Doing Foster Family with Young Refugees: Negotiations of Belonging and Being at Home

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Abstract

Unaccompanied minor refugees are regularly placed with foster families, and this residential context is sometimes assessed as especially appropriate to the needs of these young persons. The transition into a foster family is often accompanied by various changes as well as questions concerning feelings of belonging. These questions are the focus of this paper, which considers the perspectives of young refugees and their foster parents. The analysis shows that "belonging" and "being at home" are thought of as dimensions of "doing family" that change situationally and are negotiated with others.

Keywords: Doing family; belonging; foster family; unaccompanied minor refugees; being at home

Introduction

"I didn't have the feeling that I'm home; I always had the feeling that I am a guest here somehow and now I feel at home somehow; I know this is not my real home, but I still have the feeling that I belong there, this is my place, it's where I live, it's where I am."

This statement by Zamir[1], who after arriving in Switzerland moved from federal housing for asylum seekers to an unaccompanied minor refugee (UMR) centre and then to a foster family, underscores the emotional dimension of feelings of belonging and the interpretation of "home". For people in processes of transnational migration, this goes beyond the material dimension of arriving in a new country and the physical place of residence. But how are feelings of belonging negotiated within the context of a foster family? What different meanings are ascribed to "home" and "family"? These questions are the focus of this contribution.

In the last five years, there has been an average of 500 unaccompanied minor refugees seeking asylum in Switzerland each year, most of whom have arrived from Eritrea, Syria, or Afghanistan (SEM 2019).[2] Under asylum law, UMRs' asylum applications must be processed with priority and a guardian or advisor designated in order to do justice to their legal position as an especially vulnerable group of people with a right to appropriate accommodation for their age (Keller et al. 2017). After being placed in a federal asylum center, children and adolescents are assigned to a specific canton and are thus placed in different care settings (Rieker et al. fortcoming). In 2016, 44% of UMR in Switzerland were placed in children's homes and youth centres, 42% in asylum institutions, and 14% in foster families (Seiterle 2019).

Although various studies conducted in recent years have addressed the institutional living conditions of UMR in Switzerland (Jurt/Roulin 2016; Keller/Mey/Gabriel 2017), there are no systematic empirical insights into the living conditions of UMR in foster families in Switzerland (Seiterle 2019). Foster families have been regarded thus far as the preferred form of placement for children and adolescents, serving as a "positive counterbalance" (Seiterle 2019, p. 40) to children's homes and youth shelters. At the same time, it should be noted that placement in care relationships is associated with disruptions and discontinuities since the children and adolescents are often transferred to several different foster care placements in Switzerland within a short time period. Accordingly, the members of a foster family are called on to develop specific social relationships, care relations, and feelings of belonging on a temporary basis (Gehres/Hildenbrand 2008).

Against this background, the paper considers the placement context of "foster families" with a focus on the processes of situationally negotiating experiences of belonging and being at home as a dimension of "doing family" (Helming 2014; Morgan 2011). For this purpose, we conducted interviews with young refugees and their foster parents within the context of the

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[1] All personal and place names are anonymized.
[2] https://www.sem.admin.ch/dam/data/sem/publiservice/statistik/asylstatistik/statistiken_uma/uma-2019-d.pdf (last access: 04-07-2020).

research project "Unaccompanied Minor Refugees in Institutional Care: Chances and Challenges."[3] In the following, we present the current state of research and theoretical background (1) as well as the methodological considerations of the project (2). Subsequently, the empirical analyses are presented (3), and the findings are summarized in the conclusion (4).

1. State of Research and Theoretical Background

Some authors consider the placement of UMR in foster families to be the preferred type of accommodation, since these settings are supposed to develop social support and care in a special way and thus to meet the special needs of UMR (Seiterle 2019; Rip et al. 2020). A recent study from Switzerland shows that adolescents are supported most of all in regard to social integration, language acquisition and the expansion of opportunities for education (Seiterle 2019). In addition, young refugees talk about experiences of emotional care in foster families and becoming part of a family is reported as positive (Seiterle 2019, p. 41).

