials took his fingerprints and picture and ordered him to take an age-assessment test. Evidentially, the officers questioned the authenticity of the copies of his official documents (he had not taken the originals with him, fearing he might lose them on his way to Europe). When asked about his initial experience, Adam (16) similarly noted that the police were 'unfriendly' and the people in Traiskirchen – an initial reception centre in Austria, which frequently makes headlines for being overcrowded – were 'the worst'. Rasheed (17), who stayed in Traiskirchen as well for around four

weeks, found it difficult that every day many new people would arrive. He noted that there were quarrels with older residents, and that some people were drunk. Karim (14) resented that in Traiskirchen he was not spoken to nicely and no one listened to his stories about his journey through the mountains and the forest. Instead, they only showed interest in *why* he came to Austria. Asif (16) pleaded to public officials that they learn about the feelings of unaccompanied minors and give them a chance to ‘make their future good’.

Reports widely confirm that Traiskirchen, where unaccompanied minors usually stay until they are admitted to the asylum procedure, is unsuitable for accommodating minors. There, minors lack a legal guardian and are only appointed a legal representative for the duration of the admission procedure. They are otherwise left in the dark, especially during the first days, with regard to their rights and options in connection with their asylum application.<sup>62</sup> The interviewed minors’ narratives reflected the negative affectivity of abjection. They did not feel welcomed nor wanted.

Although minors received more care and assistance once they were admitted to the asylum procedure and relocated to a care facility for unaccompanied minors in one of the nine *Länder*, we observed certain continuities in their negative emotions of not being heard. Aasiya (17), who came from Somalia, did not believe that the employees at the care facility were truly interested in her or the other children, but suspected they were merely doing their job. She complained that the employees of the facility were not concerned when one of the youngsters left the facility: ‘but you want [to] feel like you were a family’. She named one person, a male employee, whom she ‘really love[d]’ but whenever she asked him a question, his answer was ‘I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know’. He would simply type her concern into the computer to be addressed in the next weekly meeting held at the facility. One predominant feeling at the time of our interview was Aasiya exhibiting a lack of immediate purpose or drive. She did not attend a school. She had initially attended a German course but quit after five days. Majeed (17) similarly reported that he was unwilling to attend a German class because he would get nervous, so, instead, he tried to teach himself German on the internet in his room. Like Majeed, Aasiya lacked a regular schedule that would help structure her everyday life. She thus slept long hours ‘because I don’t have something; even [if] I watched half of the movies, what I will do next? There is nothing.’ As a pastime, she ‘clean[ed] [her room] all over and then I clean it over again, because I don’t have something to do.’ That she did not have any particular task at the time of our interview suggested feelings we interpreted as discomfort or embarrassment. Again, time is affective in the narrations of migrant minors. Time conveys regularity and normality. If this flow of time is missing, the refugees feel lost

and uncomfortable – which makes a sense of security and belonging difficult to achieve. The migrant minors describe this situation as paradoxical, because, on the one hand, they recognize starting to feel good, to learn something, and to be cared for, but, on the other hand, they also perceive alienating constellations that take the form of inattentiveness.

#### *Loneliness, relatedness, and friendship*

Although normality (that is, the absence of direct threats such as war) was important for minors, this was not always sufficient for them to feel safe or happy. Adam (16) submitted that ‘our life is so normal here [in Austria]’ but still added that ‘my homeland would be better’. He noted that he had no one to talk to in Austria and that he could find comfort in praying. Whether minors developed positive feelings about their lives and future prospects significantly depended on whether they were able to build a social network with the help of public institutions, trusted adults, and peers. One remedy for feelings of loneliness and homesickness we could identify in minors’ narratives was access to affective relationships with family and friends.<sup>63</sup> While Adam considered his life or life in Austria as generally negative, he was happy about his friends and looked forward to bringing his family to Austria once he received asylum. Asif (16) missed a trusted adult who could provide guidance in important matters, when he was ‘confused about my future’ or when deciding which school to go to. In the absence of his parents and neighbours, he felt insecure making such decisions. He, too, was happy about his newly-found friendships but still missed his mother. Latifa (16) liked her friends whom she met in the care facility and with whom ‘[they] act as a family’. She would prefer it if she did not have to share her room with other people and said that ‘a single room would be awesome’. But she also added that ‘sometime[s] when they [roommates] are not here, I really miss them.’ Karim (14) could not hide his satisfaction with the (temporary) care facility for underage minors (meaning 14 or younger). This was a care facility of the Child and Youth Welfare Services, rather than a facility run within the framework of the Basic Welfare Support. He was given accommodation together with his 16-year-old brother and said he liked it ‘too much here’. But he, too, longed to be with his parents; ‘that is all that I want’, he added. This resonates with Statham’s findings that linking up with ‘family relatives is very important’ since this ‘may be a major source of emotional and cultural support and attachment’.<sup>64</sup> These ways of connecting with others, affectivity and connectivity, create feelings of belonging, especially against the background of ‘longing’ for safety, proximity, and relationships.<sup>65</sup> These affects stand in stark contrast to minors’ asylum-

