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Conditional Belonging

Listening to Unaccompanied Young Refugees' Voices

ULRIKA WERNESJÖ



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Abstract

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This thesis explores negotiations of belonging among unaccompanied young refugees in Sweden. The thesis further aims to shed light on methodological aspects of bringing out their voices. The analysis draws on postcolonial and poststructuralist approaches to belonging and relates belonging to the concepts of home, place, racialization and notions of "Swedishness".

The thesis analyses qualitative interviews with 17 young people, who arrived in Sweden as unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors and have been granted permanent residency. The interviews are complemented with walk-alongs and photography-based interviews.

Paper I gives an overview and discussion of research on unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors. I argue that there is a lack of their voices in the research, and that their own agency and perspectives are not addressed due to a focus on vulnerability and emotional health (or lack thereof). Paper II, which is delimited to participants in a rural village, shows that they negotiate belonging and a sense of home related to places but that othering is constraining. In paper II and III I suggest that the participants' belongings and position in Sweden can be understood as conditional due to othering and racialization. In paper III, I argue that expressing gratitude can be understood as a form of impression management and, thus be a strategy to negotiate their position in the interview setting as in the host country.

I finally argue that in order to understand the participants' negotiations of belonging attention has to be paid to their agency as well as the conditioning of belonging in discourses and in interactions on the local level.

Keywords: unaccompanied refugee minors, belonging, home, place, racialization, negotiation, gratitude, young age, qualitative methods, sociological listening

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List of Papers

This thesis is based on the following papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

- I Wernesjö, U. (2012) Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children: Whose Perspective? *Childhood*, 19(4): 495–507
- II Wernesjö, U. (In revision) Landing in a Rural Village: Home and Belonging from the Perspectives of Unaccompanied Young Refugees.
- III Wernesjö, U. (Submitted) Managing a Conditional Position in Sweden: Unaccompanied Young Refugees' Presentations of Self in Relation to Racism, Discrimination and Gratitude

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Ulrika Wernesjö, Uppsala, January 2014

Introduction

No one can be as lonely, as sad and as vulnerable as the unaccompanied refugee child

This statement was written by Hanif Bali, a politician for the neo-liberal conservative party Moderaterna, in a debate article in the daily evening paper *Aftonbladet* in 2009. He had himself arrived in Sweden as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child at the age of three. The debate, in which several decision-makers, journalists and opinion-makers shared their views, concerned the reception of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people in Sweden, and the lack of placements available in the municipalities. At this time, the number of children under 18 who were applying for asylum in Sweden without their parents was steadily increasing, and there were not enough municipalities who had signed an agreement with the Migration Board (Migrationsverket) to provide shelter and care for them during the asylum-seeking process. In the debate article, Hanif Bali, by emphasising these children's inherent vulnerability, and by speaking from the position of once having been an unaccompanied refugee child himself, appealed to the hearts of decision-makers to maintain the image of Sweden, internationally as well as nationally, as a child-friendly nation that values human rights. Despite the liveliness of the debate, the voices of the children and young people concerned were not heard. Rather than being allowed to tell their own stories, they were talked about. Against this backdrop, I became interested in what these children and young people had to say about their experiences of their life in Sweden and of the challenges and possibilities that they saw in their everyday life and hopes for future.

Since 2000, increasing attention has been paid in government policy and in the media to unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children in Sweden. This has occurred for a number of reasons: the increasing numbers; revelations of inadequacies in the care and reception; and a focus upon children who disappear during the asylum-seeking process (e.g. Stretmo 2010). The numbers of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Sweden has increased rapidly from 388 in 2004, to 3578 in 2012 (Migrationsverket 2013)¹.

¹ Since 2010, Sweden has received the highest number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people in Europe. This represents a change in trends as can be seen from the statistics: a few years ago only a fraction of unaccompanied children coming to Europe arrived in Sweden (*Dagens Nyheter* 2010-06-12, Migrationsverket 2013).

The majority (3253) of those who arrived in 2012 were boys between 13-17 years old. Up until July 16th 2013, 1286 had applied for asylum, of which 210 were girls (16%). In recent years, most of them came from Afghanistan and Somalia (Socialstyrelsen 2013a).

The term ‘unaccompanied asylum-seeking children’² highlights salient characteristics of this particular category of both minors and asylum-seekers. According to the United Nations’ High Commissioner for Refugees’ (UNHCR), the definition is “those [children] who are separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible to do so” (1994, p.121), which is the definition used in policy and research.³ In 2006 specific regulations concerning unaccompanied children were adopted in Swedish policy on the reception of asylum-seekers (e.g. SFS 1994:137, SOU 2011:64).

Even though the increasing attention on this group of children in recent years may suggest that it is a relatively new turn of events in the context of migration, a historical perspective shows that for a considerable period unaccompanied children have arrived in Sweden and Norway due to forced migration (Gustafsson et al 2013, 2012, Backlund 2012, Hesse 2009, Eide 2005), even though their countries of origin have changed over time due to conflicts and social and political instabilities around the world. In the 1930s and during the Second World War, Jewish (Lomfors 1996) and Finnish children (Langebro 1994) arrived in Sweden, and in the late 1950s Hungarian children and young people fled to Sweden (Svensson 1992). They are, hence, part of larger processes of migration and globalization in the world (Eide 2012, p.22, Watters 2008).

The children and young people concerned share, at least to some extent, experiences during their forced migration and in the host country. However, there are also differences between them in terms of age, gender, nationality, and in terms of experiences and individual life histories (Eide 2012, Kohli 2007, e.g. paper I).

Malkki (1992) writes about ‘the pathologization of uprootedness’, and argues that refugees and migrants become constructed as “matters out of place”, as they deviate from the implicit understanding that individuals belong to a specific territory and nation-state. This deviant position may also be translated to children who are separated from their parents, or whose parents are dead. From Western notions of a carefree, safe and idyllic childhood, these children are “out of place” and outside the realms of what could be considered as a “normal” childhood from the perspective of Swedish so-

² ‘Separated children’ is an alternative definition, used by Save the Children in Europe, that highlights that the children are separated from their parents, even though they may be accompanied by adults at the time of arrival.

³ The law on the reception of asylum-seekers et al (my translation, in Swedish: *Lag om mottagande av asylsökande m.fl.*, SFS 1994:137), 1§ 5th paragraph, regulates the definition of who is categorized as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child in Sweden.

ciety (e.g. Engebritsen 2012, Panter-Brick 2000, paper I). Discursively, the image of unaccompanied children is characterized by dissonance and ambivalence, where they are portrayed either as victims in need of care or as untrustworthy ‘others’ who pose a threat to the nation-state (Stretmo 2014 forthcoming, 2010, Eastmond and Ascher 2011, Ní Laoire et al 2011)⁴. For instance, within a culture of mistrust that is embedded in the asylum process (e.g. Norström 2004), there is suspicion about whether they really are children and whether they really are in need of protection and care, and not simply bogus adult men or so called “anchor children” who are sent away by their parents who take advantage of the host country’s asylum system.

During the work on this thesis I have met professionals who work in the reception and care system, and they bring an additional way of looking at this group of children and young people. Even though the children and young people’s vulnerable position is emphasised, a univocal focus on vulnerability is rejected and instead focus is on their strengths, resources and individuality. “They are so resourceful”, “they have managed to get themselves here, after all” and “many of them have taken care of themselves for a long time already” are phrases that I have heard in these encounters, especially in reference to teenage boys. Hence, they are both depicted as children in need (paper I, e.g. Fernqvist 2011) and as young people who will become a resource for Swedish society (e.g. Qvortrup 1994). In line with Kohli (2007) and Eide (2005), I argue that there is a need to adopt a frame of understanding that includes both perspectives (e.g. Wahlström 2009). Unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children should not be understood solely as victims, in the same way as they cannot be understood simply as strong and resourceful. Rather, they may be resourceful and strong in some aspects and periods of their lives, whilst being vulnerable in others, and there are differences within the group due to their individual experiences.

In this doctoral thesis, I use the terms ‘asylum-seeker’ and ‘refugee’ variously in the discussion, and for that reason my use of these terms need to be defined. According to the Aliens Law (SFS 2005:716), the term asylum-seeker is reserved for those who have applied for asylum, and whose application has not yet been legally approved (e.g. Aspinall and Watters 2010, p.2). In addition, Aspinall and Watters include those whose applications have been refused, which I also do. The term refugee, on the other hand, is, in its legal form, usually adopted for asylum-seekers who have been given recognized refugee status in accordance with the Geneva Convention and, hence, the Aliens Act. However, in research on forced migration it usually also encompasses those who have been granted humanitarian protection (ibid). In this study I use asylum-seeker when I refer to children who are waiting for their asylum application to be processed, and also for those who

⁴ Also Terrio 2008, Doná and Veale 2011

continue to stay in the country after it has been rejected. I use refugee in cases where they have had their asylum application approved by the migration authorities, with no distinction between the grounds for the decision. The participants in this project are thus referred to as refugees, since they had all been granted permanent residency after having applied for asylum.

In relation to this, the question of age categories also becomes relevant. Being a refugee child is, according to Watters (2008, p.7) an ascribed identity “temporally defined as relating normally to the ages of 0-17 years based on Western conceptions of childhood and the transition to adulthood.” With this administrative categorization may follow a risk that other aspects of the child’s situation are overshadowed and excluded (Malmsten 2012, p.35). In a legal sense, the age of majority (18 years) seems to be a clear distinction between children and adults. From a broader perspective, however, the line becomes fuzzy.

In government discourses, both young people and asylum-seeking people have been understood as occupying transitional ‘in-between’ spaces, or living in the ‘borderlands’ between origin and ‘host’ societies, and childhood and adulthood. (Sirriyeh 2010, p.214)

Sirriyeh’s discussion of the in-between spaces is of particular relevance for this research project, since it concerns young people who are refugees. I refer to the participants in the study as ‘young people’ to highlight their in-between position as teenagers and young adults, and use ‘children’, or children and young people interchangeably, when discussing the category of as a whole. The participants occupy the in-between space between adulthood and childhood, and even though Sirriyeh refers to the in-between space in relation to asylum-seekers, I would like to suggest that it may still be relevant for those newly-arrived⁵ immigrants who have been granted protection and residence. Bearing in mind that the majority of them have only been in Sweden for less than five years⁶, it could be argued that they are still, to some degree, in a process of transition. Andersson et al (2010, p.20) defines the transition process as the time between when the decision to leave the country of origin is made, and when the individual is granted permanent residency or leaves Sweden. According to Andersson et al the process is characterized by uncertainty and ambivalence, since the individual has left his/her social

⁵ Swedish authorities define ‘newly-arrived’ as those immigrants who have recently received residence permits in Sweden (Riksrevisionen 2006, p.14). Even though it may be problematic to adopt official terms, that seem to be neutral, I use the term to emphasise the position that the young people in this doctoral thesis are in. The term encompasses those that have arrived in Sweden quite recently, and thereby also highlights their situation in the host country in terms of, for instance, their position in the educational system and/or labour market, and access to social networks.

⁶ The majority (16 of 17) of the participants had, at the time of the interviews, been in Sweden between 1 ½ and four years, and one participant had been in Sweden for eight years.

competences and networks in the country of origin and has to deal with an unpredictable situation with new conditions in the host country (ibid). Rather than saying that they have left their social competences I would suggest that their social competences may have shifted or are valued differently and may have to some extent become less useful in the new context. The young people this study concerns could be described as still occupying an in-between space in Swedish society, and continue to be in a transition process, both in terms of age and as newly-arrived. Their legal status in the host country is determined, but other aspects, such as their position in the education system, labour and housing markets and their access to social networks, may not have been established to the same extent.

Against the backdrop of forced migration and disruption, the concept of belonging comes to bear a particular importance and therefore the thesis is centred on this concept. Anthias (2006, p.22) has written that the question of “‘where do I belong’ may be prompted by a feeling that there are ranges of places, spaces, locales and identities that we feel we do not or cannot belong to”. Here, the focus of concerns is, in particular, belonging in everyday life and in relation to place. However, the question of belonging is also raised in order to investigate how the young people are positioned potentially as ‘others’ and position themselves within the Swedish nation-state’s ‘imagined community’. Describing the nation as such sheds light on its social (and historical) construction: it places stress on the ‘imaginary’ dimension where individuals who have never met each other, imagine that they are members of the same national collectivity (Anderson 1991, p.6).

I began this introduction by referring to a debate concerning unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children, and the reception and care of them, which has taken place in the last few years. Looking at the debate, these children and young people seem to be a group that is frequently talked about, but they are rarely allowed, or enabled, to speak for themselves. In this form of representation, they become marginalised; their voices are not heard, their identities are reduced to stereotypes, and with a pathologisation and focus on vulnerability they are reduced to victims that are seen as lacking agency. This is also discussed in the overview of research in paper I, which highlights the need for research that takes the children and young people’s own voices as a starting point. With a pathologisation focus, there is also a disregard of the things that these children and young people have in common with others their same age – such as going to school, leisure activities, social relationships and the process of becoming an adult – and instead, they come to be seen as a deviant group. Against this backdrop, the focus of this thesis is to investigate the situation for unaccompanied young refugees in Sweden by bringing forward their own voices. In order to do this, there is a need to be sensitive to similarities as well as differences in relation to other children and young people, and within the group concerned. The children and young people concerned share experiences of migration, of being sepa-

rated from their parents and of being unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors and therefore being taken care of by Swedish authorities within the reception system. They also share the position of being children and teenagers. This thesis is aimed at exploring negotiations of belonging among unaccompanied young refugees in Sweden.

Aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to explore negotiations of belonging among unaccompanied young refugees in Sweden, with a focus on home, place, racialization and notions of “Swedishness”. Since this exploration is based on interaction with unaccompanied young refugees the thesis further aims to shed light on methodological aspects of bringing out their voices. The research questions are as follows:

- In what ways do the respondents understand belonging and home, and in what ways do they construct feelings of belonging and home in relation to social relations and place in their everyday lives?
- To what extent and in what ways do racialization, notions of “Swedishness” and exclusion interact with their understandings and negotiations of belonging?
- To what extent can the presentations of self that they make in the interview situation be understood as reflecting potential strategies for managing the ways in which they are positioned in Sweden?
- How are they positioned in this study in relation to what could be seen as an “ideal” participant?