Within this context, international researchers refer to the interconnectedness of feelings of belonging and of being at home (Rip et al. 2020; Wernesjö 2015). With regard to UMR, Kohli (2006, p. 312) emphasizes that "home" is more than the search for a place of shelter. "Home" means the development of stable relationships in which one is also able to adhere to one's own cultural practices. The feeling of being at home is "a process that involves emotional identifications such as close social relationships and experiences of familiarity" (Wernesjö 2015, p. 454). Accordingly, Sara Ahmed (1999, p. 338) suggests the following distinction: "Home can mean where one usually lives, or it can mean where one's family lives, or it can mean one's native country." This calls into question an understanding of "being at home" as being bound to a place where one grows up and a fixed location. The study by Wade, Sirriyeh, Kohli and Simmonds (2012) pointed out the importance of establishing normality, a need for protection and equal treatment with other family members in order for UMR to feel at home in a foster family as a place of everyday experience. In this context, it becomes clear that foster families can be important for some UMR as a place of everyday experience where they are supported in their placement context (Rip et al. 2020, p. 8).

Foster Families and Feelings of Belonging

In foster families, familial forms of living are produced through everyday practices and rituals, overcoming crises, and the establishment of normality. In this context, negotiation processes

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and the development of feelings of belonging are constitutive elements (Helming 2014; Winkler 2019), which in turn can be connected with ascribing the significance of "home" to the foster family. This applies to children who are placed in foster families in general (Biehal 2014) and to UMR in particular (Rip et al. 2020). Establishing feelings of belonging is not only important to the children who gain a "family membership" (Reimer 2017) but also to the foster parents who choose social parenthood (Gassmann 2018). Both parties see themselves as confronted by the need to "orchestrate feelings of belonging" (Winkler 2019, p. 151), which is simultaneously characterized by insecurities and vulnerability (Gassmann 2018; Helming 2014).

For children and adolescents who find themselves in a phase of transition out of or into a foster care relationship, it is assumed that the associated changes in location can be accompanied by changes in feelings of belonging (Göbel et al. 2020). Such changes can bring feelings of alienation as well as once again 'becoming familiar' with new social relationships and locations (Göbel et al. 2020, p. 127). Similarly, Schofield and Beek have come to the conclusion that "promoting family membership" (2009, p. 259) proves to be important for children in foster care relationships. In this, a special relevance is ascribed to experiencing security within the care relationship and feelings of belonging to the foster families. The feeling of belonging to a family is developed through social practices of solidarity within the family, rituals and a family culture, and leads to the perception of the family as a "real family" (Schofield/Beek 2009). Biehal has examined the extent to which foster children's experiences of belonging exhibit different dimensions, distinguishing between, among other things, "as if, just like, provisional" (2014, p. 959). These dimensions are to be understood as hybrid experiences and classifications of belonging that are governed by a negotiation process and may change situationally (Göbel et al 2020, p. 132). Whereas the dimension "as if" describes the foster children's level of identification with the foster family as if it were their biological family, the foster children positioned within the dimension "just like" see themselves as members of the foster family, yet they differentiate between the various familial contexts (Biehal 2014, p. 965). In this, conceptions of normality in a "real family" serve as the background for the children's positioning as belonging to the foster family. In contrast, in a state of "provisional belonging" it is uncertain whether the children's experiences of belonging and their positioning as family members are permanent (Biehal 2014). Following Gehres and Hildenbrand (2008), it has become an established scholarly perspective to view the foster family as "other family". This point of view seeks to overcome a polarizing approach to foster families as replacement or supplementary families by taking the everyday dynamics of negotiation processes into account. According to this view, the foster family as "family sui generis" (Reimer 2017, p. 47)

does not negate the contradictions that can, for example, be associated with different experiences and classifications of belonging; instead, crisis is defined as the practical normality of a foster family (Winkler 2019, p. 156). The results reveal that the foster family can be characterized by a continually recurring struggle for a sense of belonging and a normalization of social relationships between foster children, foster families, and birth families (Gehres/Hildenbrand 2008). An important part of this process comprises differentiating practices that enable feelings of belonging to become perceptible as a form of being in relationship with others (Göbel et al. 2020, p. 130), which can also imply that feelings of belonging are denied. With regard to UMR, the question of belonging becomes significant in terms of the process of integrating into a majority society (Wernesjö 2015). Furthermore, it is important to mention that UMR are often confronted with experiences of social marginalization and ascriptions of foreignness (Riegel/Geisen 2010).