related experiences of initial reception, age assessment, and negligence by institutions and persons who are by law required to observe their best interests.

Aasiya (17), who had been in Austria for less than a year at the time of our interview, did not have any such network and was still adjusting to her new environment and to the changes: 'I still move on. It might take time', she told us. She was particularly scared of dogs and drunk people on the streets; and people in Austria made a sad impression on her. Aasiya seemed troubled that 'my family is far away', and she missed her mother. She mentioned that she talked to only one female friend from home and to no one else, except for her family, because 'I don't know what I tell people, where I am, what I am doing, you don't go to school, you don't do nothing, so what I tell?' Aasiya rarely left the care facility at the time of our interview. We believe that her inaction had mainly to do with the fact that she was adjusting to her new life apart from her family and friends, and that she lacked any other support structures. Still, she told us that she was 'happy'. 'Internet is working, my family is good, that is all', and her wish for the future was to feel like she belongs to 'this country'. By stark contrast, Tahir (17) had a wide and stable social network and felt positive about his life and future in Austria. Unlike Aasiya, who found Europe and Austria scary, Tahir associated feelings of peace and calm with Austria. He mentioned that the '*Büro*' (referring to the management of the care facility where he was accommodated) helped him apply for a training position at the Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB). He was expecting a reply from them at the time of our interview. Attending a secondary school (previously *Hauptschule*, now called *Mittelschule*) and being a member of a sports club helped him learn German and make new friends. He thought highly of an Austrian couple (godparents, *Paten*) who, as volunteers, supported him in various ways and with whom he planned to live in the first few months after turning 18 (as he would have to leave the current facility for minors). Visiting a psychotherapist for two years on a regular basis helped him as well. Although he was concerned about money, he still felt 'super'. What Rasheed liked about Austria was freedom: 'One can say anything they want, yes, no one can hold their mouth and say "You have to [say this] or you can't say [that]"'. Like Tahir, Rasheed had an Austrian family at his side whom he called 'my Austrian family' and whose two children he called 'sister' and 'brother'. Salim (17), too, felt mostly positive about Austria. He noted that he liked Vienna and that the people were kind. He also liked his teachers at school as well as his friends there as well as at the care facility. He seemed particularly satisfied with his supportive mentor or caregiver. These narratives about trusted and caring adults, along with their testimonies about the educational and vocational opportunities for an ordered life, fundamentally contradicted minors' narratives on flight and arrival.

They further went against uncertainties regarding the duration and outcome of running asylum applications. These narrations make the loss of family and friends due to flight and the associated feeling of being lost particularly clear, although this can be compensated for by institutional services in Austria.

*(Re-)Gaining control: affectivity, confidence, and optimism*

Unlike Aasiya, Tahir displayed considerable incentive and motivation to take an active part in social life. When asked whether he had the feeling of being in control of the things that happen to him, he said that initially he did not until he started speaking German. When we asked him again whether he felt that he was in control, he replied: 'Over my life? Yes, I do, for sure.' Therefore, more schooling and more German courses were his main recommendations for state officials to make things easier for unaccompanied minors in Austria. His biggest wish for the future was, next to being with his family, to finish a vocational training and live a peaceful life. While Adam (16) did not feel like he currently had control over his life, he hoped that he would have in the future once he was granted asylum. Similar to the findings of a study on asylum-seeking children in the UK,<sup>66</sup> uncertainties around their asylum status were a main source of insecurity for the children in our sample. Rasheed wished to reunite with his family whom he had lost while fleeing and to live with them in Austria. By contrast, Hamed (17) was granted asylum and was happy that he would soon reunite with his parents (though not with his adult siblings to whom family reunification does not apply) in Austria. Hamed wanted to study and become an engineer, while Rasheed wished to become a head chef someday and have his own restaurant with international cuisine. He seemed to be satisfied with the changes, or growth, he had undergone in Austria; he was becoming more autonomous and less shy in the presence of other people: 'I learnt much about life and now I know what is good for me and what is not.' One can observe that whether asylum-seeking minors feel in control of their lives and feel confident about their future depends on the specific stage of the asylum procedure (e.g. whether they already hold an asylum or a subsidiary protection or whether they are still waiting for an outcome), duration of stay in Austria, and the affective relations they build and maintain with others. The better minors' prospects for staying in Austria and reuniting with their families were, the more positive were the affects through which they narrated their current lives and hopes for the future. The knowledge of the precariousness of their future without a positive asylum decision evokes anxiety and insecurity, despite positive experiences and offers in Austria – this is the classical asylum-child welfare paradox. Only some