The two first research questions are discussed both in paper II, which addresses belonging and home from the perspective of unaccompanied young refugees in a rural village and in the theoretical section of the thesis. The third research question is addressed in paper III, which concerns how the unaccompanied young refugees talk about racism, discrimination and gratitude in the interview situation. The last research question is discussed both in paper I, Paper III and the methodology section of this thesis.

Disposition of the thesis

The thesis consists of three papers and an introductory part (*kappa*). The *kappa* consists of seven sections. In the second section, the Swedish migration policy and the reception system for unaccompanied children and young people is described in order to illustrate the system that unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors face when they arrive in Sweden. In the third section,

the studies that comprise the thesis are summarized in short. After this comes the fourth section, which gives an overview of research on unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children, with a particular focus on the social and behavioural sciences. In this section, the thesis is positioned in relation to this research. In the fifth section I describe the theoretical and conceptual framework for the thesis. In this discussion the concept of belonging has particular importance, together with home, place, racialization and notions of “Swedishness”. In the sixth section, I describe the methodological approach and the fieldwork of the thesis. I also discuss challenges during the fieldwork, reflexivity and ethical considerations. In the seventh and last section, I bring the findings of the studies together and discuss their contribution to the knowledge on unaccompanied refugee children and young people in the host society.

Unaccompanied minors in the hands of the official authorities – Policy and context

The unaccompanied asylum-seeking child is an administrative category and due to the vulnerable situation they are in as separated from their parents, they have more extended contact with Swedish public authorities and social welfare services than is the case for other asylum-seekers, children in families included. Their asylum applications are supposed to be given priority and the categorization of them as such children is also of significance for what happens after the decision has been either approved or rejected. It has consequences for how they are cared for by the Swedish welfare services both during the asylum-seeking process, and on their way to adulthood afterwards (Stretmo and Melander 2013).

The young people in focus in this thesis have all crossed borders into Europe and passed through the needle's eye of Swedish migration policy. They are now living in Sweden with permanent residency, although many of them are still living in group-homes provided by the social welfare services. In order to understand unaccompanied children's and young people's position in Sweden it is crucial to turn attention to the Swedish migration policy and the reception system for unaccompanied asylum seeking children under the age of 18.

Policy

For welfare states today, international migration not only entails traditional concerns of admission of people into the territory of the nation-state, it also concerns control of access to welfare services, naturalization and integration (Lewis 2004, p.32). In Swedish migration policy there is a constant balancing act between valuing human rights (including protection of refugees) on the one hand and regulating migration on the other. Sweden has been described as one of the most generous countries when it comes to migration (Hansen 2009, Vestin 2006). Since the 1990s, however, the successive Swedish governments have become more restrictive in this regard (Sager 2011, Hansen 2009, Vestin 2006, Abiri 2000). Since Sweden is a member of the European Union, Swedish migration policy has to be in accordance with the European Union's policy and agreements, such as the Schengen agreement

and the Dublin convention, which Sweden has signed. In short, the Schengen agreement entails the opening of borders, and increasing mobility, within the European Union. In order to uphold the increased mobility for European Union citizens within the Schengen agreement, the outer borders are strengthened and entry is restricted. The Dublin Convention has been put into effect in order to prevent asylum-seekers from pursuing “asylum-shopping” (i.e. to turn in asylum application in numerous countries). According to the Dublin Convention it is the first country in which asylum-seekers arrive, and make themselves known to public authorities, that is obliged to process their asylum application. The Dublin convention also applies to unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors, even though this has been debated.⁷ In this context, the possibility for non-privileged migrants – and asylum-seekers – to obtain an entry visa is severely limited, which leads them to take irregular and dangerous routes into Europe to Sweden (Sager 2011, p.48, Khosravi 2010).

The grounds for individuals to be granted residency are regulated in the Aliens Act⁸ (SFS 2005:716). Asylum-seekers can be granted permanent residency, in accordance with the Aliens Act, if they are considered *refugees with refugee status* (4 ch 1§), as *persons otherwise in need of protection* (4 ch 2§) or if they are in *particularly distressing circumstances* (5 ch 6§). No distinctions are made between children and adults, or women and men in relation to the formulation of the grounds for protection and residency in the Aliens Act. Nevertheless, in line with the United Nation’s Convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC, United Nations 1989), the preamble of the Aliens Act states that children’s best interests should be taken into account in matters that concern them (1 ch 10 §) and the assessment of particularly distressing circumstances is supposed to be more generous in cases that concern children (Lundberg 2013). However, this principle has to be weighed against other political and societal interests, such as the demand for regulated immigration (prop. 1996/97:25; e.g. Lundberg 2013, p.72; Andersson, H. E. 2010). In line with the best interests of the child, unaccompanied children may be granted permanent residency if their parents or close family members cannot be located and there is no other adequate form of reception in the children’s country of origin (Stretmo 2010, p.248). However, studies have shown that, in practice, the assessment of the asylum claims is based on the experiences of the adults, which means that children’s specific situations, experiences and asylum claims are at risk of being neglected (Lundberg 2013, 2011). In her research on the child perspective in migration policy, Lundberg (2011) stresses the importance of the UNHCR’s guidelines on child-specific persecution in the asylum process, but emphasises that there is

⁷ However, in the case of Dublin referrals from Sweden to Greece there has been an exception since May 2008. Due to the situation for asylum-seekers and migrants there, Swedish migration authorities have decided not to send back unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors to Greece (MIG 2008:42, www.lagen.nu).

⁸ *Utlänningslagen*, in Swedish.

still a long way to go before it is fully implemented in practice. Moreover, Lundberg (2009, p.37) makes a distinction between the ‘child perspective’, i.e. a case officer’s or adult’s understanding of what is best for the child, and a ‘child’s perspective’ of what is best for her-/himself. Hence, the literature suggests that there is a tension between the best interests of children and the migration policy, and furthermore that children’s asylum claims and situations are not sufficiently taken into consideration. Despite these drawbacks, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are granted protection and permanent residency in Sweden to a much greater extent than asylum-seekers in general. In 2010, the approval rate in the first instance, i.e. the Migration Board, was 66 % (Migrationsverket 2012), in comparison to 27 % for asylum-seekers in total (Migrationsverket 2011).

Against the backdrop of the current migration policy and the ‘best interest of the child’, the distinction between adult and child becomes important. For that reason, the Migration Board uses age assessment in cases where the asylum-seeker claims to be an unaccompanied minor. Usually, a case officer makes the decision solely based on her/his own impression of the child and on information given by the child. In rare cases, medical examinations are used, even though such examinations have been criticized for their inadequate measurements and for working against the child rather than the opposite (Hjern et al 2012, e.g. Watters 2008, Crawley 2007).

Reception and care

In Sweden today the reception of asylum-seekers is highly regulated and institutionalized, and even more so when it concerns unaccompanied children. The present organizational structure for the reception of unaccompanied minors has existed since 2006. Stretmo (2010) analyses national policy concerning unaccompanied children in Sweden and Norway during the period 2000–2009. During this time period, public authorities in Sweden and Norway devoted great attention on how to effectively organize the reception in order to provide care and housing at times when increasing numbers of unaccompanied children arrive, which was the case in Sweden during the 2000s. In addition, stricter migration policies and the public media debate have also highlighted the authorities’ inadequate care of unaccompanied children (p.248). These inadequacies led to a change in the legislation and in July 2006, the municipalities took over from the Migration Board the responsibility for care and living arrangements.⁹ The reason put forward for this division of responsibility was that the social services in the municipali-

⁹ In Socialstyrelsen (2007) there are references to the Acts that were changed. For adults asylum-seekers and families the Migration Board is responsible for the reception, not the municipalities.

ties have greater competence in working with children and young people in a vulnerable situation, for instance children who are living separated from their parents (prop 2005/06:46).

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are entitled to receive comfortable and suitable living arrangement, to a guardian who undertakes on the legal guardianship in the parents' absence¹⁰ and to support in their everyday lives. They also share the same rights to education and access to health care as all other children in Sweden (Stretmo and Melander 2013, p.7). The responsibility for them is split between several public authorities: The Migration Board, the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) and the Swedish municipalities, county councils and county administrative boards¹¹, with the first two having the most contact with the children and young people in question. The Migration Board is responsible for the asylum application and financial support – as long as the child is registered as an asylum-seeker – appointing public counsel for the child and to deal with the deportation in cases where the application is rejected.¹² Since July 2006, the municipalities have been responsible for investigating the needs of the child and for making decisions on appropriate living arrangements and interventions (which is also the case for those asylum-seeking children who are living with relatives and kin), for schooling and for locating the child's family members. It is also the municipalities that appoint a guardian for the child, who will act as a provisional legal guardian for the child, and be responsible for the child's personal situation and affairs during his/her time as an asylum-seeking minor (SFS 2005:429, Hedlund 2012, Fälldin and Strand 2010). For those unaccompanied children who are granted permanent residency, the municipality continues to be responsible for interventions up until they reach adulthood (Migrationsverket 2010).

According to the Social Services Act¹³ (SFS 2001:453), when a child arrives in Sweden and seeks asylum without parents or other caregivers, temporary living arrangements¹⁴, usually in the form of a group-home, are pro-

¹⁰ Unaccompanied minors' right to a guardian *ad litem* is regulated in the Act (SFS 2005:429) on Custodians for Unaccompanied Minors (*Lag om god man för ensamkommande barn*, in Swedish).

¹¹ The County councils (Landstingen) are responsible for providing the same level of health service for asylum-seeking children under the age of 18 as for other children who are citizens or residents in Sweden, including child psychiatric and dental care. The National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) supervise the municipalities' reception of unaccompanied children. The Country administrative boards (Länsstyrelserna) supervise the chief guardians that appoint guardians for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

¹² Moreover, the Migration Board is also responsible for signing agreements on reception with the Swedish municipalities, and for allocating asylum-seeking children and young people to the municipalities.

¹³ *Socialtjänstlagen*, in Swedish.

¹⁴ The municipalities that are responsible for the accommodation and care on arrival are usually located close to the Migration Board's Application Units for unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors (Migrationsverket 2012)

vided. As soon as possible thereafter, the child should be transferred to a municipality that will be responsible for care and living arrangements during the asylum-seeking process (Migrationsverket 2012). When unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are granted permanent residency, the municipality in which the child is living continues to be responsible up until the child reaches adulthood. In cases where the asylum application is rejected, the municipality is responsible up until the age of majority, or until the child returns to her/his country of origin either voluntarily or by force.

Unaccompanied children can live with relatives they have in Sweden, in cases where it is seen as an appropriate living arrangement by the municipalities. However, more than half of them are living in group-homes, run by private or public organizations or family homes provided by the social services.¹⁵ A large number of the group-homes have been criticized for inadequate performance in taking care of the needs of the children and for not making individual assessments (Stretmo and Melander 2013, Malmsten 2012). The National Board of Health and Welfare's reviews of HVB group-homes provision, in general and specifically for unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children, has continuously shown unsatisfactory results for many group-homes. Moreover, uncertainty concerning how unaccompanied minors should be treated leads to passivity in the work with them. There is also a lack of participation by the children themselves, which, according to the report, is problematic since children and young people who are engaged in their own care recover more easily (Socialstyrelsen 2013b). In order to clarify the regulations and the division of responsibilities between the different authorities and actors, the National Board of Health and Welfare published guidelines for the reception system and care in 2013 (2013a).¹⁶

In this section I have described the migration policy and reception system for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children so as to illustrate the contextual situation they encounter in Sweden. After this background, we now turn to the summary of studies within the thesis.

¹⁵ For those unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are over the age of 14 – and who do not live with relatives – group-homes (such as HVB-homes) are the most common living arrangement (Fälldin and Strand 2010, p.99). Other forms of living arrangements are family homes and EBO (own accommodation – living with relatives or kin).

¹⁶ See also Fälldin and Strand (2010) book for practitioners and others interested, on the reception of unaccompanied minors. It contains an overview of the reception and asylum process, and the responsibilities of the different actors involved.

Summary of studies

Study I

The first study, which paper I is based on, is an analysis of existing research concerning unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children and discusses the implications of this research for understanding these children as a particularly vulnerable category. The research that was conducted at the time of the study was primarily from the medical and behavioural sciences viewpoint and focused on investigating the emotional (un)health and (lack of) well-being among unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The findings from this research suggest that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are a particularly vulnerable group and are at higher risk than other children of having or developing emotional problems and psychiatric diagnoses such as PTSD and depression. The reasons for their emotional un-health, as suggested by the research examined, are their previous and present experiences of war, disruption, loss and of the situation of being an asylum-seeker – a situation that is characterised by uncertainty – and that they have been separated from their parent(s). The separation from their parents is seen as the most aggravating circumstance for the children, and the research does not address whether other adults, in some way or another, may fill the role of the absent parent(s). Also at the heart of the analysis in this paper is the way in which the children's participation and own perspectives on their situation are often restricted by the way the research is conducted. From a sociological perspective, the study sees a potential for studying unaccompanied children and their situations by exploring their own perspectives and experiences in the host country to a greater extent than has been done so far.

Study II

The second study, which paper II is based on, is an analysis of constructions of belonging and home among unaccompanied young refugees. It is based on interviews and walk-alongs with nine of the participants, living in a village in the rural north of Sweden. The reason for this geographical limitation was to get an understanding of migration experiences in a rural area in order to explore more deeply the multiple dimensions and complexities of such a place. I choose to focus only on the participants living in that area. The re-

stricted space of an article could not encompass a comparison, with all the quotations needed in a qualitative study. The study discusses the village and the group-home where the young people live, and also their social relations with adults, other unaccompanied refugees and other young people in the village. Theoretically the study draws on poststructuralist and postcolonial approaches to the issue of home and belonging and uses Simmel's theoretical figure the stranger in the analysis. The study finds that even though the young people's sense of belonging and feelings of home may be challenged by their form of housing, and although they are refused participation in decision-making, excluded and positioned as 'strangers', the young people in different ways construct some kind of belonging and feelings of home based on the social relationships and places that are available to them in the village, which in the paper is referred to as Barnsele.