Accordingly, the present study draws on migration theory for a better understanding of concepts of belonging (Ahmed 1999; Riegel/Geisen 2010; Yuval-Davis 2006). On an analytical level, belonging is understood as associations that are repeatedly reestablished situationally through social differentiation. In terms of subjective experiences of belonging and symbolic classifications of belonging, these aspects are important both for questions of identity formation and concerning different contexts of belonging, e.g. peers or foster family (Riegel/Geisen 2010. p. 7). Belonging in the context of the foster family is subject to criteria of "symbolic membership" (ibid.), which are both ascribed and negotiated. With regard to the accommodation context of UMR in foster care, practices of feelings of belonging as well as interpretations of these feelings may be regarded as a relevant dimension of doing family (Eßer/Köngeter 2012), which takes place through everyday acts of care, familial rituals, and practices of being close and distant. The question of belonging, then, is less a matter of what foster families are. Rather, it is about how they present themselves as a family (Helming 2014, p. 90). To the extent that the negotiation of belonging occurs within processes of transition into a foster family, as well as in the foster family's effort to become like a family, belonging is negotiated anew and prompts the subjects to respond accordingly (Göbel et al. 2020, p. 130). Against this background, the present contribution investigates how young refugees and their foster parents develop and negotiate feelings of belonging and to what extent meanings ascribed to "at home" and "family" may be challenged.

2. Method and Material

For the analysis of the development of feelings of belonging and being at home in foster families, the following discussion draws on the empirical material from the study "Unaccompanied Minor Refugees in Institutional Care: Chances and Challenges". This project has been analyzing institutional care settings of UMR in Switzerland, with a focus on tensions between care and coercion. Apart from ethnographic research, interviews represent the most important material of the project. Adolescents, professionals, foster parents, and institutional experts who take part in everyday care were interviewed. In total, there are thirteen interviews with experts, fourteen interviews with adolescents, twelve interviews with social education workers, and four interviews with foster parents. For this contribution the interviews with the foster families were taken into focus.

The interviews with the members of the foster families were facilitated by two organizations that specialize in foster family placement, with the foster families themselves contacting the project staff following a call for participants. After an introductory conversation, interviews were conducted with adolescents and foster parents separately. At the time of the interviews, the adolescents had been living with their respective foster family for one or two years. All four adolescents had been living in Switzerland for four years, they had the provisional residence status "F," and they were between ten and 18 years old.[4] The current foster family was not the first place of accommodation in Switzerland after the federal asylum centre for any of the interviewed UMRs. Three of the young refugees had previously lived in two or three other foster care contexts. One was placed in a UMR-centre before moving to a foster family.

The interviews with the foster parents were conducted as couples' interviews in all cases (Wimbauer/Motakef 2017). All foster families had between two and three children. Of the four families, two had previous experience with care relationships and one of those families already had two other foster children living with them. The other two families did not have any previous experience with long-term care relationships.

With regard to the study's *method*, we are guided by the problem-centered interview, i.e. the interviews follow a guideline that can, however, be applied in a flexible manner depending on the situation. At the same time, attempts were made to set as few standards as possible in order to enable adolescents and foster parents to highlight the aspects that were most

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[4]   Regarding   residence   permits   in   Switzerland:
https://ma.zh.ch/internet/sicherheitsdirektion/migrationsamt/de/einreise_aufenthalt/ausweise_bewilligungsarten/
_jcr_content/contentPar/downloadlist/downloaditems/_bersicht_aufenthalt.spooler.download.1580744477888.pd
f/Aufenthaltskategorien+in+der+Schweiz.pdf (last access: 03-31-2020).

relevant to them (Witzel 2000). The interviews were then fully transcribed, with all personal and place names anonymized.

In terms of *methodology*, the project operates from a reconstructive perspective that focuses on biographical processing of the adolescents' and foster parents' situational experiences. In addition, the couples' interviews offer the opportunity to concentrate on the parents' everyday efforts to become foster parents as well and thus on processes of doing family (Helming 2014; Morgan 2011; Wimbauer/Motakef 2017, p. 24). The data was analyzed following the method of Grounded Theory (Strauss 2007). Accordingly, we attempted to discover concepts that were central for the subjects as they emerged from their accounts of their experiences and ideas. For the data analysis, theoretical considerations regarding a relational understanding of belonging (Riegel/Geisen 2010; Yuval-Davis 2006) and doing family (Morgan 2011) served as sensitizing access points and concepts. Such an analysis holds the potential to reconstruct appropriate empirical evidence that can be used to challenge theoretical concepts related to the questions addressed by this article.

In order to pursue the question of how UMRs' "belonging" is conceptualized by these minors and their foster families, three interviews with adolescents and their respective foster parents provide the basis for the analysis.