minors manage to affectively penetrate this paradox. However, some are able to affectively overwrite the paradox through friendships, relationships, and future plans.

### **Concluding remarks on affectivity and the asylum-child welfare paradox**

The starting point for the current analysis was a specific institutional paradox that we identified in the Austrian asylum system with regard to unaccompanied minors. This paradox concerns the fact that unaccompanied minor asylum seekers are subject to two distinct regimes whose goals, guiding principles, and common practices are largely at odds with each other: the increasingly repressive and exclusionary asylum regime, on the one hand, and the relatively caring and inclusive child welfare regime, on the other. These findings for our Austrian case resonate with existing literature for other European countries, as we outlined in the section on the state of research. Rather than a simple policy choice that can be easily undone we consider this paradox an expression of the contradictory handling of third-country nationals in contemporary European societies. This system has its roots in the power asymmetries between the Global South and the Global North, and these disparities are ingrained in the state norms and practices of the latter.

As a way forward in dealing with this paradox, we have taken an affect-theoretical approach. We put forward the argument that structural inequalities based on citizenship and residence status (or the lack thereof) can be traced and found in the narratives of those affected by them. We do not consider ‘finding’ clues about the asylum-child welfare paradox in the narratives of unaccompanied minors a passive discovery but rather as the outcome of an active process of (re-)construction and narration by our interlocutors, not least through a set of different affects. Affects of insecurity and safety – typically related to war, terrorist attacks, forced recruitment, already precarious residence statuses in the homeland — were communicated to make tangible unaccompanied minors’ reasons for leaving their homes. The pursuit of a ‘normal life’ served as a main impetus for fleeing. The affective narrations structure the refugees’ time experience. Their first encounters with state actors and institutions involved in the asylum procedure upon their arrival in Austria were, however, a reminder that they find themselves in a state of exception rather than normality. Lack of information about the course of the procedure, harsh treatment by some officials, initial accommodation in the overcrowded reception centre, and long waiting periods for the outcome of their application greatly burdened some of the minors we talked to, evoking feelings of being rejected and losing control over their lives. In the absence



of trusted adults in the family, minors felt lonely and overwhelmed. One remedy against these feelings was building affective relations with people on site (such as care facility staff), other minors staying in the same facility, classmates, and volunteers. We experienced those minors who had already built such relations as more confident and optimistic about their future in Austria in terms of education, work, and permanent residency; they felt more in control of their lives. All in all, minors were more likely to communicate positive affects of relatedness and confidence when talking about those aspects of their asylum experiences. These were made possible in contexts where child welfare provisions and considerations applied, such as prospects for reuniting with parents and minor siblings or getting on well with their friends and carers in the respective facility. By contrast, affects of insecurity, loneliness, and loss of control were communicated in connection with norms and practices related to asylum, such as initial contact with state officials and accommodation in Traiskirchen, or during age assessment.

Rather than being taken merely as narratives of personal fates, these stories by unaccompanied minors should be understood as affective counter-narratives, which reveal and make tangible the effects of the asylum-child welfare paradox for their lives. They also offer a glimpse into an alternative reality where their residency in Austria is secure and permanent, where they pursue academic and vocational training, and where they are surrounded by trusted adults and friends; that is, nothing less than a 'normal life'. Hence, an affect perspective contributes two important dimensions to existing literature: first, the affectivity of time and the importance of affectively structured (life) time in order to better understand and organize the present and the future; and, second, the agency of unaccompanied minors, which results from (as well as in) relatedness, affectivity, and belonging.