Study III

The third study, which paper III is based on, investigates the ways in which the participants talk – or do not talk – about racism, racialization and exclusion during the interviews. It was sometimes a challenge to address questions to them about racism and negative experiences (including discrimination) in Sweden. The participants rather focused on positive experiences and on expressing gratitude. This made it relevant to look at the interview as a setting for their presentations of self, and the empirical material is therefore analysed using Goffman's theorising. The study distinguishes different ways in which the unaccompanied young refugees position themselves in relation to racism, discrimination and gratitude, and in doing so also make presentations of self. They use a range of different strategies such as presenting themselves as grateful, questioning negative stereotypes and minimizing the impact of racism in Sweden, but some also make presentation of self as subjected to racism. The study suggests that the interview-situation is not a neutral setting where a person tells her/his story. It is also a setting where it is possible to make a favourable presentation of self by using impression management, which among the participants seems to encompass avoiding descriptions of racism and discrimination. Hence, it may be a challenge to investigate the effects of racism and discrimination in interviews with young people who may be subjected to it.

Previous research

Since 2000 there has been increasing interest in the wellbeing and situation of unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children in research, both internationally and in Sweden (a few years later) (paper I).¹⁷ The reasons put forward for this are a lack of knowledge concerning their situation, an increased focus on this group of children in policy and media, and, in Sweden, the increasing numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Existing research can be categorized by topic as follows (Eide 2005, paper I)¹⁸:

- Migration policy and its relation to the principle of the best interest of the child (Lundberg 2011, 2009, Bhabha 1999 amongst others),
- Emotional health and wellbeing (or lack thereof) (Hodes et al 2008, Derluyn and Broekaert 2007 amongst others),
- The reception system and care (Stretmo and Melander 2013, Backlund et al 2012, Kohli 2007 amongst others),
- The children's background and previous experience (Hopkins and Hill 2008 amongst others)¹⁹

Research on the reception system and care for unaccompanied minors can be further divided into studies that focus on the social services, authorities and resource persons, and studies that bring forward the children and young people's perspectives. Since paper I is concerned with existing research on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children this section is predominantly concerned with studies that have been published since paper I was first submitted, and with studies that were not included in the paper, due to the limitations of its focus. This means that the following overview is primarily concerned with research on the reception system and care.

In order to complement paper I, the overview has a focus on studies from the social and behavioural sciences and is limited to studies from the global

¹⁷ For an additional overview of research on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, in Sweden and internationally, see Brunberg et al (2011).

¹⁸ Eide's (2005) categorization of research does not include the fourth category – background and previous experience. I added this category in paper I.

¹⁹ This area of research is relatively small, and there is a lack of knowledge concerning the background and previous experiences of unaccompanied children and young people, which, according to Kohli (2006a), leads to an inability to see the children as normal individuals living an everyday life (e.g. paper I)

North, with a particular focus on Europe, and especially Britain, Scandinavia, and Sweden. The reason for this geographical limitation has, in part, to do with the research available, but a more important reason is that this allows comparison, since the organization of the asylum and reception system, and conditions for asylum-seekers and refugees are in some general ways more similar which makes the research results more relevant for the Swedish context.

In migration research, there has been a lack of perspectives that focus on childhood and on the everyday lives and experiences of child migrants (Bak 2013). In the last few years, however, this has started to change and anthologies, books and in 2010 a special issue of the academic journal *Childhood* (2010:2), which focus on child migrants and refugees and their situation in the host country, have been published (Bak and Brömssen 2013, Andersson et al 2010). A number of these studies are influenced by the sociology of childhood that was established in the 1980s and 1990s (James and James 2004, Qvortrup 1994, Alanen 1988). In recent years this theoretical turn has also influenced the research on unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children. Research that focuses on these children's situation in the host country, and that takes the perspective of the children and young people as a starting point, has grown during the last few years. In 2011 the Nordic Network for Refugee Cooperation on Unaccompanied Minors (NordURM)²⁰, was initiated in order to promote research and to establish a platform for interchange of knowledge.

This overview is divided into four sections. The first section deals with research on social constructions of this category of children. Thereafter follows a section on research on the reception system and care, and, in line with the need I stressed in paper I, the third section deals with research on the children and young people's experiences and situation in the host country, with a particular focus on the asylum process and the reception system. In the last section I turn to research that to some degree brings up questions of belonging and social relations outside the reception system, and I position the thesis in relation to existing research on unaccompanied children and young people.

²⁰ For more information, visit NordURM's website:
<http://www.nkvts.no/NordURM/Pages/NordURM.aspx>

Social constructions of the unaccompanied child

The social constructions and discourses surrounding unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children have been the focus of a few studies. In his research, Charles Watters (2008) focuses on refugee children – of which unaccompanied minors constitute a part – and how they are treated when they seek to cross borders into the industrial parts of the world. According to Watters, children find themselves at a number of interfaces with technologies of government, which include security and border control. This is referred to as ‘immigration control trajectories’. They also face what Watters refers to as ‘the welfare trajectory’, which includes programs of social support and psychosocial wellbeing. The young people that are the focus of this thesis have all faced immigration control and the social service, which makes these trajectories relevant for consideration. Watters concludes that:

The interrelationship between these aspects of government reveals acute tensions between conflicting views of the refugee children as ‘untrustworthy children’ or as ‘damaged children’ requiring psychological and emotional rehabilitation. (p.3)

In addition to Watters, other researchers have shown the ambivalent discourses concerning refugee children, and in particular unaccompanied minors. In a Canadian study, Bryan and Denov (2011) suggest that unaccompanied refugee children may become the focus of multiple political, racialized and gendered discourses, in which they are constructed as a risk to society. In an anti-refugee discourse they are constructed as a threat to the nation-state, and simultaneously, in an anti-youth discourse, the boys and young men in particular are constructed as potential criminals. Meanwhile, Bryan and Denov’s study is based on interviews with unaccompanied minors and stakeholders who work with them, Eide (2005) and Stretmo (2014 forthcoming, 2010) are more interested in social constructions in policy. Eide analyses the ways in which the Norwegian society has handled unaccompanied refugee minors in different historical contexts from the late 1930s. One dilemma for the Norwegian government, according to Eide, is how Norway should act in order to promote itself as a democratic and humanistic country that takes the children’s situation into account, at the same time as maintaining a restrictive refugee and immigration policy. In the documents, unaccompanied children become ambiguous, as the title of Eide’s book, *Ambiguous children*²¹ (my translation) suggests. There is, for instance, an ambiguity in attending to the child’s individual situation and best interests on the one hand, and, on the other, generalizing about these children and what their needs are. Since the study is based on four historical periods, it gives an image of the discursive shifts and changes that have occurred over time. Eide

²¹ *Tvetydige barn* in original.

argues that in the last period, the 1990s, unaccompanied children became othered through pathologization due to their previous experiences, forced migration and separation. This is a shift from the earlier periods, where unaccompanied children were othered through exotization.

Stretmo also studies discourses in policy concerning unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Sweden and Norway during the period 2000-2009. In a contribution to an anthology, Stretmo (2010) discusses the ambivalent images that come into shape in policy documents such as the adult who strategically claims to be a child in order to be granted permanent residency (“strategic minor”), in contrast to the “traumatized child” who is a victim of forced migration and separation from his/her parents. By using the metaphor of the “anchor child”, unaccompanied children are further seen as not separated from their family, but as acting as anchors for the rest of the family to follow after the child when s/he is granted permanent residency. The final two images consider the construction of the unaccompanied children that disappear during the asylum processes. While some children disappear to other countries voluntarily (“Dublin” or “transit children”), other children disappear involuntarily due to trafficking and exploitation (the “vulnerable exploited child”). According to Stretmo, all these images show ambivalence in how the phenomenon of unaccompanied children should be understood in policy, and consequently what measures the government needs to take. The children are discursively constructed on the one hand as bogus, with suspicion thrown upon them in a culture of mistrust. Other images construct them as victims of separations, forced migration and exploitation.

In the policy and practice, as well as in the literature, the separation from the parents is seen as causing a deviant form of childhood, and is accordingly an aggravating circumstance for the children’s situation and wellbeing (e.g. paper I). In a study from Norway, Engebritsen (2012) discusses the notions of what it means to be a child, what characterizes childhood and the best interests of the child, and what are the underlying premises for the reception of refugee children. She asks if these notions act as barriers to the understanding of the situation of refugee children and their best interests (p.158). Engebritsen argues that the best interests of the child, in this context, are based on a Western understanding of a “normal” childhood, which is idyllic and characterized by safety and living inside a family and within the country of origin (e.g. Panter-Brick 2000). Separation from the family and migration, hence, fall outside the realms of the “normal” childhood, since the best situation for growing up from this perspective is inside the family. Engebritsen suggests that the concepts of care and the best interests of the child are used rhetorically to promote national interests, not the child’s interests (p.166). Hence, as long as these aspects are not contextualized and do not take the individual child’s situation into account, they are pointless (p.168). In order to understand child migration and what constitutes the best interests of the individual child, Engebritsen argues for the need to investi-

gate discourses of belonging, separation, dependence and independence that may differ from Western, and Scandinavian notions of childhood and family (p.178).

To sum up, this section has shown how unaccompanied children and young people are constructed in a range of – sometimes contradictory – discourses. A common trait, however, is that they become a deviant category of children. I suggest that this research is important in order to understand how the social services and other actors respond to, assess and give care to them, and consequently how they understand and position themselves in relation to these social constructions. The ways in which unaccompanied young people in this thesis position themselves in relation to social constructions of them as potentially “bogus” is addressed in paper III.

In the care of the host country

In the following, the research on ways in which unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are treated in the host country will be discussed. These studies are predominantly focused on professional work (e.g. Eide 2012, Kohli 2011, 2007, 2006a, 2006b, Mitchell 2007 amongst others). Most research from Sweden that has been disseminated in recent years has been studies and evaluations regarding the reception and care (e.g. Backlund et al 2012, Brunberg and Aytar 2012, Malmsten 2012, Stretmo and Melander 2013, Brendler-Lindqvist and Larsson 2004). Kohli, who has conducted a number of studies on social work with unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee minors in Britain, argues that the interventions and work conducted in relation to this group of children and young people can, in general, be described in terms of insufficiency and inadequacy, for instance, due to organizational aspects of the reception and care (Kohli 2007). As was stated, Kohli draws this conclusion based on research from a British context, but as this section will show, there is research that suggests that insufficiencies may also be found in the Swedish reception system.

Studies on the reception and care also, to some degree, address constructions of unaccompanied children, and in particular how different understandings of the group influence the social work practice with them. Stretmo and Melander (2013) identified two overarching approaches used by social workers to how the children are seen and, thus, treated. In the first approach, the children and young people are seen as deviant. This form of othering means, in practice, that the focus is to create and maintain rules and boundaries for the children and young people concerned. In the second approach, they are, in contrast, treated like any other children or teenagers, which, in practice, means that the focus is on care and support for them.

Another FoU-study, from the Stockholm region, shows similar understandings and conceptions of unaccompanied minors among social workers

and identifies three different ambitions in the social workers' narratives: to see the child's uniqueness, to see the child's similarities with other children, and a salutogenetic perspective that focus on the healthy aspects of the children (Backlund et al 2012). Of these different perspectives, the healthy and the "normal" child were the most prominent. The questions that arise from these findings concern what is in the best interests of the child, and from whose perspective (i.e. the child's own perspective or an adult practitioner's perspective) (Lundberg 2013). Further questions concern how social workers (and others) understand these children, and the extent to which individual needs of the children are taken into account. Backlund et al argues that by focusing on the "normal" and healthy child, there is a risk that the child's individual needs are not communicated (and thus not addressed) by those who look after them. This discrepancy in the work with unaccompanied children is also highlighted by Stretmo and Melander (2013) who state that:

Despite consensus concerning unaccompanied children's risk of having, or developing, mental ill-health, it seems that caregivers and professionals are trying to avoid mentioning topics such as feelings and painful experiences when talking to the child. One reason for this may be that they want to avoid the recollection of painful experiences; another reason may be that they want to focus on the child's or young person's external adaptation. (p.18, my translation)

According to this body of research there is a reluctance to address the children's and young people's well-being. In the introduction of this thesis I discussed the tension between the image of the vulnerable child, on the one hand, and the independent able young person, on the other hand. It seems here that the focus among social workers and practitioners is on the latter. The study by Melander and Stretmo includes both interviews with actors who work with unaccompanied minors (social workers, school staff, guardians amongst others) and with the children and young people themselves, about their experiences of the reception system (see further below). The (physical) absence of the parents in the children's everyday lives is something that is highlighted by the social workers, who stress that, in today's practice, there is no actor in the children's lives who is designated to step into the role of the parents (p.13). The importance of lasting social relationships is also stressed by Malmsten (2012), who argues that the reception system is characterized by interchangeability in social relations (e.g. Brekke 2004). The children and young people are transferred from the transitional group-home, where they go on their arrival, to other municipalities, and may, thereafter, have to move again. In addition, their friends may move or leave voluntarily or involuntarily, and the same goes for the staff at the group-home and other professionals who are supposed to work with and care for the child. This mobility may present barriers in building trust and long-lasting relationships.

In a study by Gustafsson et al (2013, 2012), the framework of dislocation and ‘the liberated self’, i.e. the individual’s freedom to make her/his own decisions, is used to analyze the migration experiences of thirteen unaccompanied minors who arrived in Sweden between 1943-2008. They argue that the experiences of separated minors are shaped in the intersection between contexts and conditions of transnational migration and the Swedish reception system. In this context, the young people are given many opportunities, although at the same time they face many obstacles and structural limitations. Gustafsson et al argue that the existential aspects of migration for minors need to be taken into account in the reception of unaccompanied children, and they conclude by saying that, in practice, this ideology of ‘the liberated self’ in this way might be limiting.

To conclude, in this section the focus has been on how the reception of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is organized, its insufficiencies and the consequences these insufficiencies have for the children. Since the young people in this thesis could be described as being – or having been – in the hands of the social services and public authorities, these findings are important to consider in order to, potentially, understand their situation. The reception is discussed – to some extent – in paper II and in the concluding section where the contribution of this thesis to the knowledge is discussed. However, the focus here is not the children and young people’s perspectives on the reception and care that they are given. This will be discussed in the following section.

