

Investigating everyday acts of contributing as ‘admission tickets’ to belong to the nation in Norway

Abstract

This article examines the centrality of contributing to questions of belonging in Norway. Building on the diversity of individuals living within a shared national space, the study identifies how everyday acts of contributing was conceived of by the participants as ‘admission tickets’ to belong. The study further investigates the participants’ motivations and desires for contributing and unveils how, given their migration background (internal, international, or non-migrant), they respond to expectations of contributing from different positions of ontological security. The participants reveal ontological (in)security at different geographical scales and they seek to manage this less secure position of national or local belonging through their acts of contributing in everyday life.

Keywords: Contributing, belonging, everyday nationhood, Norway

Introduction

In the wake of immigration debates, the Brexit referendum and increased right-wing populism in Europe and beyond, the nation is now firmly at the centre of attention. Only a few years back, however, the nation was relegated to the past, unable to cope with globalisation and international migration (Antonsich 2017). Interestingly, both arguments for and against the salience of the nation uphold notions of the nation as an exclusionary socio-spatial entity. Regardless of what happens on the international scene, belonging to a nation – for many – merely provides a taken-for-granted backdrop to everyday life ‘offering a reliable framework for making sense of the world’ (Skey 2010: 716). But the masses of ordinary people in everyday life do not constitute one group of undifferentiated individuals, nor is national belonging evenly distributed within a national space (Skey 2009; Smith 2008). Thus, for others, in particular for those who are not automatically assumed to ‘naturally’ belong, belonging to the nation may not be so taken for granted (Antonsich 2018a; Erdal and Strømsø 2018; Koefoed and Simonsen 2011; Skey 2011). At the same time, national belonging is not unattainable. For the nation, in everyday life, is also inclusionary (Strømsø 2018).

Drawing on insights from the scholarship on everyday nationhood, this article foregrounds a notion of national belonging as something individuals identify with, rather than something they are born into (Brubaker 1994, 2004; Fox 2017; Throssell 2012). Yet, this article expands on this argument by exploring the centrality of contributing to questions of belonging in Norway. The research participants in this study did not place emphasis on what the contribution was or what they were contributing to. Rather, it was the *act* of contributing itself that mattered. Indeed, everyday acts of contributing was underlined by the research participants, regardless of their migration background

(internal, international or non-migrant), and conceived of as ‘admission tickets’ to belong. To that end, I ask: How do individuals conceptualise the relationship between contributing and belonging, and what does this mean for their everyday lives?

Moreover, the study identifies similarities and differences between the research participants regarding expectations of contributing and belonging without question (ontological security) at different geographical scales (e.g. national, local or otherwise). Thus, and heeding Antonsich’s (2010: 653) call for a need to ‘look more carefully at the plurality of scales at which belonging is articulated’, I further ask: to what extent do scales of belonging inform these conceptualisations?

Belonging to a nation is inherently about membership. It involves both self-identification by the individual and a sense of acceptance granted by the collective of other members. The latter, collective dimension is explored in this article in terms of informal dynamics, rather than formal membership in terms of the legal status of citizenship. Such informal dynamics involve both the act of recognising and recognition, what is often referred to as the politics of belonging (Antonsich 2010; Van Leeuwen 2008; Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011). Hence, belonging is understood as dynamic, relational and practiced (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Brubaker 2004; May 2013; McCrone and Bechhofer 2015).

These informal dynamics are commonly examined from a perspective of more or less belonging to the nation, where so-called nationals are distinguished from immigrants or minorities (see e.g. Antonsich 2012; Skey 2010, 2013, 2014; Triandafyllidou 1998, 2013). The data this article is built on, by contrast, draws on a sample recruited without a pre-defined notion of nationhood, e.g. citizenship, birthplace, ancestry, or race. This approach allows for analysis of similarities and

differences beyond pre-defined group-identities, unveiling the relevance of migration background (internal and international) or lack thereof for questions of belonging to the everyday nation.

The next section outlines the conceptual framework linking contributing, belonging and the everyday nation. This is followed by a brief description of the empirical context, before I outline the method and data section. Next, by addressing the two research questions in turn, I first elaborate on the centrality of the act of contributing in Norway to examine how, and for whom, this act provides an ‘admission ticket’ to belong to the everyday nation. Secondly, I examine how, and to what extent, scales of belonging inform conceptualisations of the relationship between contributing and belonging. Finally, I conclude by considering the potential implications that the act of contributing provides for future conceptualisations of the nation.

Contributing, belonging and the everyday nation

Demands and expectations regarding the act of contributing are commonly explored through the literatures on civic integration (see e.g. Borevi et al. 2017; Goodman 2014; Reeskens and Hooghe 2010) and active citizenship (see e.g. Kallio et al. 2015; Percy-Smith 2015). The former tends to emphasise these expectations as directed by the nation-state towards immigrants. Although, it (often) does so without taking the agency of these immigrants into consideration (Antonsich 2012; Erdal 2013). The latter, in contrast, takes individuals’ agency as its point of departure, emphasizing their participation and their different forms of contributions. Even so, this literature often engages with geographical scales other than the national, e.g. the urban. This article, on the other hand, combines a focus on agency with one on nationhood when examining individuals’ acts of contributions.