In line with our empirical data and overall expert recommendations, we suggest that the utmost priority of policy makers should be to harmonize the legal and infrastructural framework for care and assistance for asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors with the system that takes care of Austrian children at the Child and Youth Welfare Services. Child-friendly accommodation and legal guardianship from day one, higher daily allowance rates, swift asylum procedures, and thus improved prospects for family reunification would be important first steps towards undoing the asylum-child welfare paradox in Austria. Further research could therefore focus on the affective interplay between unaccompanied refugees and the state asylum administration as well as private organizations. Such research would enable us to understand emotions and affects better as a resource for the lives of refugees, for their life plans, and their agency in the country of arrival.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dietze, Gabriele, 'Ethnosexismus. Sex-Mob-Narrative um die Kölner Sylvesternacht', in: *Movements. Journal for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies* 2:1 (2016), <https://movements-journal.org/issues/03.rassismus/10.dietze--ethnosexismus.html>, date accessed: 31 December 2022; Farris, Sara R., *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*, Durham: Duke UP, 2017; Ajanovic, Edma, and Stefanie Mayer, '"Freie Frauen" gegen den "Gender-Wahn" – Paradoxe (neue) Allianzen in der (extremen) Rechten', in: *Femina Politica* 2 (2015) 119–123.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Scheibelhofer, Paul, '"It Won't Work without Ugly Pictures": Images of Othered Masculinities and the Legitimation of Restrictive Refugee-Politics in Austria', in: *NORMA* 12:2 (2017) 96–111; Wiesböck, Laura, 'Die meisten MigrantInnen sind Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge', in: Max Haller (ed.), *Migration und Integration: Fakten oder Mythen? Siebzehn Schlagwörter auf dem Prüfstand*, Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2019, 117–125.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Buckel, Sonja, and Judith Kopp, *Das Recht, nicht gehen zu müssen – Europäische Politik und Fluchtursachen*, Vienna: AK Wien, 2021.

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<sup>6</sup> Dursun, Ayşe, and Birgit Sauer, 'The Asylum–Child Welfare Paradox: Unaccompanied Minors in Austria', in: *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 8:206 (2021) n.p.

<sup>7</sup> Katrien De Graeve, Marianne Vervliet, and Ilse Derluyn focus on this paradox for the Belgian case as do Isabelle Frechon and Lucy Marquet for the French case. De Graeve, Katrien, Marianne Vervliet, and Ilse Derluyn, 'Between Immigration Control and Child Protection: Unaccompanied Minors in Belgium', in: *Social Work and Society* 15:1 (2017) n.p.; Frechon Isabelle, and Lucy Marquet, 'Unaccompanied Minors in France and Inequalities in Care Provision Under the Child Protection System', in: *Social Work and Society* 15:2 (2017) n.p.

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<sup>10</sup> Mets, Karen, 'The Fundamental Rights of Unaccompanied Minors in EU Asylum Law: A Dubious Trade-off between Control and Protection', in: *ERA Forum* 21 (2021) 625–637, 626.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> Şimşek, Doğuş, 'Turkey as a "Safe Third Country"? The Impacts of the EU-Turkey Statement on Syrian Refugees in Turkey', in: *Perceptions* 2222:4 (2017) 161–182, 163.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Warin, Catherine, and Zheni Zhekova, 'The Joint Way Forward on Migration Issues between Afghanistan and the EU: EU External Policy and the Recourse to Non-Binding Law', in: *Cambridge International Law Journal* 6:2 (2017) 143–158.

<sup>14</sup> Rheindorf, Markus, and Ruth Wodak, *Identity Politics Past and Present: Political Discourses from Post-War Austria to the Covid Crisis*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2022, 264.

<sup>15</sup> Gruber, Oliver, "'Refugees (No Longer) Welcome": Asylum Discourse and Policy in Austria in the Wake of the 2015 Refugee Crisis', in: Melani Barlai, Birte Fähnrich, Christina Griessler, Markus Rhomberg (eds.), *The Migrant Crisis: European Perspectives and National Discourses*, Berlin: LIT, 2017, 39–57, 51.

<sup>16</sup> Rosenberger, Sieglinde, and Sandra Müller, 'Before and After the Reception Crisis of 2015: Asylum and Reception Policies in Austria', in: Birgit Glorius and Jeroen Doomernik (eds.), *Geographies of Asylum in Europe and the Role of European Localities*, Cham: Springer, 2020, 99.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Glawischnig, Katharina, 'Kein Kind wie du und ich', in: *Asyl Aktuell* 3:14 (2014) 2–7.