3. Results

The following section presents the analysis of the study. This paper examines different dimensions and conditions of the phenomena of belonging, the formation of and performance as a foster family, and the perception of being or feeling at home. First, the case of Tarik and the Meier family is presented in greater detail; in this case, there are differing perspectives on the negotiation of social belonging and feelings of belonging to the foster family setting (3.1). We then outline two other cases that reveal contrasting aspects within the development of feelings of belonging to a foster family: practices of physical closeness from the perspective of the foster parents (3.2) and the relationship between autonomy and belonging from the perspective of an adolescent (3.3). These last two sections offer a selective contrast to the first more detailed section, in order to highlight additional aspects of belonging.

3.1 The Negotiation of Feelings of Belonging: Being a Family Member *and* a Guest

Tarik, who grew up in Afghanistan, had been living in Switzerland for three years at the time of the interview. Before coming to the Meier family, he experienced various institutional

transitions: He moved from a federal asylum centre to a UMR-centre and then transitioned into his first foster family. Shortly before the interview in January 2019, Tarik had turned eighteen and was thus transitioning out of the context of institutional support for UMR. The placement in foster care would normally end and Tarik would become a care leaver. But Tarik and his foster parents decide to continue living together as flatmates until he moved out, which was planned for summer 2019. His membership in the foster family was therefore temporary. Leaving foster care requires all members of the foster family setting to negotiate belonging and social positioning as a family member situationally (Herdtle 2020).

In response to the question of how it was for Tarik to be with the Meier foster family, he says that he was not "as open" at the beginning and he had to get to know the family first.[5] After hinting at difficulties during the initial period, he then describes the foster family as follows:

> And there I lived, I was happy with the family, they are kind to me; yes, we never had problems and stuff, we just talked openly with each other and asked questions and stuff […]; we ate together, […] yes, were just like a family, I was, just like his children kinda, and they were very kind to me – yes, there were no problems and nothing […], not any stress and stuff; the family was always happy, when I asked something about school, work or whatever; was always helping […].

Tarik talks about being content and stresses that there have been no conflicts. He highlights the family's happiness as well as its support. In particular, Tarik associates organizing everyday life together, e.g. eating together or going to restaurants together, with familial practices, and so the Meier family becomes "just like a family" for him. The expression of loyalty and gratitude to the family for their social support as well as the experience of being treated as an equal to their biological children suggest that the foster family is important to Tarik as a "normal family" (Werner 2019, p. 233) in his everyday life in Switzerland. Through the experience of being treated equally to the other children, he is able to develop a symbolic sense of belonging to and membership of the family – in contrast to his earlier placement settings.

At the same time, it should be noted that Tarik talks about his experiences with the Meier family in the past tense and he refers to "the" family only, not distinguishing between individual family members. This could point to Tarik's experience of transition from a care

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[5] The interviews were conducted and later transcribed in German, then translated into English for the present contribution.

setting to a shared flat, which brings an altered sense of belonging to the family. It also indicates that individual classifications of belonging as well as acts of self-positioning and being positioned as belonging to the "family" context are continually subject to new negotiation processes, which are temporary because of the transition process. When asked about fond memories of his family, he answers as follows:

> I: [A]nd earlier, from your family, are there any nice experiences that you still remember?
> T: What family?
> I: From *your* family.
> T: Aha, my *my* family.
> I: Yes, your *your* family.

In this passage, it becomes clear that Tarik is not sure which family the question refers to. While the interviewer apparently asks about Tarik's experiences with his family of origin, from Tarik's point of view the term "family" needs to be clarified. Since the current foster family situation has been transformed into a shared flat, Tarik could also talk about his earlier experiences with the foster family. The clarification that the interviewer means "his" family, which Tarik repeats by saying "my *my* family," indicates that he focuses on his birth family as the relevant family only in the second attempt. This points to the high demands that are associated with managing the different family connections (Biehal 2014; Gehres/Hildenbrand 2008). Earlier in the interview, Tarik had compared his birth family and his foster family:

> Actually nothing different [laughs], there also the mother cooked, prepared everything or washed clothes, […] yes, family is real family, it's different, with foster family, I mean the feelings, it's not exactly the same, a lot different, I thought, at first I thought I only go to Iran and after a couple of years I go back home, but yes, I'm four years away from home now, I miss my parents a lot and all brothers and sisters, long time no hear, no see and heard nothing from family and where they are and live.