Situated within the scholarship of everyday nationhood, this article maintains that nationhood is a co-production of individuals in their everyday life (Antonsich 2016; Skey 2009). It does so by placing emphasis on the agency involved in the acts of contributing and by exploring the desires and motivations for conforming to expectations (Brubaker et al. 2006; Edensor 2002). Whether the act of contributing is conducted in an ‘unselfconscious’ manner, or whether it is reflexively and ‘purposefully manipulated’ for specific purposes, is debated (Antonsich 2012, 2016; Fox 2017; Hearn and Antonsich 2018; Ichijo et al. 2017). How the act of contributing is *performed* is thus beyond the scope of this article (see e.g. Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) for discussion of performing the nation).

That said, it is necessary to consider the question of *where* in the world these everyday acts of contributing are conducted. For nationhood, as an institutionalised form, is situated and contingent in time and space (Brubaker 1994; Jones and Merriman 2012; McCrone and Bechhofer 2015; Valentine 2007). Within the social and spatial frame of a national context, there are asymmetrical power-relations and hegemonies helping to define who may or may not be recognised to ‘naturally’ belong to the everyday nation, a point which I now turn to (Antonsich 2018a; Erdal and Strømsø 2018; Koefoed and Simonsen 2011; Skey 2011). I do this by first addressing belonging and ontological security, before I elaborate on the nation in everyday life. I end by summarizing these insights into the analytical framework of scales of belonging.

Belonging and ontological security

Belonging to the nation, as membership, involves processes of recognising and recognition. The fact that recognition is central to the relationality of belonging echoes Taylor’s (1994) politics of

recognition. A politics of recognition foregrounds the need for mutual acceptance, which in this article is recognition of equal membership in, and belonging to, the nation. But also, more generally, recognition as someone who belongs in everyday life. Recognising individuals as familiar is what sets them apart from being strangers, or somehow ‘others’ (Yuval-Davis 2010). This recognition may be challenged by imaginaries of who ‘naturally’ belongs, which is closely tied with internalised imaginaries of what a national ought to look like (Antonsich 2018a). Yet, at the same time, such familiarity is something that (potentially) can be achieved by what May (2011: 372) refers to as ‘doing in the world’: through individuals’ social practices in time and space. This article contends that in the ‘doing’, i.e. the acts of contributing, lies a potential to achieve recognition as someone who belongs to the nation in everyday life.

In everyday life, ‘(...) it is those who position themselves (and are recognised) as belonging without question that are provided with a more secure sense of identity and agency’ (Skey 2010: 730). Therefore, situated in time and space, some individuals can rely on things staying the same tomorrow as they were yesterday (Skey 2010). Such unconditional and taken-for-granted belonging to the nation offers stability and is what Giddens (1990) refers to as ontological security. Others, on the other hand, acknowledge that automatic recognition as someone who ‘naturally’ belongs is not equally distributed. Thus, depending on their positions of ontological security or insecurity, individuals may have different motivations and desires to seek recognition as someone who belongs.

This analysis centres around the research participants’ migration backgrounds and how the position of ontological insecurity is shared between those who are (or have been) newcomers, which includes both internal and international migrants. Still, one needs to be careful not to overemphasise individuals’ level of agency, both in terms of the extent to which they are able to

act and in terms of their opportunity to act (McCrone and Bechhofer 2015; Valentine 2007). Constrained by structures and hegemonic powers, national belonging is often associated with race and whiteness (Hage 1998), as is also the case in Norway (see e.g. Erdal and Strømsø 2018; Vassenden 2010), which indicates that the position of being newcomers among internal and international migrants must not be conflated.

Nation in everyday life

In traditional research on nationalism, the nation is often understood as a phenomenon at the national scale. In this way, the nation is by many foregrounded as something that is abstract, intangible and imagined (Jones and Fowler 2007). In the scholarship on everyday nationhood, however, the nation is not only understood as imagined, it is also experienced as both a discursive reality and as practical and situated accomplishments in everyday life (Brubaker et al. 2006; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). Thus, to examine the eventful nation as situated and contingent in time and space (Brubaker 1994), the everyday is deployed as the ‘domain of enquiry’ (see e.g. Antonsich 2016; Brubaker et al. 2006; Fox and Jones 2013). While the everyday is not itself the object of study here, it does provide a realm to explore the routine and sometimes not so routine activities and social practices of ordinary people through which the nation sometimes emerges as meaningful.

That said, the everyday is commonly associated with other geographical scales than the nation, such as the local or the urban. Also, these scales are often contrasted to the nation and the national, which tends to be rejected on a normative basis for being exclusive. This is referred to as the local/national divide (Antonsich 2018b; Antonsich and Matejskova 2015; Rossetto 2015). A key dimension to these discussions is the way the spatiality of the nation is conceptualised, often associated with territory and notions of bounded space. However, turning to the work of Jones and

Merriman (2012), they argue that if nations are to be understood in terms of contingency (Brubaker 1994), so should the territories aligned with them be understood in the same way. Put differently, power-relations associated with the social and spatial entity of the nation and the national, as any other geographical scale, are situated and contingent in time and space.

This article contends that the everyday does not have a fixed spatiality. This implies that everyday life does not only consist of a local context. It also encompasses the national, as any geographical scale, e.g. the local and the regional (Brenner 2001; Brubaker et al. 2006; Jones and Desforges 2003; Jones and Merriman 2012). As such, deploying the everyday as the ‘domain of enquiry’ allows for analysis of which scale(s) emerge as meaningful through social practices, and what this entails for ordinary people in their everyday lives. Moreover, it is worth noting that ‘[the] inclusive character of a space is not to be associated with a given scale’ (Antonsich and Matejskova 2015: 496). Consequently, imaginaries of who ‘naturally’ belongs where may be upheld, but also transcended, in everyday life.