Experiences of the asylum-seeking process and reception system

Several recent studies have taken into account the unaccompanied children’s own perspectives and experiences of the asylum-seeking process and reception system. According to studies by Malmsten (2012) and Backlund et al (2012), the children’s situation during the asylum-seeking process is challenging and characterized by uncertainty and insecurity. Backlund et al characterizes it as a situation of multiple insecurities, which involves feelings of a loss of control and of relief combined with feelings of anxiety about the situation for family members, and they argue that the children feel lonely in their insecure situation. In their study, the children and young people were asking for closer relationships, (more available) care, and clear and honest communication with social workers and others in order to build trust (p.143-144). These findings are similar to Wahlström’s (2009) study on unaccompanied young people in London, who said that their needs were not being met by professionals (p.180). In addition, the young people in Stretmo and Melander’s (2013, p.91) wanted social support, help with homework, help

with understanding how Swedish society works, and help with understanding their possibilities for the future. Lundberg and Dahlquist (2012) found that the way the individuals perceived their current situation in Sweden was highly dependent on the status of their asylum application in the asylum-seeking process. The children emphasised that information from the authorities must be clear and understandable for them. The study suggests that continued information from the authorities about the asylum case, more therapeutic care, and ensuring everyday contact with supportive adults and friends are possible improvements in the current practice. In line with other studies, Lundberg and Dahlquist show that social relations and activities are important aspects of the children and young people's lives in that they act as distractions from thinking about the difficulties such as their asylum process, previous traumatic experiences, the loss of family members or the uncertainty of the whereabouts of family members (e.g. Malmsten 2012). Such activities may also offer a way to come into contact with other same-age youth (Stretmo and Melander 2013, p.89).

In addition to these diversities, studies by Gustafsson et al (2012), from a Swedish context, and Wahlström (2009, p.179), from a British context, have shown that the children and young people feel a lack of power in the decision-making that concerns them and their everyday lives. Gustafsson et al point to the paradox that these restrictions of participation are embedded within a care and protection system that – at the same time – encourages independence and freedom of choice. Researchers have further described how the group-home implies living with individuals that the young person has not chosen him-/herself (Stretmo and Melander 2013, p.93-94, e.g. Sirriyeh 2013, p.94).²²

The main part of this research concerns the children and young people's perspectives and experiences in the host countries, with a particular focus on the asylum process, the reception system and their relationships with authorities, social workers and others who work with them. Ní Raghallaigh's (2011) contribution to this body of knowledge differs to some extent in its focus. She investigates the significance of religion and shows how religion serves as a coping strategy. Religion is, according to Ní Raghallaigh, both a 'relatively available' and a 'relatively compelling' way for them to deal with the challenges they face. It is a source of continuity and something familiar in an unfamiliar context, and it provides a sense of meaning and comfort (e.g. Luster et al 2010, Wahlström 2009, Goodman 2004). Ní Raghallaigh therefore suggests that religious beliefs need to be taken into account and should be integrated into social work practice.

To conclude, the research that brings forward, or includes, children's and young people's own experiences and perspectives is an important contribu-

²² This will be discussed further in relation to the concept of home (in the section "Negotiations of belonging – Conceptual framework").

tion to our understanding of the challenges they face during the asylum process and in their everyday lives in the host country. The research is primarily focused on the reception system and the different professionals and practitioners within it. With such a focus, other dimensions of the children and young people's life situations may be excluded. There is therefore a need for research that addresses issues that are not primarily related to the organization of reception, but also look at other dimensions of their lives, as is done in this thesis.

Belonging and social relations in the host country

In paper I, I pointed out the need to bring forward the children and young people's own perspectives of their situation in the host society to a greater extent than had been done at that time. As this overview has shown, there has been an increasing interest in recent years in taking the children's stories and perspectives into account in research that concerns them. This thesis follows in line with these epistemological changes. As the above section has shown, however, the situation and everyday life of unaccompanied children and young people that extend outside the organizational structures they are positioned within have, with some exceptions (e.g. Wells 2011, Wahlström 2009), not been explored to any greater extent. Wahlström's (2009) study concerns how unaccompanied young people from the Democratic Republic of the Congo adapted to their changing and adverse circumstances as refugees in London. She describes them as being in a position where they have 'agency under constraints', which highlights how political and social structures restrict agency (p. 176f). In addition, Wahlström sheds light on the young people's social relations in the host country. Among these, relations with other refugees the same age were held as particularly important (p.188ff). Social relations are also at the heart of the analysis in Wells' (2011) study on social networks among young unaccompanied asylum-seekers and refugees in London. She finds that the young people establish new social networks – both formal and informal – and reactivate or maintain old networks that have the potential to change their social position and cultural location (p.328). Both Wahlström's and Wells' contributions show the need to explore social relations – formal as well as informal – in order to investigate the potentials as well as the constraints for unaccompanied children and young people in the host country. The significance of social relations is also addressed in this thesis, in particular in paper II.

Kohli (2011) argues that there is a need for research to take the perspectives of the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people into account and, particularly, to explore how they themselves define and reflect upon issues of safety, belonging and success in their lives. The young people's understandings of home, which Kohli includes in the concept of be-

longing, are crucial for these investigations. Furthermore, in a report for Save the Children O'Connell Davidson and Farrow (2007) calls for further research on child migrants' situation in the host country, including their exposure to discrimination, racism and xenophobia. In line with the research of both these studies, this thesis has focused on the issues of home as well as on experiences of racism and discrimination in the analysis of the interviews in paper II and III.

In Backlund et al's (2012) study, a prominent theme in the interviews with the children is the difficulties in getting to know Swedish-born children and youth. This was also noted in Stretmo and Melander's (2013) study. Their study showed that the children formed relationships with people their own age at the group-home and in school, and often in the preparatory classes. The children interviewed used strategies to withhold their background from other children at school. The children stressed the need to speak fluent Swedish in order to build social relations, and Backlund et al conclude that the Swedish language seems to be the key and the main criterion for inclusion in the Swedish imagined community (p.144, e.g. Stretmo and Melander 2013, p.82). These findings were not discussed to any greater extent by Stretmo and Melander in the report, which had its main focus on the reception system. They are, however, of interest for this thesis which, rather than primarily focusing on the young refugee's situation in the asylum-seeking process or reception system, investigates unaccompanied young refugee's negotiations of belonging, with a particular focus on processes of racialization, "Swedishness", home and place. In doing so, this thesis is also a contribution to existing general research on belonging and racialization in the Swedish context.

In contrast to the main body of research, where the focus is placed on the time period in which they are asylum-seekers, this thesis focuses on the time after they have had their asylum-application approved and have been granted residency. There are two Swedish qualitative follow-up studies that have investigated the life situation and well-being for unaccompanied young refugees ten years after they had arrived, using qualitative methods (Hessle 2009, Wallin and Ahlström 2005). Both studies show that after ten years in Sweden, the young adults had, with some exceptions, established social relationships, and were quite content with their life situations. According to Hessle, the migration experience entails obstacles, which Hessle argues most of the participants had overcome. This thesis is not a follow-up study on how they have adapted to life in Sweden from a long-term perspective. This thesis differs from the above-mentioned studies in that it aims to investigate the young refugees' situation for in the period (relatively) short after they have been granted residency and are no longer asylum-seekers. The reason to focus on the time after residency has been granted has to do with the change in the young people's life situation. They no longer live in a situation of uncertainty about whether they will be allowed to stay or not. However, as

was noted in the introduction to this thesis (p.12), they occupy an in-between position between childhood and adulthood, and between the country of origin and host country (Sirriyeh 2010, p.214). It is against the backdrop of this position that I argue for the need to explore potential negotiations of belonging among these young refugees, with a focus on home, place, racialization and notions of “Swedishness”.

Negotiations of belonging – Conceptual framework

I have decided to live here forever so I think that this is like my home, and sometimes I think so, but sometimes something happens, everyone says thing like “it’s the refugees that have done that”, even if you’ve been here for a hundred years still they say so, “it’s the refugees that have done that”, you know it’s, not, even if you have Swedish... it doesn’t matter (Haidar, 17, Afghanistan)

Introduction

This quote by Haidar, which is also included in paper II, illustrates tensions in his feeling of being at home in Sweden. As is the case with the other young people in this study, he has had his asylum application approved and has, in a formal sense, become accepted as a member of the Swedish population. Haidar says that he has decided to stay in Sweden and wants to make it his home. However, as the quote shows, his claims and feeling of belonging are challenged by racialized discourses of “refugees” and “immigrants”²³, and in particular young “immigrant” men, as deviant and potentially dangerous. Moreover, for Haidar the label “refugee” seems hard to get rid of, which may have implications for his feelings of belonging in Sweden

In this section I present the theoretical framework and the central concepts that I use in this thesis. In line with the aim of the thesis, the concept of belonging has particular importance and therefore the following discussion centres on this concept. In order to explore potential negotiations of belonging among unaccompanied young refugees in Sweden, I am also interested in their meaning-making of feeling at home, and how negotiations of belonging are related to place, and may be challenged by processes of racialization and notions of “Swedishness”.

With inspiration from Back’s (2007) concept of ‘sociological listening’, I am interested in exploring the unaccompanied young refugees’ individual stories of their lives in Sweden and in relating these stories to larger social and political processes. Theory should according to Harvey (2006, p.79) be

²³ In this section I want to stress that categories such as “immigrant”, “refugees”, “Swedish”, “us” and “them” are socially constructed markers of difference. For that reason quotation marks are used for these concepts.

understood “as an evolving structure of argument sensitive to encounters with the complex ways in which social processes are materially in the web of life”. In order to be sensitive to these complexities, the theory and concepts used in this thesis have evolved in dialogue with the empirical material that the thesis is based on (see also Sohl 2014 forthcoming). I have further tried to be sensitive to the ways in which meanings are attached to concepts in the interviews, such as the concept home. In the following sections I will therefore include quotes from the young refugees in order to empirically illustrate and clarify the conceptual discussion, as well as to bring forward their voices.

Process, difference and negotiation

In the world today and in Europe particularly, it is possible to observe two simultaneously on-going and divergent social and political processes. On the one hand, migration and transnational flows cross and challenge national borders. On the other hand, nationalism is on the rise, with debates on what constitutes a national identity, and borders are set up to hinder certain forms of migration. It is within this contextual frame that this thesis is set, and it is therefore crucial to ask how concepts such as belonging and home should be understood.

The thesis is based on postcolonial and poststructuralist approaches to belonging and migration. I use these contributions primarily in order to put an emphasis on process, movement and negotiation in the conceptualisation of the central concepts of belonging, home and place. The reason for this is two-fold: firstly because these approaches challenge essentialist notions of ethnic and racial belonging and of racial, ethnic and national identities. Secondly, since they facilitate being sensitive to the in-between space the young refugees in this thesis occupy in relation to forced migration and their age position as they progress from childhood and youth to adulthood (e.g. Sirriyeh 2013, 2010). Postcolonial and poststructuralist approaches reject claims of natural belonging and fixity linked to origin and stability (Alexander 2010, p.495, Ahmed et al 2003, Brah 1996, Hall 1990). Within this frame, there is an acknowledgment of movement, and therefore belonging should rather be seen as an ongoing process in which individuals’ belonging(s) to different collectivities are negotiated. In line with this, there is a need to rethink the construction of home and migration as opposites, where the former is linked to stability and origin, and the latter linked to disruption and change. As Ahmed et al (2003) argue these concepts need to be understood in ways that go beyond the oppositions of stasis – transformation, and presence – absence (p.1). This way of thinking about what it means to identify oneself as belonging to a particular collectivity, or place, and how such identifications are negotiated constitutes a vital part of the frame of understand-

ing in this thesis. With negotiation I mean, in line with Kraus (2006, p.109), how belonging is claimed or disclaimed by the individual and ascribed, disclaimed, rejected or treated by others (see further below).

Postcolonial studies have been much inspired by poststructuralism (e.g. Hall 1990, Spivak 1988). In terms of poststructuralist perspectives, the focus is on language and on analysing how meaning is created through processes of construction; thereby poststructuralists often destabilize the fixed structures of binary opposites. By these critical investigations, poststructuralist approaches may often also contribute to the opening up of possibilities for destabilizing the social power relations of domination and subordination that are embedded in these binaries of difference, such as distinctions between “us” and “them” (Eriksson et al 1999, p.18, Hall 1990, Spivak 1988). In *Cultural identity and diaspora*, Hall (1990) uses difference to challenge notions of a shared and stable culture, shifting the focus from fixity and origin to seeing identity (and consequently belonging to a collectivity) as an ongoing production of difference. Belonging is, hence, not only a question of identification with and notions of similarity within a collectivity. Just as important, it is about drawing boundaries based on differences to others (see further discussion on Jenkins 2008 below). Yuval-Davis (2011, p.17-18) stresses that these processes of inclusion and exclusion are often not mutual, and that they entail unequal power relations as well as normative values concerning who belongs and who does not.

In addition, on an individual level, belonging is a process that involves both the individual’s own identification with a collectivity or not and how s/he is seen or labelled by others. I will return to this later. However, first I want to stress a vital point made by Fanon (1967); that forced construction of identity (both individual and collective identities) may be internalised by those who are subjected to subordination (due to, for instance, colonial and postcolonial images of the other). The subordinated may thus end up sharing their oppressors’ devaluation of themselves.

Going back to the quote from Haidar that introduced this section, how can we best understand how belonging is negotiated in these young refugees’ everyday lives? In his article, Kraus (2006) points to the complexities of what the concept of belonging might mean. It is not merely a question of identification with a social collective; neither should it be seen as merely a label that is attached by others:

People do not simply choose affiliations, they have to negotiate them with others and are positioned within them by others. Their distance to some collective identities or their closeness to others must be expressed by them – and affirmed or rejected by present others. This does not entail the individual not disposing of concepts of belonging which are available in a specific situation, but rather that belonging must be negotiated, tested, confirmed, rejected or qualified again and again and not simply shown. (ibid, p.109)

Against such a backdrop, this thesis explores potential negotiations of belonging. Belonging then means identification with a collectivity. As discussed, this may be understood within the context of macro processes of categorisation. However – and this is the focus of my thesis – it may also be understood on the micro level where it involves negotiations in interaction, connected with negative processes of labelling (and exclusion) or positive processes of inclusion and acceptance. To the individual, belonging may also encompass an emotional dimension – a feeling of belonging to a collectivity. Being rejected may also involve being categorised, labelled and thus ascribed as belonging to another, perhaps subordinate, social collectivity. This ascription may in turn be negotiated, rejected and resisted. Such negotiation is, according to Kraus, done “again and again”, which means that individuals who were seen as belonging may later be excluded and vice versa. However, I suggest that the position of some individuals within the social collective is less stable than others, for instance in connection with migration. In addition, belonging understood as a process also entails an emotional dimension of feeling a belonging to a particular social collective and place or not which is particularly related to the concept of home. This will be addressed in the following sections.