<sup>19</sup> Asylkoordination Österreich, 'Unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge (UMF) in Österreich', in: *Asylkoordinaten Infoblatt der Asylkoordination Österreich* 1 (2019) n.p.

<sup>20</sup> Svasek, Maruska, 'On the Move: Emotions and Human Mobility', in: *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36:6 (2010) 865–880, 869.

<sup>21</sup> Boccagni, Paolo, and Loretta Baldassar, 'Emotions on the Move: Mapping the Emergent Field of Emotion and Migration', in: *Emotion Space and Society* 16 (2015) 73–80, 73; cf. also Lee-Treweek,

Geraldine, Asa Wettergren, and Steve Taylor, 'Editorial', in: *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion* 5:3 (2013) 209–212.

<sup>22</sup> Wettergren, Asa, 'Protecting the Self Against Shame and Humiliation: Unwanted Migrants' Emotional Careers', in: Jochen Kleres and Yvonne Albrech, (eds.), *Die Ambivalenz der Gefühle. Über die verbindende und widersprüchliche Sozialität von Emotionen*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2015, 221–245.

<sup>23</sup> Cf., for example, 'Emotions and Globalisation, Identities', special issue of *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 14:4 (2007); 'Translocal Subjectivities: Mobilities, Connection, Emotion, Mobilities', special issue of *Mobilities* 2:2 (2007); 'On the Move: Emotions and Human Mobility', special issue of *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36:6 (2010); 'Transmigration, Emotions and Labour', special issue of *The International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion* 5:3 (2013); 'Moving Feelings: Emotions and the Process of Migration', special issue of *Emotion, Space and Society* 16 (2015).

<sup>24</sup> Kofler, Angelika, *Migration, Emotion, Identities: The Subjective Meaning of Difference*, Vienna: Braumüller, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Rosenberger, Sieglinde, and Miriam Haselbacher, 'Populistischer Protest: Mobilisierung gegen Asylunterkünfte in oberösterreichischen Gemeinden', in: *SWS Rundschau* 56:3 (2016) 399–421, 401.

<sup>26</sup> As there exists a substantial amount of research, we refer to the literature which has been most relevant to our own work as it has a social science perspective: Clayton, Sue, Anna Gupta, and Katie Willis (eds.), *Unaccompanied Young Migrants: Identity, Care and Justice*, Bristol: Policy Press, 2019; Gebhardt, Mareike, and Matilde Rocchi, "'I Have No Clue about My Future (...) (If) I Stay Here or Not': Participatory Research with Unaccompanied Minors in the German Reception System', in: *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34:3 (2021) 3288–3316; Sedmak, Mateja, Birgit Sauer, and Barbara Gornik (eds.), *Unaccompanied Children in European Migration and Asylum Practices: In Whose Best Interests?*, London: Routledge, 2017; Lems, Annika, Kathrin Oester and Sabine Strasser, 'Children of the Crisis: Ethnographic Perspectives Crisis: Ethnographic Perspectives on Unaccompanied Refugee Youth Unaccompanied Refugee Youth in and en Route to Europe', in: *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46:2 (2019) 315–335; Horning, Amber, Sara V. Jordanö and Nicole Savoi, 'Double-edged Risk: Unaccompanied Minor Refugees Risk: Unaccompanied Minor Refugees (UMRs) in Sweden and their Search for Safety', in: *Journal of Refugee Studies* 33:2 (2020) 390–415; Josefsson, Jonathan, *Children at the Borders*, Dissertation, Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2016; Lind, Jacob, *The Politics of Undocumented Migrant Childhoods: Agency, Rights, Vulnerability*, Dissertation, Malmö: Malmö University, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Huemer, Julia et al., 'Emotional Expressiveness and Avoidance in Narratives of Unaccompanied Refugee Minors', in: *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 7:1 (2016) n.p.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. for example: Eriksson, Riitta, and Asa Hedberg Rundgren, 'Coping with Life in a New Country – Affect Regulation Based on Unaccompanied Refugee Minors' Needs', in: *European Journal of Social Work* 22:6 (2019) 1012–1024; Statham, June, *Promoting the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health of Unaccompanied Young People Seeking Asylum in the UK*, London: University of London, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Statham, *Promoting the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health of Unaccompanied Young People Seeking Asylum in the UK*, 6–7.