Scales of belonging

In line with recent work in human geography, this article maintains that questions of belonging in everyday life involve more geographical scales than the national, e.g. the local, urban or regional. This is also referred to as scales of belonging (see e.g. Antonsich 2010; Wood and Waite 2011). Yet, whilst some uphold a distinction between scales as mutually exclusive, others call for a need to explore the ‘plurality of scales at which belonging is articulated’ (Antonsich 2010: 653). For the purpose of this analysis and reiterating that the everyday does not have a fixed spatiality, I take the position that in everyday life, there is an interplay between different scales (Brenner 2001; Jones

and Fowler 2007; Jones and Merriman 2012). Whilst keeping in mind the asymmetrical power-relations in space, belonging, as a reciprocal exercise, is (potentially) practiced through contributions at different geographical scales simultaneously in everyday life. This is what I refer to as scales of belonging.

To illustrate, the research participants in this study who have moved internally in Norway reveal an ambivalent position of ontological security in everyday life. Whilst they position themselves and feel recognised as individuals who belong in a Norwegian nationhood, they do not reflect the same position of ontological security in the small municipality of Fiord where I conducted my study. Hence, the local scale emerges as meaningful for their acts of contribution to gain recognition (Jones and Merriman 2012). The participants who have immigrated to Fiord from abroad, on the other hand, reveal a position reflecting ontological insecurity in everyday life. At the same time, the participants also reflected upon how, by contributing in their everyday lives, they could potentially achieve recognition as someone who belonged not only in Fiord (local), but also in Norway (national). Consequently, they underscore the interplay between different geographical scales, rather than upholding them as mutually exclusive (Antonsich 2018b; Rossetto 2015).

In sum, given their migration background (internal, international, or non-migrant), the participants reveal ontological (in)security at different geographical scales and seek accordingly to manage this less secure position of national or local belonging through their acts of contributing in everyday life.

Imagined sameness and egalitarianism in Norway

This article focuses on belonging in everyday life to the nation, but also to other geographical scales. Notions of both imagined sameness (Gullestad 2002) and egalitarianism (Bendixen et al. 2017) provide important background expectancies regarding the dynamics of recognising and recognition in everyday life in Norway (Fox 2017; Garfinkel 1967).

In 2018, the population of Norway stands in excess of 5.3 million, of which immigrants account for approximately 14 per cent (Statistics Norway 2018). Still, the statistics help unveil how the Norwegian population composition is constantly changing. For instance, Norwegian-born inhabitants with two immigrant parents comprise 3 per cent of the population, whilst inhabitants with one Norwegian-born and one immigrant parent amounts to nearly 5 per cent of the population (Statistics Norway 2017).

Nevertheless, Norwegian nationhood is understood as one built on notions of an imagined sameness (Gullestad 2002). Whilst these notions of sameness are often perceived as observable similarities, e.g. skin colour and/or dress, drawing on research from everyday life, Gullestad underscores that they are also related to modes of social interaction. In other words, when interacting, individuals need to feel as equals to imagine themselves as compatible. Consequently, differences are left unspoken. Thus, and in contrast to popular belief (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008; Eriksen 2015), Norwegian nationhood is not solely built on homogeneity. Rather, as argued by Bendixen et al. (2017), there are performative criteria for inclusion in Norwegian nationhood. This understanding of Norwegian nationhood foregrounds that the *making* of sameness is a relational process (Nagel 2009).

In Norway, as in other Nordic countries, the notion of egalitarianism is strong. That is, there is a particular kind of egalitarianism which comes to the fore in, for instance, the Norwegian language. In contrast to English and French, for example, the Norwegian language does not distinguish between ‘equality’ and ‘similarity’, and the two concepts are, in consequence, conflated as one (Bendixen et al. 2017; Gullestad 2002). Historically, equality was not in itself an important criterion for inclusion (Abram 2017; Lidén et al. 2001). But, where independence was considered a basic criterion for personal dignity, and labour simultaneously was in short supply, equality was promoted by the authorities to secure the participation of as many people in the workforce as possible (Stenius 2010). Today, a similar emphasis is placed on formal employment as an instrument to integration. To secure an efficient integration policy, a recent White Paper issued by the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security (2015–2016) reasoned that the Norwegian welfare model depends on a high level of participation in the workforce. The White Paper thus went on to state that all immigrants will be met with demands of contributing and participating.

Method and data

The data this article is built on were collected during the autumn of 2015 as part of a larger study exploring negotiations of nationhood in Norway (Erdal et al. 2017). The overall dataset consists of 60 interviews conducted in four different localities. This particular analysis draws on a subset of 16 interviews conducted on two trips to Fiord¹, a municipality in Western Norway, each lasting a week.