At first, Tarik establishes a structural similarity between his birth family and his foster family, referring to everyday care practices within the family: In both familial lifestyles, the mothers are responsible for care work. Tarik then makes a distinction on the emotional level and expresses his feelings (of belonging) by describing the birth family as his "real family," which

he misses. Tarik's longing for his birth family and his home indicate that the family is important for him as a place of shared history and growing up – a shared life story that cannot be continued and told at the moment because of an inability to contact them. For Tarik, home is connected to his parents and siblings and thereby situated in an emotional dimension. At the same time, he talks about the foster family as a place of everyday experience when he mentions coming home from work. Both the foster family and the birth family represent contexts of belonging where Tarik feels at home. However, being at home in two places is a paradoxical feeling for Tarik, as becomes clear when he struggles to find the "right" way of describing the place where he grew up as opposed to the place of his everyday experiences.

While Tarik positions himself as a member of the Meier family, he is positioned differently in the interview with Mr. and Ms. Meier. The following passage shows the extent to which taking in an adolescent refugee may be accompanied by uncertainties about one's own understanding of family as well as the experience of daily family life:

> [W]e didn't want to engage with this over a longer period of time deliberately, since we didn't know if this would really last, and it just was very important for us, because Anna was still around, the youngest daughter, the son had already moved out, that the construct of our family shouldn't suffer much from this during this time.

From Ms. Meier's perspective, as a long-term foster child Tarik challenges the construct of her own family, which is ascribed a special importance in this context. Only if the normality established by the family is not called into question by the entry of a new, foreign individual is it possible for the foster family setting to be established and developed. Tarik, then, is not taken in without conditions. Being part of the foster family is not only temporary for him, it also depends on overcoming potential crises and conflicts in the family. As things develop, Mr. and Ms. Meier decide to take Tarik on for the long term. Upon his reaching the age of majority, an aftercare setting is developed in which the members of the foster family become flatmates. This new living situation is established by the fact that Ms. Meier no longer engages in care practices for Tarik, e.g. cooking, shopping, cleaning, or doing laundry. Rather, he is now responsible for himself and has to organize these tasks independently. Through this transformation process, Ms. Meier's framing of the family construct is thrown into crisis; this relates to the ambivalence of the relationship she offers in which Tarik's belonging to the family appears to become fragile.

[F]or him, because he really lives in our family, he almost became our child somewhat [*Mr. Meier: Well, yours.*], well, my child then, yes indeed, so that I noticed that I had opened this, so boundaries [*Mr. Meier clears his throat*] were difficult to uphold for me, well, I found it very… pretty fast, it broke my heart, I shared his grief.

Whereas Tarik has become Ms. Meier's own child to whom she wants to offer a long-term home and whom she positions as a family member, Mr. Meier does not share this perception. By interrupting his wife to correct her, he distances himself from Tarik's positioning as their "own child." In the further course of the interview, he differentiates between Anna as their biological daughter and Tarik as their foster son: "They are just different, I think that he is a family member for you [*Ms. Meier: Yes.]* – and for me, he is a guest." Mr. Meier positions Tarik as a guest and distinguishes his social status of belonging from the social status of a family member. The self-positioning as host that this entails Mr. Meier to distance himself emotionally, as he expresses in another passage: "That's why I don't have emotional problems." The implied care relationship between guest and host establishes a temporary place of residence for Tarik. For Mr. Meier, this does not mean that Tarik belongs to the family; however, it does enable him to participate in the day-to-day life of a family.

When we compare these different perspectives, it becomes clear that both Tarik and the Meiers ascribe a special importance to their respective families of origin because they have developed naturally. For Tarik and Ms. Meier, everyday care practices actualize the social relationships of the family and create a sense of belonging, bringing an emotional closeness to these relationships. With respect to the negotiation of belonging, it appears that this is realized situationally and is subject to change. This change relates to symbolic orders of belonging as well as to subjective feelings of belonging, e.g. family member or guest status.

3.2 A Sense of Belonging through Practices of Physical Closeness
Sakar, who grew up in Iran, arrived in Switzerland in 2016 with his older brother and is ten years old. Before Sakar was taken in by the Keller family in 2018, he had been placed in four different foster families since his arrival in Switzerland. Sakar and his brother were placed together in the first two foster families. After that, they were separated because Sakar's brother had reached the age of majority. Mr. and Ms. Keller present the decision to take Sakar in as a "family decision" that they reached together with their two sons. In this section we focus on the perspective of the foster parents.