In order to investigate how belonging may be negotiated in everyday life, I have found Jenkins’ (2008) sociological contribution to the theorising of identity, Goffman’s ‘presentation of self’ (1959) and management of stigma (1963) particularly useful. The concepts of belonging and identity are often used together and in similar ways in the literature. In many ways, belonging is closely linked to identity, and especially social and collective identities concern belonging to, and being part of, a collectivity. Both concepts relate to how we see ourselves, and are seen by others, which “can matter enormously” (Jenkins, p.3). Social identity should, according to Jenkins, be understood as a process that entails categorisations of both similarities, i.e. identification with others and notions of shared belonging, and differences that set us apart from others (p.5, 12). ”To define the criteria for any set of objects is, at the same time, also to create a boundary, everything beyond that does not belong” (p.102). The question of who is seen as belonging to and included in, a collectivity is thus simultaneously about drawing a line that excludes others from the same collectivity.

Hence, Jenkins’ conceptualisation of social identity shares some key aspects with poststructuralist and postcolonial approaches to belonging and identity. Both perspectives turn the attention to the social construction of collective identities and belonging; in terms of how individuals identify themselves, how they are seen by others, how belonging is negotiated and how boundaries marking difference are drawn.

In the case of the young refugees in this thesis, belonging can be seen as multidimensional, encompassing both the relationships to imagined communities and relationships to a community or a group of friends in the place

where they stay. As the quote from Kraus (2006) highlights, belonging to collectivities involves negotiation with others that may accept or reject the individual's claim of belonging, or that may label the individual as belonging to another (subordinated) collectivity. In this process, interaction plays an important part for these young people as they negotiate belonging to particular collectivities in their everyday life. According to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical sociology, individuals perform their identities by making presentations of self on-stage in interaction with others. The aim for the individual is to make a favourable presentation of her-/himself in front of the person(s) with whom s/he is interacting – the audience that is witnessing the performance. What is seen as a favourable presentation of self may differ depending on the situation and the others who are present. In much of Goffman's writing the focus is on individuals' efforts to make the interaction as smooth as possible. There may be cases, however, where what is meant to be a favourable presentation by the individual, can be seen as the opposite by the audience. In order to make a favourable presentation of self, the individual seeks to control and direct how s/he is seen by the other, i.e. impression management. This is done, for instance, by changing her/his appearance and manner in different ways (1959, p.208ff), or managing a potentially stigmatized position (1963). For instance, being labelled as an "immigrant" may involve a stigmatized position (further discussed in a following section). As discussed in paper III, the young refugees may make presentations of self in a favourable way in order to challenge such a position and potentially be accepted as belonging. Thus, impression management (Goffman 1959, p.208ff) is an important dimension of belonging; and in particular for how claims to belong are negotiated with others.

Belonging in the context of migration

In this section I will discuss how the concept of belonging may be understood and the dimensions it may include, primarily focusing on the context of migration. The young people in this thesis share the experience of forced migration and of being newly-arrived "immigrants" in Sweden, and it is within this context that they develop and negotiate belonging to different collectivities. The question of "where do I belong?" may, according to Anthias (2006, p.22), come to have particular significance for individuals when they are excluded from social collectivities, or when their belongings are threatened or not acknowledged (or valued) (e.g. Yuval-Davis 2011, p.10). As has been discussed, belonging is a process where difference is made. At the same time as some individuals are included, a demarcation line is drawn that excludes others. All individuals are part of, and belong, to different social collectivities, depending on how they define themselves and are defined by others, but belonging may not become an issue as long as it is not challenged or threatened in some way. It should also be noted that belonging,

according to Anthias (2006, p. 21), is “about experiences of being part of the social fabric and should not be thought of in exclusively ethnic terms”. For instance, belonging and making claims of belonging to a collectivity can also be a question of age-based identification, such as the longing to be part of a group with other teenagers and/or young adults.

In her book *The politics of belonging*, Yuval-Davis (2011) uses an intersectional perspective in order to deconstruct simplistic notions of ethnic and national collectivities. In order to theorize belonging, Yuval-Davis differentiates between three analytical dimensions, within which belonging is constructed: 1) social locations, 2) identification and emotional attachments and 3) ethical and political values. The first dimension, belonging to a particular category such as gender, race, class, nation or age group, has to do with the social location that the individual occupies, and Yuval-Davis argues for the need to look at these social locations with an intersectional lens that takes into account the ways in which power relations based on such categorizations intersect (p.13, e.g. Yuval-Davis 2011, Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992)²⁴. Social locations are based on categorisations, but do not necessarily involve subjective identification or social attachment with the category or with others who are seen as included, even though that sometimes may be the case. However, I suggest that social locations may be of importance for how individuals’ claims of belonging are negotiated by others.

The second dimension noted by Yuval-Davis above, involves individuals’ subjective identifications, social and emotional attachments to particular collectivities. These subjective identifications may shift at different times and in different situations, but according to Yuval-Davis they become central if their belonging is threatened or less secure (p.15), which may be the case for refugees whose identifications of themselves may shift or be challenged or denied by others, for instance through racialized or stereotyping discourses. Lastly, by means of her third dimension, Yuval-Davis emphasises ethical and political values that are attached to belonging to a particular collectivity, either one that the individual identifies with or that the individual is labelled as belonging to by others. This, she argues, concerns the ways such individual and collective identities are assessed both by oneself and others. Yuval-Davis stresses that such assessments can be made in a range of different ways, and may also involve ideological questions about where and how the boundaries of who belongs to different categories and identities should be drawn (p.18).

There is not much focus on process in Yuval-Davis’ theorising. However, other aspects of her work are clearly compatible with poststructuralist approaches, such as the deconstruction of simplistic notions of ethnic and national belonging. I find Yuval-Davis’ conceptualisation of belonging useful because she isolates the different dimensions that are at play in the construc-

²⁴ For intersectional analysis that includes age and life stage, see Krekula et al (2005).

tion and negotiation of belonging to social collectivities. Moreover, Yuval-Davis turns her attention to the emotional dimensions of belonging; the longing to belong and the feeling that you belong somewhere and to some group. These emotional dimensions are important for understanding the degree to which belonging, and questions of who belongs and who does not, can become significant in particular context and at certain points in time.

In this thesis, the focus is on the belongings that the young people articulate as important in some way or another in their everyday lives in the host country, and also their comments on how others value these belongings. The young people may – to a lesser or greater extent – continue to identify themselves as belonging to particular collectivities. At the same time, they may also develop other belonging(s) and/or their claims of particular belonging(s) can be challenged by others who may, instead, ascribe them to belong to a subordinated social collectivity that is potentially stigmatising.

Drawing boundaries of belonging in the Swedish ‘imagined community’

The residence permit may be seen by the young people as a ticket not only allowing presence within the geographical boundaries in Sweden but also opening for acceptance as members of the collectivity within the ‘imagined community’ in Sweden (e.g. Anderson 1991). However, as this section will demonstrate, the boundaries of the imagined community may, due to essentialist notions of belonging, be narrower than the geographical borders of the nation-state. It is important to note that the young refugees in this study all have experiences of forced migration, since they “may have little or no choice either about leaving their country of origin or concerning the country of migration (Watters 2008, p.10). Moreover, as was discussed in the introductory section of the thesis, as asylum-seekers they are faced with a culture of mistrust that is embedded in the asylum process, where distinctions are made between “deserving victims” on the one hand, and “bogus”, “undeserving”, “illegal” migrants on the other hand, indicating that they are ascribed as belonging to a subordinated category that is not “us” (Holgersson 2011b, Watters 2008, Norström 2004).

In order to grasp the position the young refugees in this study occupy in their host country, I utilise what Back (2003, p.351) terms as the ‘grid of immigration’. This is particularly useful since it points to the unequal relationship between the asylum-seeker or refugee and the host society. Within this grid, asylum-seekers and refugees are ascribed as occupying a subordinated position and as such they face obligations to show gratitude to “their host”. I suggest that this unequal relationship between “us” and “them”, points to the conditional position that they occupy: a position from which not

all can be said or done (e.g. paper III). Whether such a position is more or less possible to move away from may vary depending on the social and political context. In this thesis, there are examples both of how young people say that, with time, they will become full members of the society in which they live, and how others state that the ascribed position as “refugees” or “immigrants” seems hard to avoid.

The quote from Haidar (p.34), which introduced the theoretical section, reveals some of the tensions that people who are – or may be – categorized as “immigrants” may face when they claim rights to belong in their new country. The focus in this section is on how the boundaries of belonging are drawn between an “us”, who are seen as belonging to the Swedish imagined community, and a “them”, who are excluded from the same collectivity. The dimensions of belonging, distinguished by Yuval-Davis (2011), could all become relevant in relation to Haidar’s story. Firstly, his decision to stay “here” could be read as a form of emotional attachment and identification with a Sweden that has accepted and welcomed him as a member. This claim, however, is denied by others who instead ascribe him, and persons he identifies with, as belonging to the category “immigrant”/“refugee”. This, as Haidar himself notes, is not a neutral label but rather involves othering. The label “immigrant” is socially constructed, as a marker of difference. Furthermore, being labelled as an “immigrant” is not merely a question of migration and crossing borders.

The concept of immigrant is not a neutral or an innocent labelling but a highly politicized concept that enables social control of “others”, who are subordinated through naming, and through the drawing of lines between “Us and “Them”, and between “natural/real/organic” members and “other members” (Eliassi 2010, p.79).

Being labelled as an “immigrant” involves, as Eliassi points out, distinctions between “us” who are considered to belong to the nation, and “them” who are seen as different and as not belonging there, and who thus become excluded and subordinated. For Haidar, the label “immigrant” seems fixed and hard to challenge: “even if you’ve been here for a hundred years still they say so”, signaling that he is aware that the word is associated with lasting and potentially negative meanings.

In order to theoretically investigate “Swedishness” I particularly focus on Mattsson’s (2005) contribution, which is informed by critical race and critical whiteness studies. The question of what constitutes a “Swedish” identity and what is seen as typically “Swedish” has, according to Mattsson received increasing attention since the early 1990s, and within these discussions, “immigrants” are constructed as deviant by markers of difference. What it means to be “Swedish” may, according to Mattsson, be defined in various, although somewhat interlinked, ways, ranging from definitions of citizen-

ship, to having a “Swedish culture”, to origin and bodily markers such as blond hair and fair skin (p.149). Based on these definitions, Mattsson distinguishes three socially constructed categories with different degrees of access to “Swedishness” and being seen as a “Swede”. First, an inner core of “indisputable Swedes” are constructed whose belonging is never challenged or denied; simultaneously and secondly with a peripheral category of “temporary Swedes” who – regardless of how they perceive themselves – are categorized as Swedish in some settings and situations, and as “non-Swedes” in others. The third and final constructed category, Mattsson defines as “unthinkable Swedes”: regardless of how they perceive themselves, they are seen as “non-Swedish” in their everyday lives (p.152). Within this context, (some) “immigrants”, as was noted above, become the others. These categorisations are used in this thesis to grasp how the young people negotiate and develop belonging in relation to the Swedish imagined community, rather than as a means of discerning to which particular category they may belong to. When Haidar says that the “immigrant” position, in which he is ascribed by others, seems fixed and hard to move away from, he also indicates that he is not fully accepted as a “Swede” and as belonging to the Swedish imagined community (e.g. Schmitt 2010). This challenges his feelings of belonging.

The focus, in this section, has been directed to how the boundaries for belonging are drawn in the Swedish imagined community, in relation to notions of “Swedishness”. In this context, the young refugees and others who are ascribed as “immigrants” are positioned outside the boundaries of belonging, or close to where the boundaries are drawn. The latter refers to a conditional position of belonging, where the individual is accepted as member of the collectivity, but her/his position is not as stable as it is for those who are seen as fully belonging, i.e. “indisputable Swedes”.

The position of the stranger

Belonging becomes a particular issue, according to Anthias (2006, p.22), if it is threatened or lost, which may be the case for individuals with experiences of forced migration. In contrast to youth whose belonging to the Swedish imagined community and to the collectivity where they live has never, or rarely, been threatened, the young people, who are the subject of this thesis, to a greater or lesser extent are in a position where they have to form new belongings in the context of the places where they live. Hence, more is at stake for them when they develop, and make claims of, belonging to social collectivities and place, than to those who already have an undisputed position in those groups and collectivities.

‘The stranger’ was introduced as a concept by Simmel (1950[1908]) who describes her/him not as the wanderer who comes today and leaves tomorrow, but rather as the potential wanderer – who comes today and stays tomorrow (p.402). The stranger’s position in relation to the collectivity is

characterized by the condition that s/he did not belong to it in the first place, and that s/he brings in qualities that had not been there prior to her/his arrival. A central dimension of the stranger is that s/he is both close and remote: “in the relationship to him (sic), distance means that he, who is close, is far, and strangeness means that he, who is also far, is actually near” (Simmel 1950[1908], p.402). This, I suggest, directs our attention to the significance of place in terms of who is seen as a stranger. The stranger is *here*, but at the same time s/he is seen as someone who should not be, or at least not be at home *here*. Hence, the stranger challenges taken for granted notions about what peoples and qualities are attached to particular social collectivities and places, both in relation to imagined national communities (as Ålund and Alinia, 2011, notes) and on the local level.

Simmel describes the stranger’s position as similar to the ‘internal enemy’, which Bauman (1991), later on, denounces by stating that the threat the stranger carries:

[...] is more horrifying than that which one can fear from the enemy. The stranger threatens the sociation itself – the very *possibility* of sociation: And all this because the stranger is neither friend nor enemy; and because he may be both. And because we do not know, and have no way of knowing, which is the case. (p. 55, italics in original)

In contrast to the enemy, who can potentially belong to the same collectivity, the stranger is positioned on the outside and seen as someone who does not – and maybe even cannot – belong to the collectivity and to the place where s/he lives at the time. In the literature, the stranger is written about in the singular, which could signal that the stranger is isolate and not part of a group. However, when the word is used it often refers to more than one individual, and this is the way it is also used in this thesis. Being positioned as strangers may result in the formation of social relations and friendships with others in the same position. This may be the case, but, as the discussion in the following section will show, the development of close relationships may entail similar background experiences, similar interests and a shared language.