Whilst nationalism is considered a mass-phenomenon, more work is required to examine who the individuals who constitute the ‘masses’ are (see e.g., Anthony D. Smith’s (2008) critique of

everyday nationhood and its ‘undifferentiated’ ordinary people). This study contends that questions of belonging to the nation cannot be defined *a priori* based on so-called objective criteria of who or what it means to be a national, i.e. citizenship, birthplace, ancestry, or race. By recognising the increasingly complex population compositions of today’s societies, including in Norway, the point of departure for sampling research participants was thus the diversity of ‘ordinary’ individuals inhabiting a shared national space (Bauböck 2002; Fox and Jones 2013; Meissner and Vertovec 2015; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). As ‘ordinary’, they are considered as complex individuals, all with unique combinations of identity markers and experiences in their everyday lives, not as representatives of a profession or a group, e.g. national, ethnic, religious. A key feature in the sampling strategy was thus the research participants’ self-identification with various subject positions, such as nationalities, and religious and political affiliation (Brubaker 2004; Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

A two-step recruitment strategy was employed for the overall dataset to secure access to research participants as diverse as possible along multiple axes of diversity. The first step was to secure geographical diversity, and the municipality of Fiord added a rural dimension to the dataset. The municipality has a population of less than 10.000, yet it includes both a longstanding migrant population and newly settled refugees. The second step was to recruit participants through different key arenas in each locality, such as nursery schools (parents), sport-clubs for children and youth (parents), and senior centres (users). In addition, convenience sampling strategies, such as snowballing through the extended networks of research participants and my own acquaintances, proved valuable. In keeping with the sampling strategy for this study, – i.e., individuals’ self-identification with various subject positions – background information was documented systematically *during* the interviews.

Out of the 16 interviews conducted in Fiord, seven were men and nine women. Two participants were in the age-bracket 20–39, nine between 40 and 59, and five were 60+. Five participants had always lived in Fiord, five had moved internally in Norway, and six had an international migration background. Whilst the scope of this article is limited to informal membership in the nation, there is no doubt that formal membership through citizenship and permanent residency is important. The research participants in this article all hold such formal membership in the nation-state: three from Europe (with permanent residency), and three from outside of Europe (naturalised as Norwegian citizens). Three of them had lived in Norway for more than ten years, and three less than ten years. One identified as Norwegian, two as Norwegian and something else, and three as something else. Thirteen participants had formal employment and three were retired. Two had primary education, six had secondary education, and eight had a university background or similar. Thirteen were affiliated with the Church of Norway, and three with other religions. Based on their last voting preferences from Norway’s most recent election, three identified with the left, eight with the centre, and two with the right.ⁱⁱ Thirteen participants were in a relationship, and three were single. All but one had children.

All interviews were conducted by the author in Norwegian, something which may have affected their sense of belonging and their experience of being recognised as someone who belongs. The linguistic dimension is important for matters of belonging (Brubaker 2013). Even so, the research topic might be experienced as sensitive, in part also due to my own positionality as an insider in Norwegian nationhood. However, the rationale behind the sampling strategy, where the participants held the power to define their own place in the nation, helped me, to some extent, to negotiate this skewed position.

The study was introduced to potential participants as exploring how Norwegian nationhood is being shaped and contested in light of increasing ethnic and religious diversity in Norway. It was then explained that I wanted to learn how this may unfold in their everyday lives. The methodological choice of a talk-based approach as the primary source of data was informed by similar studies exploring everyday nationhood (see e.g. Antonsich 2016; Mann and Fenton 2009; Miller-Idriss and Rothenberg 2012). However, ordinary people are not necessarily aware of how they are involved in (re)producing nationhood. For this reason, ethnography is by many emphasised as a more appropriate method (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Jerolmack and Khan 2014). That said, nationness is not only limited to the realm of habitual and unselfconscious social practices (Jones and Merriman 2009). Thus, the interview guide for this study was designed to elicit when, where and how nation emerged as meaningful in the context of their everyday lives, and the interview provided a space to reflect on meanings of the research participants' actions and experiences (Brubaker et al. 2006).

Using a semi-structured interview guide, I began each interview by asking the participant to talk about everyday life, thereby employing a 'wait-and-listen' approach (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008: 556). Immediately asking topical questions could have risked treating the nation as a salient identity marker in everyday life (Millard 2014). Throughout the interview, oral representations of the nation were also prompted through direct questions, and participants were encouraged to illustrate statements with anecdotes from their everyday lives. The questions 'Where did you grow up and where do you live now?' followed by 'where is home?' prompted reflections on belonging in everyday life on different geographical scales (Antonsich 2010; Wood and Waite 2011). We also discussed participants' own and others' right to belong vis-à-vis who and what they considered Norwegian.

All data have been recorded and transcribed. They have been coded and re-coded using the software program of NVivo following the rationale of grounded theory linked with abduction. In other words, whilst impressions formed during data collection provided the article's point of inquiry, data is understood as only serving as evidence for explored phenomena. Hence, the analysis is built on a systematic process of going back and forth between the data and theoretical concepts to identify patterns (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009; Charmaz 2000).

Contributing to belong in the everyday nation

In what follows, I start by establishing the centrality of contributing in Norway to demonstrate how, and for whom, it provides an 'admission ticket' to belong. Next, I consider how the notion of scales of belonging help illuminate the relationship between contributing and belonging.

The centrality of contributing

A major insight from the data concerns the centrality of contributing in relation to questions of one's own and other's belonging to the nation and in everyday life. As one research participant, Torillⁱⁱⁱ, observed:

I feel that when I am in Fiord and I see these, what can you call them, dark skinned, wherever they are from, I don't know. There must be something they can do, they just parade back and forth [on the main street]. Going for a walk is good, but isn't there any work they can do?

