

THE POLITICS AND POSSIBILITIES OF BELONGING:

Masculinity, Narrative and the Governance of Asylum

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Across the globe, asylum systems are increasingly central to how mobility, difference, and belonging are governed. As forced displacement persists at record levels, asylum regimes remain deeply uneven, producing hierarchies of deservingness that shape who is recognised as vulnerable, legitimate, or capable of belonging. Single men, in particular, are frequently positioned through dominant representations that cast masculinity as risk-laden, deceptive, or culturally incompatible. These problem-saturated storylines travel across borders, informing policy design, service provision, and everyday encounters within asylum and settlement contexts.

Drawing on the concepts of configurations, representations, and encounters, this keynote examines how masculinity is constructed and governed within contemporary asylum systems. It engages Yuval-Davis's work on the politics of belonging and everyday bordering to illustrate how boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are not only established through law and policy, but are continually enacted through social narratives and routine interactions with welfare systems, service providers, employers, and communities. These everyday bordering practices render belonging as conditional, provisional, and gendered. At the same time, it draws on my research on transnational settlement to foreground how asylum seekers negotiate belonging across multiple sites, scales, and temporalities beyond typically imagined integration pathways, often constrained by methodological nationalism.

By bringing these perspectives together, the keynote explores not only the constraints imposed by asylum governance, but also the possibilities of belonging that emerge in an increasingly, though unevenly, mobile world. It argues for a more relational and transnational understanding of belonging grounded in both structural power and lived experience.

March 16, 2026

16:00–17:20

HU-Hauptgebäude

R. 2249a