The desire to belong in the context of a foster family is expressed in the interviews with the adolescents in their longing to have arrived at a place that offers stable relationships (Kohli 2006). The adolescents and the foster parents contrast this desire with the experience of being moved around (Göbel et al. 2020, p. 137) – or, as Ms. Keller puts it, representing Sakar's perspective: "I don't want to feel like a ping-pong ball anymore." In the interview, the Kellers address Sakar's experience of "being passed along" and describe him as a thoughtful, interested adolescent for whom they want to provide the experience of "still being a child". In this, they attach particular importance to Sakar's belonging to the family:

> Ms. Keller: I don't feel like there is a foreign element here, that I can't be myself. I feel like, he was saying, "I've been with you for eight months already now." Then I said, "Yes, but emotionally, I feel like you have been with us forever," and he also; I feel like… […]. Really, he also says, "Yes, I want to stay until I'm 21 […]." You see, it's like he is already making plans: "How long can I stay here or not."

Ms. Keller does not perceive Sakar's presence as interfering in the day-to-day life of the family. He is not a "foreign element" who would encumber her personally. Moreover, she feels like Sakar has been living with them "forever." While knowing the limitations of the stay can make it difficult to take in a foster child both physically and emotionally, in this case a familial bond was successfully created and continuity established in daily life together. Ms. Keller describes the experience of "being correlated" that is expressed in social relationships. From her perspective, the sense of belonging to the family that is established as part of this "correlation" is also manifest in the fact that Sakar responds with a feeling of permanent belonging to the family when he expresses his wish to stay with the family even after reaching the age of majority.

That Sakar is "truly a family member," as Mr. and Ms. Keller phrase it, is expressed in the fact that friends of the family would acknowledge him as such: Sakar is implicitly invited to family celebrations and can accompany Mr. Keller to his band rehearsals. Accordingly, Sakar's sense of belonging to the family is not just expressed on an emotional level within the family system. Rather, relationships of belonging are also established externally and symbolize "a great gift" for Ms. Keller, since Sakar's sense of belonging to the family is thus acknowledged. This indicates that belonging is established as a result of processes of attribution. From the perspective of Mr. and Ms. Keller, Sakar's relationship with the foster siblings is significant for this tangible form of belonging, which is based on reciprocity. The

siblings are "incredibly fond" of Sakar, "they would defend him with their own blood". Mr. Keller conveys the extent to which the adolescents are also called upon to impart and establish their sense of belonging to the familial context performatively: "Actually, he [Sakar] allowed physical closeness pretty fast or actively sought it out; he came and hugged you […] and we were acting in kind […], because we treat him as our own, this is very important for us." The practices of physical closeness described in this passage, e.g. an embrace, not only establish a sense of belonging, they also render it perceptible and tangible. It is important for Mr. Keller that Sakar not only allowed the closeness offered by the family, but actively sought it out. In this, Mr. Keller addresses the dependence on emotional care that is expressed in social relationships, which can be especially significant for feelings of belonging.

In contrast to the Meier family, the Keller family does not negotiate membership in the family through social positioning, but through the physical dimension. In establishing their social relationship with Sakar, the Keller family does not seem to require a "biological-physical relation" or need to overcome an "unfamiliarity with physical closeness" (Helming 2014, p. 77) in order to practice emotional care towards others through physical closeness. To the extent that these practices express feelings of belonging to the foster family that are accepted and reciprocated by all parties involved, this case exhibits an experience of reciprocity that is important for both the foster parents and the foster child in establishing stable and reliable relationships.

3.3 The Tension Between Autonomy and a Sense of Belonging

Ahmend, who grew up in Ethiopia, had lived in Switzerland for three years at the time of the interview and is fifteen years old. Before coming to the Mathis family, where he had been living for a year, Ahmend had lived with another foster family. He left this family due to conflicts. In the following we concentrate on Ahmend and his point of view.

For Ahmend, there is less focus on experiencing and negotiating a sense of belonging in his foster family setting. In contrast to the first two cases, there are no explicit narratives in his interview that indicate a struggle for a sense of belonging as a foster child.