After a while, you feel that they become Norwegian. When they talk Norwegian, behave Norwegian, and they participate in Norwegian choirs and all. Then I feel they are Norwegian.

(...) They can speak broken Norwegian of course, but that they are a part of us... they are like us and then they can become Norwegian.

In line with established debates on civic integration (see e.g. Borevi et al. 2017; Goodman 2014; Reeskens and Hooghe 2010), the demands and expectations of contributions expressed by Torill in the first extract are directed towards individuals who have immigrated to Norway. Torill herself is a woman who has always lived in Fiord. Drawing on a national imaginary, informing her perceptions of who may or may not ‘naturally’ belong (Koefoed and Simonsen 2011; Skey 2011), the perceived idleness of these individuals walking in the street, i.e. the absence of an observable contribution, helps emphasise their ‘otherness’ through markers of difference, such as skin colour (Yuval-Davis 2010).

Still, in the second extract Torill reveals how, as time passes, the act of contributing is central for her to recognise someone as belonging to the nation, albeit situated in the context of Fiord. In so doing, she underscores how belonging is a reciprocal exercise (Antonsich 2010; Van Leeuwen 2008; Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011). Therefore, by conforming to national structures through the act of contributing, belonging is something that (potentially) can be achieved in Norway.

Whereas debates on demands and expectations regarding the act of contributing are often limited to formal employment and voluntary work, see e.g. White Paper issued by the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security (2015–2016), the analysis here reveals a broader understanding than formal employment of what constitutes a contribution. As already indicated, the research participants in this study do not so much place emphasis on *what* the contribution is, nor how well it is performed. Rather, it is the *act* of contributing itself that matters. For, as Torill elaborates in the second extract: ‘they can speak broken Norwegian of course, but they are a part of us’, she

indicates that showing a will to contribute and to make an effort – here, by learning the language – is considered an act of contributing.

As discussed in the introduction, more established approaches to research on nation and belonging tend to distinguish between more or less belonging (Antonsich 2012; Skey 2010, 2013, 2014; Triandafyllidou 1998, 2013), whereas for this particular dataset, participants were not recruited based on a pre-defined notion of nationhood. As a result, the centrality of contributing as an ‘admission ticket’ to belong emerges as meaningful on different geographical scales (Antonsich 2018b; Brenner 2001; Jones and Desforges 2003; Jones and Merriman 2012), as pointed to in the following extract by Anna:

In Norway, we are a hardworking people. (...) those who come here, learn Norwegian and get a job, they get respect and become integrated. But, if you come and freeload, then people won't have the same respect for you. That applies to society in general, but perhaps most for those who are in-movers [*innflyttere*].

In this extract, Anna echoes the centrality of contributing as a performative criterion for inclusion in Norwegian nationhood (Bendixen et al. 2017). But in contrast to more established debates, where expectations are directed towards immigrants, Anna foregrounds how all individuals living in Norway are expected to contribute. Thus, Anna's words reflect an awareness of a background expectancy of Norwegian nationhood (Garfinkel 1967) which was echoed by all in the sample, irrespective of their migration background. Still, Anna further distinguishes between expectations towards what she refers to as ‘society in general’ and ‘in-movers’, which needs further elaboration. Once an internal migrant and newcomer in Fiord herself, Anna continued:

When I moved here, people were polite and stuff, but it took time to get inside. (...) Because you're a stranger. You don't have a name that people know, you don't belong to a family that they know. Here you're a nobody. (...) I think you must be secure in yourself to think it's fine that it takes time to get inside. (...) The first 10–15 years I lived here, it didn't exactly fall into my lap. People don't come knocking on your door to welcome you, wondering who you are. (...) By having children, you get it slowly by contributing through voluntary positions in the nursery school, school, and spare-time activities. Then it happens, but it takes a long time.

Whilst Anna's position as someone who 'naturally' belongs in Norwegian nationhood might not have been questioned (she was born in Norway, she spoke a Norwegian dialect and her skin colour was white) according to her, she was nonetheless not recognised as someone who belonged in the context of Fiord. Whilst time is central to questions of belonging (Erdal and Ezzati 2015), Anna also described how, after many years, by contributing through her children's activities, she had achieved a position of being recognised as someone who belongs in both her own and in other's eyes. Therefore, whilst expectations of contributions are explicitly directed towards immigrants, Anna's example helps underscore the centrality of contributing as an 'admission ticket' to being recognised as someone who belongs in everyday life for all newcomers (in-movers), regardless of where they have moved from. Hence, she simultaneously underscores that internal migrants as well as immigrants are considered newcomers in everyday life, though their positioning as 'others' should not be conflated (Yuval-Davis 2010).

One more point is worth noting from the extract, namely how the responsibility to achieve belonging is placed with the individual. Anna underscored this position by adding: 'It's up to you.' Originating from Norway, she might be expected to hold the necessary cultural competence to decipher expectations of how to interact within a Norwegian context. But, as with the shared

understanding of the centrality of contributing, this sense of personal responsibility was also something that was echoed by all in the sample, such as in the following two extracts from Thomas and Bernard:

To be part of, and feel Norwegian, to be seen and recognised as having a certain status and function in the society, then you need to be able to work. Then you'll be recognised for and evaluated based on who you are and what you do. If you sit at home, waiting to receive your money [social security benefits], then there is no recognition.

You have to greet people. You must talk, you must help. Because you got help from Norwegians here. They gave you used shoes because you are from [name of country]. You had no money. You had zero money. And they tried to help you. Try helping us. Try to talk. Try to integrate yourself.