The “immigrant” is the one who, according to Ålund and Alinia (2011), has become the stranger of today in Sweden. In their interpretation of Simmel’s concept of the stranger, they emphasise the social construction of that concept. The stranger comes into shape as part of a social process of stigmatisation and exclusion, in which individuals are transformed to stereotypical members of a subordinate social collective elsewhere and where culture and ethnicity tend to be viewed as given, or definite (p.50). In this way, those who are seen as strangers are ‘othered’, and are not regarded or accepted as belonging to the social collectivity in the place where they live. With this in mind, the theoretical figure of the stranger may be used to investigate nego-

tiations of belonging and what it means to be at home in relation to experiences of migration. In their study, Gustafsson et al (2012, p.75) suggest that a prominent feature of forced migration is a “feeling of being a stranger, both to one’s surroundings and to oneself.” Being a stranger to oneself is not discussed in this thesis. However, the experiences of being a stranger that the young people in this thesis talk about involves two interrelated dimensions that characterise the in-between space that they – to a greater or lesser extent – occupy (e.g. Sirriyeh 2010). Firstly, arriving and living in an unfamiliar place where they do not (as of yet) know the social context, codes and rules may involve a feeling of being a stranger in a strange place. Secondly, they may be seen and treated as strangers by others, both in relation to larger imagined communities and in relation to place more locally.

In paper II, some of the young people explained that the difficulties to get to know same-age youth outside of the group-home and introductory classes were partly associated with the fact that “Swedish” youth may be shy or that they are afraid of “immigrants” and “refugees”. Their interpretations can be seen as in line with the theoretical discussion in sociology about the stranger (Simmel 1950[1908], e.g. Ålund and Alinia 2011, Bauman 1991). In relation to the stranger, the individual or collectivity does not know what to expect or, as Ålund and Alinia note, the stranger’s position is linked to negative stereotypes and subordination. However, being positioned as a stranger today may not mean that one continues to be a stranger in a long-term perspective. In the interviews, some of the young people mentioned this possibility of changing position when “they” get to know “us”. They see it as possible to move out of the stranger position over time and that the distinction between “us” and “them” ceases to exist. As newly-arrived, they may see themselves as strangers today, but not tomorrow. This idea fits rather well with the approach of Ålund and Alinia, both in terms of how others see the young people, and how they see themselves in their new - more or less unfamiliar – situation in Sweden.

In combination with the stranger, Ålund and Alinia use Simmel’s concept ‘the door’, in order to address the issue of human interaction. The door is a symbolic metaphor for border-crossing and agency, in that it represents a dialectical process between the individual’s need to delimit her-/himself socially and culturally from her/his social environment (by closing the door), and the opportunity/possibility for social action and border-crossing (by opening the door) (p.51). Ålund and Alinia argue that Simmel’s conceptualisation of the stranger opens up for transformation and change of positions. Hence, the stranger is not fixed to her/his position as such, but may cease to be a stranger and be included and accepted as belonging to a particular collectivity and seen, by others, as being at home in the place where s/he lives. The temporality of the stranger is highlighted by some of the young people who suggest that they will be able move out of the stranger position in time. Moving out of such a position does not necessarily mean that they will – or

want to – become “Swedish”; it is about feeling at home and being accepted as a member of the social collectivity.

In this section, the focus has been on how the young people report that their claims of belonging are assessed, accepted, conditioned or denied by others. Hence, the focus has not been on the young people’s identifications or feelings of belonging.

Race, racialization and racism

In order to understand how the young people in this study are positioned, and to explore how their claims and feelings of belonging may be challenged, I will now turn to the concepts of race and racialization. The use of race has been, and still is, a much-debated concept within research, as well as in public discourse, due to its problematic history of genocide, slavery and racial biology. For instance, some commentators ask whether using the concept in anti-racism and research may even reify race and, thus, strengthen the racist forces who argue that race actually exists (Bhatt 2010, p.91f). In addition, there continues to be debate among scholars concerning the definition of racism and how to draw the line regarding what counts as racism or not (Collins and Solomos 2011, p.3). The debate has, for instance, concerned whether racism should be understood as an ideology that is located simply within isolated and extremist groups or rather as an ideology that permeates social structures more generally and regulates everyday interaction.

Since the turn of the millennium, postcolonial and antiracist researchers have introduced race (or “race”) and racialization as theoretical concept in the social sciences and humanities in Sweden (with inspiration from scholars in the UK and the US): they have argued for the need to use race and racism, rather than ethnicity and xenophobia, in order to put an emphasis on how difference is made based on bodily markers and in order to stress that racism, rather than xenophobia, is a concept that can catch the power relation of domination and its associated subordination (e.g. Hübinette et al 2012, Lundström 2007, Schmauch 2006, de los Reyes et al 2006). The idea that Sweden is a society free from racism and discrimination against racialized minorities has been challenged by, for instance, Pred (2000), Catomeris (2004) and de los Reyes et al (2006, p.17). They and other scholars have amply demonstrated that the historical roots of racism in Sweden still live on today, and that difference is commonly constructed in Swedish society on the basis of what are considered to be ethnic, cultural and racial distinctions (e.g. paper III). Scholars have shown how racism and racialized notions of “immigrants” and ethnic minorities in Sweden are based on markers of difference, such as culture, religion (de los Reyes et al 2006, p.17), dark hair and/or dark skin (Andersson, M. 2010, Eliassi 2010, Schmauch 2006).

It should be stressed here that race, as is the case with the concepts discussed above, should not be seen as a fixed identity. Instead, race is socially produced and its meaning is constantly negotiated. Racial difference is produced in the process of racialization whereby some groups of individuals, distinguished through constructions of biological or cultural difference, are categorized as different and subordinate (Neergaard 2002, p.117). Introduced by Miles²⁵ (1989, p.74), racialization has become one of the central concepts in the study of race and racism, since it points to the social construction in which notions of race come to matter as markers of difference that are tied to exclusion, stigmatization and subordination (Lundström 2007, p.22, Alexander and Knowles 2005, Murji and Solomos 2005).

In this thesis, I do not explore if, or to what extent, the young people have been subjected to racism. Instead, the focus is on how they themselves, and we together, talk about racism in the interviews. ‘Everyday racism’, introduced by Essed (1991) emphasises how racism is routinely reproduced and reinforced in everyday practices. The latter is clearly relevant for this thesis which is focused on what the young people say about their everyday lives. According to Essed, the concept of everyday racism connects structural forces with the micro-level and the routines and situations in everyday life (p.2). These situations and routines may not, individually, be defined as racism by those who are subjected to them (by or those subjecting others to them), but as Essed stresses, altogether, they reproduce racism in the social order.

The young men in this study have to negotiate and relate to racialized, gendered and age-based discourses which may be understood in terms of everyday racism. Each of these categories – young age, “immigrant”, race and masculinity – are discursively tied to social problems in Sweden, and in the case of the “young immigrant man” they all intersect (Burcar 2012, p.81, Alexander 2000, p.20). Words such as “bullies” and “unruly” are used as negative, gendered and racialized labels that depict young “immigrant” men as deviant and potentially dangerous. Such intersecting social locations become negatively valued in these types of discourses, and through them the young refugee men’s feelings and claims of belonging in Sweden may be challenged and rejected (e.g. Yuval-Davis 2011). Instead, they are constructed as belonging to the others. These labels are, however, challenged and negotiated by the young men’s, and women’s, presentations of themselves and their refugee friends as “nice”, focused on school and that they stay out of trouble. This form of impression management may be understood as a strategy to manage a conditional position also discussed above in the section on boundaries of belonging in the Swedish imagined community (e.g. Goffman 1959, 208ff). Through these strategies they try to become accepted

²⁵ There is, however, literature that indicates the origin of the concept goes back further than Miles (e.g. Murji and Solomos 2005, p.5ff).

as belonging in the Swedish imagined community as well as in the local community where they live (e.g. paper III).

As has been discussed, belonging of the young people in this thesis could be described as conditional. The conditional position highlights that the individual may be denied belonging, due to her/his own acts or acts done by others who are seen to be similar to her/him. I suggest that racialization contributes to such a conditional position. After the 9/11 attacks in the US and the suicide bombings in London, Madrid and Stockholm, Muslims in these countries, and elsewhere, have been subjected to mistrust and discrimination due to acts that were not conducted by themselves, but by others who are regarded as affiliated with them due to islamophobia and processes of racialization. This, I suggest, is an example of how some individuals and groups belonging to a larger collectivity may have that belonging made conditional as a result of the other members in that socially produced and imagined collectivity.

Negotiations of belonging in a particular place

In a previous section I discussed the boundaries of belonging in the Swedish imagined community in relation to racialization and notions of “Swedishness”. In this section, the focus is rather on how belonging to social collectivities more locally and in relation to place is negotiated.

Place and place-specific conditions may in various ways facilitate or obstruct possibilities for developing social relations and friendships with “Swedish” youth and those youth with different social locations according to race, ethnicity, nation, class and gender etc. I therefore suggest that place carries considerable significance in terms of investigating the everyday experiences of these young refugees, since belonging and exclusion are negotiated and played out in places where the young people reside and/or transit and in relation to the meanings ascribed to places.

Within the social sciences, place is understood as a subcategory to space. According to Lefebvre (1991[1974]), space encompasses three dimensions. Space is socially produced by *who* people are (i.e. subjectivities and identities), *by what they do* (i.e. social practices and activities) and *how they connect with other people* (i.e. social relationships) (p.33). Place is, thus, also socially produced in this way, but in addition place is localised, physical and attached with meaning, and socially constructed. What a particular place symbolises and how it should be utilised is always under negotiation (Holgersson 2011a, p.220, e.g. Sirriyeh 2013, Knowles 2010, p.33, Massey 2005). Knowles (2010, p.34) argues that saying that place is made and, thus, transforming challenges essentialist (and primordial) notions that particular people belong to particular territories. Bearing in mind the social dimensions of place, it is never neutral, but rather a site where power relations and social

division are played out. As a result, it may be suggested that place is of particular importance in the lives of young people since their opportunities for movement are usually more limited than those of adults (Cele 2006).

Some of the unaccompanied young refugees in this thesis live in urban areas, while others live in a village in northern Sweden. The specific conditions and qualities of a particular place, becomes significant in terms of the meanings that are attached to it but also for the social networks and activities that are available there. In paper II, the young people in the village expressed difficulties in getting to know same age youth they categorised as “Swedish” and, in addition, there were limited possibilities for leisure activities in that place. Still that place had special qualities of particular relevance for the young refugees, such as being quiet and safe (e.g. Craig et al 2004), which gave the place a positive connotation that same-age “Swedish” youth may not have agreed with. However, it should be acknowledged that vast differences may exist between this situation and those in other parts of Sweden. In the following, I will compare the situation in the rural village with how Abdi describes what he and his friends do together in the urban area in which he lives.

We usually go and hang out with other friends, and friends of my friends so yeah, like a group. We walk around in town, do something fun together or play football together. Just do something, I don't know; sometimes we play miniature golf (Abdi, 18, Somalia)

In urban areas there may be a greater variety of activities, even though they may sometimes be costly and thus unavailable to unaccompanied young refugees. In comparison to the young people in the village, it seems that urban areas may enable larger social networks, that also cross the boundaries between “refugee”/“immigrant” and “Swedish” youth. However, this may not always be the case due to segregated housing situation in urban areas in Sweden.

Urban and rural areas are contrasting physical and social locations which may thereby impact differently on the people who live there. The city and urban areas are generally regarded as places characterized by anonymity and heterogeneity (Massey 2007, Karp 1973), while rural areas are often characterized by social control and closely knit social relations (Nordin 2007, Waara 1997). Even though there are exceptions of these stereotypes as well, these potentially different characteristics may influence the young refugees' feelings of belonging in the place where they live, including whether – or to what extent – they feel as belonging to the place where they live.

That the localisation and physical presence which the concept of place addresses, are relevant for the analysis may be illustrated as follows. I suggest that the refugee young people in the rural village become visible, and othered, due to the location of the group-home on the main street and due to

the segregation of pupils where the refugees are placed in introductory classes. Against this backdrop and the limited contact with youth outside of the group-home and the introductory classes, the young people are positioned as existing outside of the social collectivity; and it is from this position that they negotiate and create belonging (see further below). In contrast to this relatively rural situation, the urban area may offer anonymity and thus less visibility due to its heterogeneous character. Together with the larger numbers of inhabitants, this may allow more possibilities for the young people to develop social relations with others. The young people, however, also have to relate to and manage the ethnic and classed residential segregation in Swedish urban areas; likewise with the racialized discourses concerning this residential segregation that they may often encounter (e.g. Sohl 2014 forthcoming, Lundström 2007, Molina 1997). The conceptualisation of the place in the thesis thus encompasses reference to locality and physical presence at various levels – from classrooms at school, housing to local community.

So far, I have tended to focus on the young people's relationships with youth that they categorise as "Swedish" and on the potential perspectives of those outside the particular places and collectivities the young refugees are physically placed in. However, the social relations that actually seem to be the most important for them and those relationships that contribute to their feelings of belonging are primarily with same-age and often same-gendered²⁶ youth they have met during the migration process, at the group-home or in school. This directs attention to another category of place, that of shared place of origin. The young refugees' friendships often seem to be established with youth from the same country of origin.

I have some friends in [town], they are from other countries like Somalia, Yugoslavia, but I don't socialize with them like I do with friends from my country, it's not the same thing /.../ it's the language, with friends from my country we share the same language, it is not the same (Ali, 20, Afghanistan)

Here, Ali suggest that it is "not the same" if you do not share language, indicating that there may be language-barriers for him and others who have only learnt Swedish (or other new languages) in the last few years. These patterns may be understood in terms of notions of "shared" traditions, similar life histories and of sharing the same language, rather than in simplistic notions of a shared ethnic and national belonging. With regards to the theoretical approach this thesis builds upon and sensitivity to differences between the social locations that individuals occupy within a social collectivity of origin, it is thus important not to over-emphasise the significance of belonging built on a shared country of origin.

²⁶ See further discussion in "A final comment".