With regard to the Mathis family, at the beginning of the interview Ahmend talks about his weekday schedule, mentions his weekend activities, addresses his search for an apprenticeship, and positions Mr. Mathis as "father":

[F]or a day […], I get up in the morning and go to school, I come back and eat lunch. We all eat together, only the father is not at home most of the time – he is working. And

afterwards, you go back to school […]. That is, not on weekends, sometimes I have a match then or I go out all the time with friends and stuff like that.

Ahmend describes the organization of his daily routines, which are characterized by the intra-familial ritual of eating together and contribute to the process of establishing a family. These rituals do not take place over the weekend because Ahmend prefers to play soccer or spend time with his friends. Following the passage quoted above, Ahmend addresses how the foster family deals with his dietary habits.

Well, I like everything, basically; now, we… I don't eat pork obviously; this is why they don't eat pork now, that is, if I'm not there, then they don't eat, except, for example, on Wednesdays, I have a side job, then I don't eat at home, then they eat pork most of the time on Wednesdays – apart from that, never. Otherwise just always normal, chicken or beef and stuff like that, yes.

Not only is Ahmend allowed to maintain his dietary habits in the family, but the whole family only consumes meals without pork in his presence. By consciously acknowledging this practice, Ahmend recognizes the efforts of his foster family to avoid difficult situations and to establish a common ground. Although he appreciates eating together according to the quoted passage, Ahmend also emphasizes the option of not taking part in shared weekend activities: "Here is my decision, I can say if I want to come along or without." It is important to Ahmend that his autonomy not be restricted. In the interview, he talks about how his life has already been characterized by the loss of important attachment figures such as his parents or his uncle, homelessness, and the necessity of being mobile during his childhood in Ethiopia. Against the background of these biographical experiences of "self-care," Ahmend presents himself as a self-determined and constitutive agent in his own life for whom experiences of discontinuity in the form of changing attachment figures and locations are "just normal". In his first foster family, Ahmend feels unduly patronized and treated like a small child. After various conflicts, Ahmend ends the care relationship and initiates a move: "After that, I changed it; I'm here now, yes".

Ahmend presents moving to the second foster family and the process of arrival there as a pragmatic form of passage in his life ("I'm here now") and plays with normalization as a strategy for coping with experiences of alienation. Towards the end of the interview, Ahmend emphasizes the importance of the foster family as a place of care and support for his life in

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Switzerland: "They help me everything, yes. Without them, I wouldn't have no, wouldn't have a side job, or I wouldn't have played for the FC, or wouldn't have changed schools." He describes how his foster family supports him in changing schools, getting a part-time job, and playing in a soccer club. This is also associated with the possibility of reconnecting with his peers from the reception center and spending time with them on the weekends. Not only does Ahmend's social dependence upon others become apparent here, but also the extent to which a sense of belonging to the foster family becomes tangible through supportive practices for Ahmend. At the same time, the foster family appears as an acceptable place for Ahmend to live – as long as his autonomy is not restricted.

4. Conclusion

This paper focuses on situational negotiation processes of belonging and being at home as dimensions of "doing family" in the placement context of "foster families". Three analytical dimensions were identified through which the negotiation of social belonging takes place: social positioning, physicality and autonomy. With regard to UMRs' feelings of belonging in the context of foster families, we can summarize that a sense of belonging to family-like constellations is continuously being established and negotiated situationally through social, physical, and caring practices. The analyses thus confirm empirical findings concerning dimensions of doing family in which establishing a sense of belonging to the foster families is especially important (Biehal 2014; Helming 2014). At the same time the analysis shows the critical aspect of a culturally normative, emotional and powerful form of doing family. All of the participants are confronted with the need to not only negotiate but also establish belonging (Winkler 2019). Particularly if the family is conceived as a permanent context of accommodation, the inclusion of "foreign" children and adolescents should be adapted as far as possible to the social form of the family. The critical aspect of powerfully doing family can then be interpreted as the construction of an "as if family", which can be understood as an approximation to a specific family concept (Niederberger/Bühler-Niederberger 1988). Negotiating these ways of doing family is complex and multifaceted, involving different expectations from different parties.