In the first extract, Thomas, who came to Fiord from a European country less than ten years ago, placed emphasis on the centrality of formal employment to achieve recognition. In the second extract, Bernard, who also came to Fiord less than ten years prior to our meeting, but from outside Europe, placed emphasis on reciprocity following from a conversation where his wife had told him how to interact with people in Norway. She had immigrated to Fiord a few years earlier than Bernard. Both extracts echo that the responsibility to achieve recognition and mutual acceptance in Norway lies with the individual (Taylor 1994). Moreover, in these extracts, the participants underscore the centrality of contributing as their potential 'admission ticket' to belong.

In sum, all research participants, regardless of migration background (internal, international or non-migrant) expressed an acknowledgement of how, being situated in Norway, there is an expectation to contribute. This insight echoes research on Norwegian egalitarianism, as discussed above, where

the principle of inclusion involves an inherent expectation for the individual to desire to conform (to work hard) (Bendixen et al. 2017; Stenius 2010). Whilst individuals are expected to conform to background expectancies with regard to contributing, their agency – in terms of their desires and motivations for conforming – has received less attention in the literature (see e.g. Antonsich 2012; Erdal 2013). Thus, I will now elaborate on how, and to what extent, scales of belonging both inform and help illuminate the relationship between contributing and belonging.

Scales of belonging and ontological (in)security

By conforming to background expectancies regarding contributing, the research participants are (re)producing national structures in their everyday lives (Fox 2017; Garfinkel 1967). The explicit awareness that the participants demonstrated regarding these structures indicates that the centrality of contributing in Norwegian nationhood is well-known, and that individuals are thus not (re)producing them in an unselfconscious manner (Bendixen et al. 2017; Ichijo et al. 2017). Nevertheless, not all research participants responded to the expectations in a similar way. Thus, and as has already been eluded to, a major insight from the analysis suggests that belonging and ontological security in a given social and spatial frame - here, everyday life as situated in the municipality of Fiord – involves more scales than the national. For the nation, as any other geographical scale, is practiced and experienced in and through everyday life (Antonsich 2018b; Brenner 2001; Brubaker et al. 2006; Jones and Desforjes 2003; Jones and Merriman 2012).

Drawing on the research participants' migration backgrounds (internal and international or non-migrant), the analysis unveils a pattern which encompasses three scales of belonging (Antonsich 2010; Wood and Waite 2011). This entails that, in light of their position of ontological (in)security in everyday life, there are differences but also similarities with regard to their motivations and

desires for conforming to these expectations. This pattern provides an understanding of belonging in everyday life that departs from the oft-deployed emphasis on more or less belonging, where so-called nationals are distinguished from immigrants and minorities (Antonsich 2012; Skey 2010, 2013, 2014; Triandafyllidou 1998, 2013). Before continuing, I want to emphasise that I do not intend to reduce the research participants to representatives of their migration backgrounds, nor conflate their individual experiences.

The research participants who have always lived in Fiord (no migration background) reveal a position of ontological security in everyday life, both in Fiord (local) and the Norwegian nationhood (national). With a taken-for-granted sense of belonging, these participants seemingly do not worry that their position will change tomorrow (Giddens 1990; Skey 2010). Whilst conforming to background expectancies, they appear to do so without explicitly seeking recognition for their contributions, as was the case with Torill, who had always lived in Fiord. She explained: ‘My voluntary work [‘*dugnad*’] is to watch the grandchildren so that their parents can go [out]’. In the interview, she reasoned that she did not have the time to make other contributions. This act was something she did at home in her private sphere. A sphere where nobody but the children could observe her doing it. Thus, knowing herself that she was not a freeloader was seemingly sufficient, and she did not consciously contribute in order to gain recognition from others.

Echoing this lack of explicit desire for recognition was Berit, another participant who had always lived in Fiord. She spoke in the interview about how she had started an organisation for local development in collaboration with what she described as ‘other stressed young people’. Although Berit’s contribution was public, she underscored how, due to the stress of everyday life, they had ‘to adjust the ambitions to a level we can handle’. In doing so, rather than conforming to other’s

expectations of them to work hard (Stenius 2010), Berit and her fellow contributors had taken it upon themselves to define what was a good enough contribution.

The participants who simply contribute exhibit a ‘more secure sense of identity and agency’ (Skey 2010: 730) than the participants who are or have been newcomers in the municipality of Fiord. The newcomers, on the other hand, which includes participants with internal and international migration background, revealed a position of not necessarily being automatically recognised as someone who ‘naturally’ belongs in Fiord (Antonsich 2018a; Erdal and Strømsø 2018; Koefoed and Simonsen 2011; Skey 2011). For this reason, the act of contributing was to a large extent reflexively (re)produced by these participants as an ‘admission ticket’ to belong, and they made more concerted efforts to be seen as contributing.

Given that belonging as informal membership is a reciprocal exercise (Antonsich 2010; Van Leeuwen 2008; Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011), newcomers must be observed contributing in public if their acts of contributing are to function as an ‘admission ticket’. This is illustrated in the following extract from Bernard (previously introduced), who spoke about how he had been the leader of a group consisting of newly settled refugees doing practical work for the municipality. He referred to a conversation he had had with one of the participants who did not want to join in on the assignment. Bernard elaborated on the conversation between them:

I asked him [the other participant] if he had a problem or was sick, and he said no. (...) I continued by asking ‘What are you going to do here in Norway if you don’t like to work? What diplomas do you have?’ He said he didn’t have any. The day after he returned and never sat down. I asked, ‘Why on Wednesday did you sit all day and Thursday you worked?’ He replied: ‘I thought all night of what you said to me. People here, they have two eyes and they talk. If you sit here all day, who’s going to give you a job?’