In connection to this discussion, diaspora and diasporic practices are of relevance. Alinia (2008, 2004), who is inspired by the work of Stuart Hall, defines diaspora as a complex process that, on the one hand, includes deterritorialization and dispersal, a loss and a longing for home and feelings of estrangement. On the other hand it may also constitute collective action and the creation of collective identity based on a shared home of origin (2008, p.334). In this thesis, I have not focused on the concept of diaspora in itself, but attention has been placed upon the diasporic practices in which the young people engage on a more or less regular basis. In the interview with Khalil, he says he feels most at home, and as belonging to a social collectivity when he is together with others from Eastern Africa.

When there is a party. Somalian parties, Ethiopian and Eritrean, when they gather at parties, yeah, when all we black people meet. The languages are very different so we talk Swedish with each other (Khalil, 18, Somalia)

At the parties Khalil meets others from the Eastern African region. They do not all have the same nationality, language or religion. They do however share some traditions, foods, music, and, as Khalil notes, 'black' skin. These social gatherings contribute to Khalil's feelings of belonging to and identification with a collectivity in the village where he now lives. Khalil's experiences, together with the other young people's diasporic practices, also point to the significance of the familiar, whether it is food, practices, and music or close social relations, in order to form a sense of belonging in a place which is, or at least has been, unfamiliar. The importance of these diasporic practices and the social relations with other refugees may also be understood as managing a position where they are being negatively labelled and excluded from belonging to other collectivities (e.g. Alinia 2008) in the imagined community or when their belonging is in some way or another made conditional by others in the local community where they live.

A place to call home?

In this thesis I consider (feelings of) being at home to be a significant dimension of belonging, which involves emotions that may also be tied to close social relationships and localised to particular place(s). In the previous section place was introduced in order to discuss how the young people negotiate belonging. Place continues to be of relevance in this section where I now focus upon the question of what it means to call a place 'home'. Home and belonging are concepts that are often used together in the literature: feelings of belonging is sometimes used to describe what it means to be at home or vice versa, and it is not always clear what the relationship is between the concepts. However, there may be tensions between feelings of belonging –

and of being rejected as not belonging – and feeling at home somewhere. It is against this backdrop that home, and how the young people construct feelings of being at home, becomes an issue in this thesis.

Investigating previous research, Sirriyeh (2010, p.215) demonstrates that home has been described as a shelter and place of security, as the location of important social relations, or in terms of intimacy, privacy, choice and control. Poststructuralist contributions to the theorising of home have argued against the idea that home is inherently about origin and fixity – both in terms of family and place – and instead focus on process and movement, thereby creating the possibility of having multiple homes (Sirriyeh 2013, 2010, Blunt and Dowling 2006, Ahmed 1999, Massey 1992). From the literature on home it is clear that home is a multifaceted concept that is conceptualized in various and interrelated ways.

In this thesis I am interested in how the young people conceptualise home, and how they talk about being or feeling at home based on their own definitions. I thus refrain from establishing a strict definition beforehand. However, there is some salient characteristics in the young people's meaning-making about home and what it is to feel at home on which I build my understanding of the concept in this study. In my research, home seems to involve emotional dimensions that may be hard to grasp and describe to others. Moreover, home is intimately connected to closely knit social (and family) relations and to feelings of familiarity, i.e. being familiar with the place where one lives and with the people there. The following quotes from Samira and Abdi shed some light of the young people's meaning-making regarding the concept of home.

I am a guest here in Sweden, I don't feel at home (...) maybe it would be different if my mom was here, but I'm alone /.../ I could tell you that [home] is where I live and where I have my bed, but you know, in my soul, I don't feel at home where I live (Samira, 16, Somalia)

The dwelling, like if I live in this area then I will get to know my neighbours. I don't have any family or relatives here in Sweden, but if I meet my neighbour and have friends here then it feels like I have someone to meet and hang out with. That is why I say it feels like home where I live now. Some don't think so, but [the group-home] feels like home to me. I can't be away from [city] for too long, I want to go back. That's why I say it feels like home (Abdi, 18, Somalia)

These two quotes illustrate the young people's different ways of meaning-making about feeling at home and calling a place home. Samira suggests that even if she could call the room and place where she lives her home, she does not feel at home there. Instead, for her, as for many people, home is closely linked to family and closely knit relationships (e.g. Mallett 2004). Samira, however, reveals the possibility that she could feel at home in Sweden if she

were to be re-united with her mother and siblings or if she were to start a family of her own. Abdi, on the other hand, defines home somewhat differently. They both emphasise the importance of family and the familiar, although, in different ways. For Abdi, home is a place where he is familiar with the surroundings, where he has significant social relationships, knows his neighbours and where he has come to be emotionally attached to the place. His meaning-making of home is in line with the conceptualisation of Blunt and Dowling (2006) who describe home as a site of attachment, that is connected to how individuals identify themselves and relate to place(s) (e.g. Sirriyeh 2010).

As can be seen, both of these young persons' conceptualisations of home involve familiarity, although in different ways. In terms of understanding home as an on-going process, the question of time becomes an important consideration. Abdi has been living in the same regional urban area for three years, while Samira has been in Sweden for a shorter time (18 months). As we have seen, Samira also allows for the further possibility that she may later come to feel at home in Sweden, and indeed have what she recognises to be her home there, though this is conditional upon changes occurring in her social relationships. This illustrates the dynamic nature of what is considered home.

Home may thus involve questions about the future, and where to (re)make a home for oneself. This may especially be the case for young people who are expected, at least in a Western context, to become independent and re-establish a home of their own (Mallett 2004, p.78). The young refugees in this thesis did not have a say in the decision-making on where, and how, they would live in Sweden. At the time of the interviews, most of them were still minors and were not in a position in which they could make such decisions due to the way that the reception was organised²⁷. In the future, however, when they are no longer in the care of the social authorities, they can make their own choices about where to live. Apart from a few who would like to move back to their country of origin or to another country, most of the young people say that they would like to continue to live in Sweden. What then are the qualities and dimensions that are attached to the place where they would like to live and call 'home' in the future? However, one of the key dimensions of their comments on the future is however living in a place that is familiar, either the place where they were living at the time of the interview or a place that is similar. Home can thus be connected to familiarity with a place and the people living there. Here follows what Nawid has to say about the place where he was living at the time of the interview.

²⁷ See further in paper II and the section "Unaccompanied minors in the hands of the official authorities – Policy and context".

Sometimes you think it's a bit too small, but sometimes it's good. But you know since I'm here by myself, I like it. (U: Why is it you like it here?) Because it doesn't happen much and it's quiet and like and I go to school. I don't want to live in a big town, I like it here (Nawid, 19, Afghanistan)

Living in a place that is quiet and where there is no "trouble" is further stressed as important. As has been noticed, place is socially produced and thus charged with symbols and meanings. Hence, living in a particular place, as well as making decision to move to a specific place, are not simply matters of geographical location. They also involve the meanings that are attached to that place. In the following quote, Ali, who has been in Sweden for three years, talks about where he would like to live and which place he wants to avoid.

I want to stay in [town], (U: Okay, you want that) because it's quite [inaudible], there are not that many immigrants here, like in [a disadvantaged urban area], there is always rioting and [inaudible] there (Ali 20, Afghanistan)

Ali describes the town he lives in as quiet and safe, and for those reasons he would like to stay there. The town is part of a larger urban area, and in the quote Ali contrasts it with the kind of socio-economically marginalised and racialized urban area which in Swedish is often referred to as a "förrort", with high levels of unemployment, poverty, poor health and a relatively large proportion of inhabitants with an "immigrant background". Researchers in postcolonial and critical race studies have shown how places such as this, particularly socioeconomically and racially marginalised urban areas, are not only racialized and labelled as dangerous, but are also exoticised (Lundström 2007, Back 2005, Molina 1997).

It is against this backdrop that Ali's dismissal of the specific "förrort" as a potential place to live should also be understood. To him, avoiding such an area is both a way to avoid trouble, and also a way to negotiate the position of being labelled as an "immigrant". When Ali says that "there are not that many immigrants here" when talking about the place where he lives, and contrasts it to places where many "immigrants" live and where there is rioting, he is influenced by – and using – racialized and stigmatising discourses concerning the segregated housing situation in urban areas in Sweden. By using Goffman's (1959) conceptualisation of presentation of self, I suggest that Ali, in the quote above, may seek to manage the impression of him as a "well-adjusted" young man in order to both negotiate and avoid a potentially stigmatising position as a young "immigrant" man. Thereby, he may also be seeking to increase his opportunities of becoming fully accepted by others as belonging in both the place he lives and in Sweden more generally.

In this section on concepts I have discussed the overall theoretical perspective of the thesis. In order to clarify the meaning of the theoretical concepts of belonging, stranger, racialization, place and home that are central in

the thesis and the relations between them, I have combined the theoretical discussion with quotations from the empirical material and examples of my analysis.

Methodology

In this section the methodological and ethical concerns of the doctoral thesis are discussed. Against the background that unaccompanied refugee children and young people have until recently been silenced in research concerning them (paper I), this thesis focuses on listening to what they have to say about their situation in Sweden. Hence, this doctoral thesis falls into line with feminist and postcolonial studies that are aimed at making room for and listening to those who are marginalised and not heard (Ålund and Alinia 2011, Mohanty 1991, Spivak 1988). The sociology of childhood provides the theoretical basis of this thesis in terms of seeing these children and young people as active social agents that have things to say about their situation (Bak and Brömssen 2013, James and James 2004). The focus of concern is seeing them as ‘beings’, which puts a stress on the here and now, rather than seeing them as ‘becomings’ and focusing on what consequences their present situation may have in the future (Qvortrup 1994).

In relation to earlier discussions of vulnerability, the sociology of childhood also provides a frame for seeing that the children and young people may be in a vulnerable situation (at times), but that they are still able to, and should, in accordance with the UNCRC (United Nations 1989), have a say in matters that concern them. Eriksson and Näsman (2012), in research with children in vulnerable situations, have shown the potential of adopting a perspective of children as social actors with rights to participation at the same time as acknowledging that the child may need care and support.

Unaccompanied children and young people are, as has been discussed earlier, a group that are often reduced to stereotypical figures in political discourse, seen as either vulnerable victims or as bogus. With these simplifications there is a risk of overlooking the complexities of the young peoples’ lives, and the focus is turned to the young people themselves and not to the social context in which their everyday lives are played out. In *The art of listening* (2007), Back argues for a certain kind of sociological listening that is sensitive to what is being said, and that challenges simplifying images and preconceptions.

Sociological listening is needed today in order to admit the excluded, the looked past, to allow the 'out of place' a sense of belonging. This is not some quick or blithe or romantic 'one world' ethos in which the wretched are listened to and heard. I am suggesting something much more difficult and disruptive: a form of active listening that challenges the listener's preconceptions and position while at the same time it engages critically with the content of what is being said and heard. (Back 2007, p.23)

Sociological listening thus turns attention to what is excluded in the above-mentioned simplified images, and is therefore careful to avoid reducing the complexities of the social world. As advocated by Back, sociological listening concerns linking individual experiences and stories to larger social and political processes and to investigate how these processes may enable and/or limit individuals in their everyday lives (p.15, 23). The listening Back calls for is neither about simply reproducing what is being said, nor about forcing individual experiences into a predefined theoretical frames. Rather, it is about balancing sociological theory as an analytical tool and for being sensitive to preconceptions and to what happens during fieldwork. Hence, it is an abductive approach to analysis.

In order to practice sociological listening that is sensitive to the complexities of these young people's stories this thesis project adopts a qualitative approach. Starting from the young people's everyday lives and experiences is also useful when the researcher is in many ways in an 'outsider' position (Merton 1972) in relation to the group s/he is researching, as was the case in this project, in terms of race/ethnicity, age, education level and experiences of forced migration.

A qualitative approach

The thesis is primarily based on qualitative interviews that are aimed at investigating the young people's experiences and perspectives of their life situations as newly-arrived persons in Sweden (e.g. Alinia 2004, Kvale 1997). Bryman (2006) argues that combining methods is a fruitful way of conducting qualitative research, and it has been especially motivated in research with individuals in marginalised positions in society (Cele 2006, Darbyshire et al 2005). The fieldwork in this study was planned to include three kinds of conversations between the researcher and the participant: semi-structured qualitative interviews, photography-based interviews and walk-alongs. I suggest that there are a number of advantages of combining these methods. Firstly, it is theoretically and methodologically fruitful, and could potentially result in deeper knowledge of the young people's everyday life and experiences that would not have been obtained in a traditional qualitative interview setting. Secondly, my intention was to meet the participants on

more than one occasion and then offer various ways of interaction in order to create trust between the participants and myself.

The knowledge that is gained from interviews is produced in interaction between the researcher and participant (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). This also means that “the researcher does not have direct access to people’s experiences but to the representations and articulations of these” (Alinia 2004, p.132). The walk-along was developed as an ethnographic research method by Kusenbach (2003), and has been further developed within, for instance children’s geographies and migration research (Holgersson 2011b, Svensson 2010, Cele 2006). The walk not only entails interaction between the researcher and the research participant, but also interaction between participant and place, where place is socially produced and transforming (Massey 2005). Using walks as a method in this research project was aimed at contributing to the investigation of everyday life and belonging in that the walks might unravel what is taken for granted in the places that are passed through, and also the meanings that are attached to places and the ways in which they are used. Use of photography-based interviews as a research method is, according to Lieberberg (2009), appropriate and of value when conducting research on people in marginalised positions, since it may reduce the risk of cultural misrepresentation and misunderstanding when communication may be problematic (p.445-446, e.g. Svensson et al 2009, de Jong 2005). In this way, photography may help to reduce boundaries to understanding in the relationship between the researcher and those being researched. The process of taking photographs might increase her/his possibility to prepare for the interview (Svensson et al 2009). In accordance with Back’s concept of sociological listening (2007), photography has potential in that it helps in challenging preconceptions about victimization, vulnerability and deviance. In addition, photography-based interviews and walk-alongs make the participant active before and during the research meeting, and therefore, they may feel more in control of their participation.

However, only five of the seventeen participants decided to participate in more than the qualitative interview. The reasons for this will be discussed below. I conducted walk-alongs with four of the participants (e.g. paper II), and photography-based interviews with three. Due to this setback, the project came to focus on the qualitative interviews. The additional methods contributed to the knowledge gained from the interviews, especially when it concerned the participants’ views on their everyday life, social relationships and their relationships to place. The two empirically-based studies that this thesis is based on entail somewhat different ways of looking at the interview. While paper II is focused on the young people’s experiences and perspectives on the place where they live, on home, belonging and on their social relations, paper III is rather more focused on the interview as a setting for interaction and presentations of self (e.g. Fernqvist 2010, Egeberg Holmgren 2011). In the following I will discuss the methods used.