With regard to the negotiation of social positioning, the analyses presented here show that this is carried out in different ways. With the positioning as "family member" or "guest" symbolic orders of belonging to the family are negotiated. At the same time, these positions are also related to different models of family relationships, as Wade (2017) has pointed out. Being a family member is associated with "family-like" connections (ibid., p.7). This can be linked to

the expectation that the relationship will continue to exist even after leaving the foster family. In contrast, the positioning as a guest can be interpreted as a form of denying family membership. At the same time, the positioning as a guest indicates that the foster family serves as a "temporary home base" (Wade 2017, p. 8). The social relationship has more a formal character and is not permanent. Such a reflection and attribution of meaning can then also be seen as a relief from expectations of assimilation to the ideal of family-like relationships – especially if the young people are care leavers. The transition into adulthood raises questions for all parties involved and challenges them to renegotiate feelings of belonging and to reorganize their living together. Accordingly, the Meiers present a concept of "membership with reservations", in which – in accordance with asylum law – there is a change of status that would probably not be required of biological children. In contrast, the case of the Keller family exhibits a negotiation of "unconditional" belonging. This negotiation of belonging takes place less through social positioning than through the establishment of physical closeness. Accordingly, the foster parents also deal with questions of belonging in different ways. These differences may also be structural. Feelings of belonging vary, depending on the age of the foster children and on their asylum status, with different levels of care.

For the young people, the foster family can be seen as an important place of living daily life together where they receive support (Göbel 2020). Belonging to a foster family is negotiated in different ways: For Sakar, a sense of belonging characterized by physical closeness and emotionality appears to be important; for Ahmend, securing his autonomy and contact with his peers are of central importance while questions of a familial sense of belonging are not an issue; for Tarik, daily life together in the foster family is placed in the foreground while emotional aspects appear to be tied to his birth family. In this context, two aspects are particularly important: the extent to which foster parents emphasize the difference between the family and the foster children, and their readiness to orient themselves towards the foster child and the child's values in their everyday practices in order to give meaning to the foster family and establish normality.

The analyses show that feelings of belonging to the familial context are – also for structural reasons – "provisional." This is accompanied by the fact that feelings of belonging to the foster family context on the levels of "as if" ("as if he were my child") or "just like" ("it's like at home") (Biehal 2014) are quite powerful. There is some tension between the practice of labeling and the ascription of meaning to the foster family as an accommodation context. On the one hand, we have the concept of the foster family as a "family", which suggests permanence, emotional closeness and commitment – feelings of belonging to a foster family

are not only ascribed from the outside, but also presented to the outside world, as in the case of the Keller and Sakar families. On the other hand, we have the meaning of the foster family as a temporary place to live, which is not always interpreted as an emotional "home", but can be thought of as a "home", even as a guest. This points to the ambivalence of feelings of belonging that are simultaneously subject to practices of normalization (Reimer 2017). The adolescent refugees are confronted with these practices of normalization in everyday life within their placement context, as they will always have experiences of discontinuity in relation to the place where they live and the social relationships they establish (Kohli 2011). Thus UMR present being at home not only as a place of growing up but also as a place of everyday experiences (Ahmed 1999, p. 341). The foster family can sometimes serve as a place of being at home, but not always, as the case of Ahmend shows. This is important because for these young people being at home and feeling at home can also mean having 'landed' and found a place where they can stay, as the quotation at the beginning of this paper shows. However, the interpretation of home and the associated negotiation of feelings of belonging is related not only to the context of "foster families" but also to the "assimilation context of Switzerland" or to an individual peer group (Riegel/Geisen 2010). Accordingly, we can understand the feeling of being at home as an important dimension of the processes of negotiating belonging. At the same time, the interpretation of "home" need not be limited to a fixed place. Especially for people in transnational migration processes the meaning of home and belonging is fluid and dynamic. This, in turn, points to the multidimensionality of arrival for UMR in different contexts of life as well as the constant need to negotiate feelings and orders of belonging in various social relationships with others. Compared to other foster children, they not only have to handle their positioning in the various family-contexts (family of origin, guest family) and with respect to various degrees of belonging (guest, family member), but also in the contexts of cultural belonging and residential status of asylum law.

This article can be regarded as an important first step towards a better understanding of the dynamics of doing foster families for unaccompanied minor refugees and their foster parents. We were able to reconstruct multiple perspectives of young refugees and foster parents, and to develop some ideas about how these perspectives are interrelated. Nevertheless, there are more questions waiting to be addressed. First, we need to include a much broader sample in such an analysis, in order to identify relevant conditions and variations of doing family with unaccompanied minor refugees. Furthermore, we need to analyze ethnographic material in order to gain some insights into the practices being used by those who are doing foster family. And finally, we have to expand our view by including various residential contexts. The extent

to which specific aspects of processes of arriving and feelings of belonging are seen among young refugees can only be clarified through a comparative analysis of different care contexts.

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