In this case, neither of the two relatively newly arrived immigrants are referring to belonging. What is interesting in the extract, however, is their conscious awareness of the importance of being observed contributing, a point further underscored by the acknowledgement of the potential consequences of not contributing; not having a reason to stay in Norway. Fiord is a small municipality. Hence, the notion that ‘people here, they have two eyes and they talk’ might hold true for future references. In larger cities on the other hand, to gain recognition as someone who belongs might to a larger extent be a contingent and situated event (Brubaker 1994). Even so, as I also discuss elsewhere (Erdal and Strømsø 2018), whilst individuals may have a conscious awareness of the necessity of being observed, and respond accordingly to the structures to gain recognition, they can never fully control the response of the onlooker.

It is worth noting that individuals might have multiple motivations and desires behind their actions, not all of them reflexive (Fox 2017). Hence, the newcomers’ contributions are not solely motivated by the explicit aim of gaining recognition as someone who belongs. They are also motivated by a desire to include themselves in, and to be part of, the everyday contexts in which they find themselves. For joining a group in the local community also provides an ‘admission ticket’ to belong as it may offer equal membership in a collective. This collective may be associated with the local or the national or both scales simultaneously, depending on the participants and their migration backgrounds (Brenner 2001; Jones and Fowler 2007; Jones and Merriman 2012). Examples of this can be found amongst both internal and international migrants, such as Jens and Mareille.

Having recently moved internally in Norway, Jens was a newcomer in Fiord, and he did not know many people in the municipality. In line with Anna’s reflections above, however, he stated that: ‘You cannot sit here and wait for someone to show up on your doorstep.’ In this way, he reiterated

that it is the individual's own responsibility to achieve recognition as someone who belongs. He subsequently spoke at length in the interview about how he had already made a contribution by working voluntarily in one of the many local projects. This act was motivated by a desire to gain recognition, but also to get to know people. This act was also a response to not 'waiting for someone'. Volunteering provided a place which allowed him to meet and interact with other people so he could be a part of a collective in everyday life.

Echoing this is Mareille, who further elaborated on the desire of having a place to go to get to know people. Mareille had immigrated to Norway from Europe less than ten years earlier. 'I'm in a choir (...) it's really important to us [her spouse was also in the choir]. I didn't join at first [upon arrival in Norway], but then, in relation to integration, getting to know people, but also for something to do after work.' Being part of a choir is not necessarily associated with contributing. However, in a small municipality like Fiord, the selection of spare time activities is not as broad as in larger cities. Helping to maintain existing activities, and thus keeping the community alive, fits with the broader understanding of what may be perceived as an act of contributing, as discussed in the previous section. In addition, as stated by Torill above: '[When] they participate in Norwegian choirs and all, then I feel they are Norwegian.' Still, the motivation Mareille indicates for joining this choir is not only about being recognised as someone who belongs, but also a conscious desire to get to know people. As with Jens, the act of contributing is about including oneself in a collective situated in the everyday context in which they find themselves (Antonsich 2012; Ichijo et al. 2017).

The analysis reveals shared features between the newcomers in Fiord (internal and international migrants) regarding their motivations and desires for contributing. Still, their positions should not be conflated in terms of their opportunity to act and the extent to which they are able to act (McCrone and Bechhofer 2015; Valentine 2007).

The research participants who had moved internally in Norway, here discussed through the examples of Jens and Anna, reveal an ambivalent position of ontological security in everyday life. On the one hand, they exhibit a ‘secure sense of identity and agency’ (Skey 2010: 730) in terms of feeling recognised as individuals who belong to a Norwegian nationhood, similarly to those without a migration background. On the other hand, they exhibit a position of ontological insecurity in the municipality of Fiord, where they are or have been newcomers. To them, it is the local scale that emerges as meaningful in everyday life and motivates their acts of contribution to gain recognition and acceptance as equal members (Antonsich 2018b; Brenner 2001; Jones and Desforges 2003; Jones and Merriman 2012; Taylor 1994).

But not all internal migrants responded to these expectations or were able to act in a similar manner. In contrast to Jens and Anna, Lene, also an internal migrant in Fiord, exclaimed: ‘Yes, you must do something about it yourself [belonging in everyday life], but it is difficult if you don’t have a place to go.’ Even though more than ten years had passed since she was a newcomer in Fiord, she still did not feel as someone who belonged there. Whilst Lene reiterated the importance of ‘having a place to go’ to get to know people, the lack of such a place for her resulted in a sense of defeat, caused by her conscious awareness of the background expectancies that placed the responsibility to achieve recognition as someone who belongs in everyday life – local, national, or otherwise – on the individual.