<sup>30</sup> Herz, Marcus, and Philip Lalander, 'Being Alone or Becoming Lonely? The Complexity of Portraying "Unaccompanied Children" as Being Alone in Sweden', in: *Journal of Youth Studies* 20:8 (2017) 1062–1076, 1064–1066.

<sup>31</sup> Neag, Annamaria, and Marketa Supa, 'Emotional Practices of Unaccompanied Refugee Youth on Social Media', in: *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 23:5 (2020) 766–786, 768.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, 768, 780–781.

<sup>33</sup> Simsa, Ruth, 'Beiträge der Zivilgesellschaft zur Bewältigung der Flüchtlingskrise in Österreich', in: *SWS Rundschau* 56:3 (2016) 343–361, 348.

<sup>34</sup> Yuval-Davis, Nira, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations*, London: Sage, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> *Idem*, 12–14.



<sup>36</sup> Idem, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Clough, Patricia, and Jean Halley (eds.), *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, Durham: Duke UP, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Massumi, Brian, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham: Duke UP, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Ahmed, Sara, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Penz, Otto, and Birgit Sauer, *Governing Affects: Neoliberalism, Neo-Bureaucracies, and Service Work*, New York & London: Routledge, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Bargetz, Brigitte, and Nina Elena Eggers, 'Affektive Narrative: Theorie und Kritik politischer Vermittlungsweisen', in: *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* (2022) n.p.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>43</sup> Ricoeur, Paul, *Narrative Identity in From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1991.

<sup>44</sup> Bargetz and Eggers, 2022.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, all translations from the German original by Ayşe Dursun and Birgit Sauer.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>52</sup> Svasek, Maruska, and Zlatko Skrbis, 'Passions and Powers: Emotions and Globalisation', in: *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 14:4 (2007) 367–383, 371.

<sup>53</sup> We also interviewed two former unaccompanied minors who were older than 18 at the time of the interview and whom we did not consider in the current analysis. This research was conducted in the context of the project 'Whose Best Interests? Exploring Unaccompanied Minors' Rights through the Lens of Migration and Asylum Processes' (MinAs), funded by the European Union, 2014–2016. For ethical reasons, interviews with minors in all project countries were approved by the guardian of the minors. While the project focused on children's rights and children's well-being, during our interviews we became aware of the role of affects and emotions and hence conducted a secondary analysis of our material.

<sup>54</sup> We asked the minors in which language they wanted to talk with us. Some of them were proud that they had already acquired good German and wanted to talk to us in German; all interviewees wished to talk to the female interviewer in privacy, also without an interpreter and felt comfortable to talk to us in English. We decided not to ask them about their experiences during their flight journey in order not to re-traumatize the refugees; however, in most interview situations, it happened that they felt the need to talk about these experiences on their own. We also did not explicitly ask about their emotions; the interviewees talked about their feelings on their own, emotionally-laden words.

<sup>55</sup> Kleres, Jochen, 'Emotions and Narrative Analysis: A Methodological Approach', in: *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 41:2 (2010) 182–202.

<sup>56</sup> Idem, 197.

<sup>57</sup> Idem, 194–196.

<sup>58</sup> Idem, 194.

<sup>59</sup> A study on pre-flight experiences of unaccompanied minors in the UK delivers similar results: Thomas, Stuart, Beenish Nafees, and Dinesh Bhugra, "'I Was Running away from Death" — The Pre-Flight Experiences of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children in the UK', in: *Child: Care, Health and Development* 30:2 (2004) 113–122.

<sup>60</sup> We use pseudonyms for all interviewees.

<sup>61</sup> 'Subsidiary protection is granted to people whose application for asylum has been rejected on the basis that there are insufficient grounds to believe they will be persecuted, but whose life or integrity

are nevertheless threatened in their country of origin. People in this situation are not entitled to asylum, but they are granted temporary protection from deportation.’ Austria’s digital government, ‘General Information on Asylum’, [https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/en/themen/leben\\_in\\_oesterreich/asyl/Seite.3210001.html](https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/en/themen/leben_in_oesterreich/asyl/Seite.3210001.html), date accessed: 4 May 2023.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Wolfsegger, Lisa, ‘Sicherheit für Kinderflüchtlinge’, in: *Asyl Aktuell* 4 (2019) 23–27.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Statham, 2008, 5.

<sup>64</sup> *Idem*, 6.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Neag and Supa, 2020, 776–777.

<sup>66</sup> Statham, 2008, 5.