The research participants who had immigrated to Fiord from abroad reveal a position reflecting ontological insecurity in everyday life. Still, they reflected upon how, by contributing in their everyday lives, they could potentially achieve recognition as someone who belonged not only in Fiord (local), but also in Norway (national). Consequently, they underscore the interplay between different geographical scales rather than upholding them as mutually exclusive (Antonsich 2018;

Brenner 2001; Jones and Fowler 2007; Rossetto 2015). This can be seen in the example of Herman, who had immigrated to Fiord more than ten years earlier from a European country. He explained: ‘Even when I was new here and stuttered, trying to manage something that sounded like Norwegian and eventually managing something that sounded like [local dialect]. I have felt acceptance and recognition all the way.’ By making an effort to manage the language and local dialect, Herman felt he received recognition for his contribution (Brubaker 2013). This contribution helped override markers of difference between himself and people in Fiord. In this way, his contribution provided him, according to himself, recognition as someone who belonged not only in Fiord, but also to the nation.

Still, Herman’s skin colour was white, and he was married to a Norwegian woman. What is clear from the first extract by Torill above, is how skin colour – i.e. not being white – is emphasised as an important marker of difference from her point of view. This echoes the racialised discussions of what a Norwegian looks like, drawing simultaneously on notions of imagined sameness (Antonsich 2018a; Erdal and Strømsø 2018; Gullestad 2002; Vassenden 2010). Thus, even though Bernard (as discussed above), who has black skin, acknowledged his own responsibility for contributing and its potential as an ‘admission ticket’ to belong, his opportunities were more constrained by structures and hegemonic powers (McCrone and Bechhofer 2015; Valentine 2007). Even so, it is obvious from the extracts by both Torill and Anna above, that with time, there is potential for recognition as someone who belongs in everyday life in Fiord, and potentially also to the Norwegian nation.

That said, it is worth noting that not all individuals seek recognition as someone who belongs to a Norwegian nation. There may be different reasons for this, one being, as I discuss elsewhere (Strømsø 2018), that some may uphold perceptions of Norwegian nationhood as an exclusionary

socio-spatial entity regardless of how they act and gain acceptance as equal members in their everyday lives (Taylor 1994; Antonsich and Matejskova 2015).

Conclusion

Situated in Norway, where egalitarianism as a background expectancy prevails, this article demonstrates the centrality of the act of contributing and how it provides a potential ‘admission ticket’ to belong to the everyday nation, from both the perspective of both onlooker and contributor. What I find is an emphasis on lived experience rather than a national imaginary concerning who belongs where in everyday life – the nation, the local community, or otherwise. These insights help underscore how the nation, or any other geographical scale, can be inclusive as much as exclusive in everyday life (Antonsich and Matejskova 2015; Strømsø 2018).

Returning to the title of this article, contributing to belong indicates agency. In contrast to current debates where the act of contributing is found to be conducted with little agency (Antonsich 2012; Ichijo et al. 2017), this study shows that the research participants rather conform to background expectancies from different positions of ontological security (Giddens 1990; Skey 2010). The notion of scales of belonging helps illuminate these insights and unveils similarities and differences in terms of the motivations and desires for contributing to belong. In so doing, the article identifies three scales of belonging: Participants with no migration background reflect a position of ontological security and taken-for-granted belonging in everyday life and they simply contribute. Participants with internal and international migration backgrounds, on the other hand, reveal more ontological insecurity, and they consciously contribute knowing how it potentially provides an ‘admission ticket’ to belong. Still, whilst these acts are conducted in the participants’ everyday

lives, those who have moved internally in Norway contribute to belong on a local scale, and those who have immigrated do so on both local and national scales simultaneously.

Building on the diversity of those who inhabit a shared national space – here Norway (Bauböck 2002; Brubaker 2004; Meissner and Vertovec 2015) – and recruiting research participants without a pre-defined notion of nationhood, this study unveils how individuals, who otherwise would be assumed to ‘naturally’ belong to the nation, such as internal migrants, exhibit a sense of ontological insecurity in everyday life. This is a position similar to those often identified as belonging ‘less’ to the nation, such as immigrants and minorities (Antonsich 2012; Skey 2010, 2013, 2014; Triandafyllidou 1998, 2013). Thus, and in response to the critique of the ‘undifferentiated’ ordinary people of everyday nationhood, this study calls for a need to look more carefully at questions of national belonging, including in research designs (Skey 2009; Smith 2008; Strømsø 2018).

Finally, all individuals living in Norway, regardless of their migration background, are expected to contribute. By conforming to these background expectancies, the research participants reproduce national structures in their everyday lives. Simultaneously, however, they challenge them. An understanding of belonging to the nation as something that can be achieved by and through the act of contributing in everyday life challenges a national imaginary built on notions of an imagined sameness (Gullestad 2002). Thus, whether an individual identifies as, or is recognised as, someone who belongs in everyday life, does not only depend on visual appearance or origin, as suggested by the notion of imagined sameness. It also depends on their actions. Hence, the conceptualisation of the relationship between contributing and belonging as argued in this study echoes Nagel’s (2009) argument that the *making* of sameness is a relational process. This is a process, which foregrounds the dynamic everyday nation and provides the opportunity for challenging national

imaginaries of who is assumed to 'naturally' belong in the future (Erdal and Strømsø 2018; Strømsø forthcoming).

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ⁱ For reasons of anonymity, I will not disclose the name of the municipality.

ⁱⁱ Left parties include Labour Party, Red Party and Socialist Left Party. Centre include Centre Party, Christian Democratic Party, Liberal Party and Green Party. Right include Conservative Party and Progress Party.

ⁱⁱⁱ Research participants are referred to using pseudonyms. The interview excerpts were translated from Norwegian to English by the author.