Researching a ‘vulnerable’ group I – Struggling to get access

Unaccompanied children and young people are often considered as a particularly vulnerable group (paper I). Although they may have features that distinguish them – individually and as a group – from others, they share some similarities with other children and young people in marginalised and vulnerable positions, such as children in foster care and children who have experienced trauma (Broch 2012). Getting access to conduct research with such a category of children and young people can be a struggle (e.g. Sallnäs et al 2010). As this section will show, it was a challenging and time-consuming process to get in contact with the participants. In order to establish contact it was necessary to get help from gatekeepers. The reason for this is that the institutionalized nature of the reception process makes it hard to find young persons who are unaccompanied and have been granted residency outside the control of gatekeepers.²⁸

It can, however, be problematic to go through gatekeepers, due to the unequal power relation between the young person and the gatekeeper. The young person is in a position of dependency – and therefore might feel forced to agree to participate if the gatekeeper makes such a request (Hopkins 2008). In addition, the use of a gatekeeper may have consequences for the selection of participants since the gatekeeper may have ideas about which young people to ask, and, more importantly, which ones that should not be asked. For those reasons it may be better to avoid gatekeepers (e.g. Fernqvist 2013, p.64), which was unfortunately not an option in this project. Taking these drawbacks into account, there are, however, also some advantages to using gatekeepers. Firstly, the fact that the gatekeeper had experience of working with the young people who were potential participants facilitated a discussion on appropriate ways to make the initial contact with them. Secondly, in cases where the gatekeeper had relationships with the young people that were based on trust, the young person could talk to the gatekeeper about whether to participate or not or if s/he had questions.

I contacted gatekeepers, such as social workers, refugee coordinators and directors of group-homes for unaccompanied children, who could help me to get access.²⁹ It was, as noted earlier, a time-consuming task to get into contact with gatekeepers, and thereafter, with the participants. I sent requests

²⁸ Since 2012, there has been an association for unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children in Sweden, *Sveriges ensamkommandes förening* (SEF) that is organized by the young people themselves, with help from the non-governmental organization Skyddsvärnet. Recruiting participants through this association would have been a way to get past the use of gatekeepers that work professionally with the young people concerned. At the time of the interviews, however, I was not aware of the plans to start such an association.

²⁹ Due to the difficulties getting access to potential participants I also contacted guardians of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in one municipality. However, this effort did not result in any participants.

and information letters to gatekeepers by e-mail and phone, but, even in cases where additional e-mails were sent, I rarely received any replies. At contact it was also quite common that the gatekeepers said no to help, referring to the integrity of the unaccompanied minors, stating that they had recently been involved in evaluations, or sometimes without giving any reason. In the institutionalized system there were further gatekeepers at different steps. At one time, the staff at the municipality agreed to help me get access and thought it would be a good idea to contact the group-homes. However, the directors of the group-homes, which were run by private companies said no.

Others have faced similar challenges in getting access when conducting research with children on 'sensitive' or 'threatening' topics (Powell and Smith 2009, Svensson et al 2009, Campbell 2008, Wanat 2008). The topics that are regarded as such seem to change and when the group concerned is described as vulnerable, as is the case with unaccompanied children and young people, I suggest that even more topics may become sensitive or threatening. The gatekeepers' caution about giving access could be understood as a will, from their part, to protect the young people from potential risks. This was the explanation I received when some of the gatekeepers declined. However, another explanation could be that the gatekeeper felt that it would be time-consuming or disturbing to get involved in a research project. Still another could be that participation entails a risk of negative exposure of the gatekeeper's work and of her/his employer.

I suggest that there was a kind of paternalism in the way that some gatekeepers acted towards the young people, by making the decision for them. In this way they restricted the young people's right to be heard and to make the decision to participate or not by themselves. Considering the lack of unaccompanied children and young people's voices in research, the right to be heard according to the UNCRC (United Nations 1989) and the stress on sociological listening to marginalised groups, the power of gatekeepers is a problem.

Despite the difficulties with access, I eventually established contact with seventeen participants through the help of four gatekeepers, who, in one way or another, worked with unaccompanied young refugees. All the gatekeepers expressed a need for research that included the young people's own voices. I came into contact with three of them through a third person who knew about their work and about my thesis project. In these cases I suggest that the third person facilitated the contact between me and the gatekeepers. The fourth gatekeeper was working with unaccompanied minors in a rural municipality in the north of Sweden.

In research with young people, and young people in vulnerable or marginalised positions, the question of trust is crucial and one way to build trust is to meet with them for a period of time on a regular basis in school, at the group-home or at a leisure centre (Broch 2012, Andersson 2008, Lundström 2007, Alexander 2000). Initially, I was planning to visit group-homes on a

regular basis so that the participant would get to know me. Due to ethical considerations, visiting the school was not an option; the group concerned went to school with other young people who were living with their families, and sometimes did not tell the others that they were separated from their parents (e.g. Backlund et al 2012, p.106). In a meeting with a director of a group-home, I was further advised not to visit the group-home due to the personal integrity of the young people living there. Moreover, the vast geographical distance to the location of some of the participants also made it difficult to visit them for a longer period of time. Looking back, I conclude that the project would have been improved if I had been able to meet the participants for a longer period of time so we could get to know one another and build trust. Despite these drawbacks the interviews that were conducted provide a rich empirical material that shows similarities as well as differences in how the participants talk about their life and experiences as refugees and unaccompanied refugee minors in Sweden.

Selection of participants

In total, seventeen young people participated in this project. I met five of them on more than one occasion, giving a total of 24 interviews³⁰. Fourteen of the participants were male, while three were female. At the time of the interview all but one of them were 16-21 years old, and had been living in Sweden between 1 ½ and four years. One participant was slightly older, 24 years old, and had been in Sweden for eight years. Most of the participants were from Afghanistan and Somalia, which, according to statistics from the Migration Board, are the countries where the majority of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors have arrived from in the last years (Migrationsverket 2013). In addition, two were from Iraq and one was from the Democratic Republic of Congo. In paper III, additional information on the participants' living situation and position in the education system is given.

In order to investigate the different conditions unaccompanied minors face and experience, interviews were conducted with young people in both urban and rural areas. Nine of the participants were living in a village with 2500 inhabitants in the north of Sweden, one hour away by car from the nearest town (paper II). The others were living in, or close to, cities in urban areas.

There are some limitations in the selection of participants that need to be addressed. In the initial contact with the gatekeepers I was often asked questions regarding the criteria I had used to select the participants. The criteria I gave were that they should have arrived in Sweden as unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors in the last few years, and that they had been granted permanent residency. In addition, I stressed the benefits for me to interview

³⁰ I met three of the participants on two occasions, and two of them on three occasions.

both young men and women, especially due to the difficulties of accessing female participants. The shortage of female participants is, in part, a consequence of the fact that they only constitute approximately a fifth of the unaccompanied minors that have arrived in recent years (Socialstyrelsen 2013a, Migrationsverket 2013). However, I suggest that conceptions of vulnerability are gendered and that the young women and girls are seen as particularly vulnerable by professionals. For instance, one gatekeeper explained that the girls living at that group-home were shy and focused on their schoolwork, and therefore would probably refuse to participate. Instead, she introduced me to four young men who agreed to participate. In total, eight of the participants were selected via a gatekeeper in this way. In contrast to having a gatekeeper that, in a sense, makes the selection for me, one municipality invited me to visit the group-home for one day to meet young people who lived there, or had lived there before. Nine of the young people I met there eventually participated, of which two were young women.

With a gatekeeper involved in the selection of participants there is a risk that some voices may not be heard, in this case, unaccompanied minors who have been in Sweden for a short period of time. Which voices are silenced by the gatekeepers? Obviously young women and younger children.³¹ Since protection is one reason for denial, those who suffer from emotional problems such as PTSD³² and depression may also be excluded due to their vulnerable situation. None of the participants said that they were in contact with some form of psychiatric care at the time of the interview. However, some of the participants said that they at times felt sad or depressed and found it hard to sleep, so some of the voices in this thesis are those of young people with such difficulties. Overall I would argue that there is a variety among the participants in this study in terms of how long they have been in Sweden, and in their accounts of past and present experiences.

In the fieldwork

The qualitative interviews, as well as the photography-based interviews and walk-alongs, were conducted during 2011-2012. The qualitative interviews were semi-structured and focused on the everyday life, social relationships, place and belonging(s). They were conducted with the help of an interview guide that consisted of themes and questions (appendix 2). I did not follow

³¹ An additional reason for why younger children did not participate in the research reported in this thesis has to do with the channels, i.e. gatekeepers, through which I came into contact with the participants. The gatekeepers were professionals that were in charge of group-homes or worked in the introductory education for asylum-seeking and refugee youth at upper secondary schools. As was noted in footnote 15, children under the age of 14 should not – and rarely – live in group-homes and they do not go to upper secondary school.

³² Post-traumatic stress disorder.

the interview guide in detail. Instead, it acted as a support for me during the interview to make sure that all the themes were commented upon. The interviews lasted between 35-65 minutes. Some were relatively short and some of the participants spoke quite briefly. This is a reflection of heterogeneity among unaccompanied children and young people; a group who share some experiences but are also very different from each other. This and the lack of participation in walk-alongs and photography-based interviews add to a discussion on who is the “ideal” participant later in this section.

For the walk-along we met at a place that the participant had decided and walked from there. The participants were asked to show me places that held a significance, i.e. that they went to, or passed through, on a regular basis, that they liked or disliked. While walking we talked about the places we passed through and the conversation went on from there. Three of the participants who lived in a rural area and one of the participants who lived in an urban area participated in the walk-along. For the photography-based interviews, the participants were given a disposable camera and instructed to take photographs of things, people, events or places that held significance for them; that they liked, or that happened on an everyday basis. In accordance with Svensson et al (2009), I used the photos that the participants took as a platform for conversation and concentrated on the representations and narratives that were expressed by the participants when discussing them, rather than on their pictorial character. Three participants turned in their cameras and we met for an interview. However, one of the films was underexposed. In this case, we looked at some of the photos he had taken with his smartphone instead, and I took notes. Cameras were given to four other participants, but three of them never turned them in and did not continue their participation and one of them lost his camera. In the latter case, we did a walk-along instead (see above).

Given that the unaccompanied young refugee in this study had been in Sweden a relatively short time, and might not feel comfortable speaking Swedish in the interview, I gave them the opportunity to use an interpreter. Of the seventeen participants, six chose to speak their mother tongue in interpreter-mediated interviews³³, whilst the others spoke Swedish. Interpreters were only used in the traditional interviews, not in the others.

The benefits of using an interpreter are that communication is facilitated and that young people, who may not have felt comfortable enough to participate otherwise, can participate. However, with translation there is an increased risk of misapprehensions and slippages in meaning (paper II, Keselman 2009, e.g. Stretmo and Melander 2013, Malmsten 2012). In order to

³³ These interpreter-mediated interviews were conducted in the north of Sweden. Due to the long distance between interpreters, who were available at the time and had a long experience, and the location for the interview, the interpreter was not physically present. Instead, a speakerphone was used to conduct the interpretation over the telephone.

minimize the risk of misapprehensions due to the translation, I repeated, briefly when needed, what the participant had said before moving on to the next question. This technique of repetition was also used in some of the interviews that were conducted in Swedish. Since this thesis, and the papers it consists of, is in English, I also had to translate the quotes used from Swedish to English. Thus, there is a risk that some of the initial meanings and nuances have been lost in translation, despite my efforts to translate as precisely and as sensitively as possible.

Methodological drawbacks – Critical reflections on the fieldwork

As was mentioned in a previous section, only five of the seventeen participants met with me on more than one occasion.³⁴ Three of them had taken pictures that we talked about, and four of them participated in walk-alongs.³⁵ Consequently, the project became more focused on the traditional interviews, with the empirical material from the other methods contributing to the interviews. In this section I will reflect on why the project did not turn out as planned and will consider the reasons why participants chose not to participate in the photography-based interviews and walk-alongs.

At the time of the qualitative interview, eleven participants said that I could contact them again for additional interviews (including walk-alongs and/or photography-based interviews). However, when I contacted them again six of them replied and agreed, while five did not reply to my request, hence, they did not give a reason for why they did not want to continue their participation. The non-answers may have to do with reluctance from their side to say no to an authority figure, which I think needs to be respected. However, there may also be other practical reasons, such as changed phone numbers. In all these cases I thanked them for their participation. However, one of those who agreed to meet again could not do so due to family reasons. In the following I will discuss additional reasons for why the others did not continue their participation.

Is there any indication that the participants may have declined to participate because of integrity reasons or self-doubt about performing the task, i.e. reasons that may be seen as supporting the gatekeepers' understandings of them as being too vulnerable to be approached for an interview. For instance, participants may not feel comfortable in a walk-along since walking with a researcher on the streets may make their participation visible to others. Confidentiality also became an issue in one of the photography-based

³⁴ Of these five, I met two of them on three different occasions and three of them on two different occasions.

³⁵ With one of the participants I conducted both the photography-based interview and the walk-along in our second meeting.

interviews, where the participant did not want me to have any copies of the photos he had taken in order to preserve the integrity of his friends, who were in the photos. After saying that I would ensure the confidentiality of him and his friends by not showing the photos to anyone, I complied with his wishes by giving him all the copies of the photos.

There may also have been practical reasons for not participating in more than one interview. Participating in more than one research meeting, and preparing by taking photos, could be a time-consuming task, especially since the participants had to go to school and perhaps engage in recreational activities. The need to prioritize schoolwork was given as the reason for why two young people chose not to participate at an initial information meeting, and this could also be expected to have an impact on participating in an additional interview.

The timing of the second meeting was also a problem. In the case of the participants in the rural village, it was four months after the qualitative interviews that I contacted them again to ask if we could meet again. The first interviews were conducted just before their summer holiday and after a conversation with the staff at the group-home I decided that it would be better to do the following fieldwork at the beginning of autumn. If the fieldwork had been conducted within a more convenient time frame maybe more of them would have agreed to participate on one more occasion.

The unusual form of the second interview could also have been a hindrance. A qualitative interview can be seen as a traditional, and easily understandable, way to conduct research, while the photography-based interview and walk-along can be seen as more fuzzy, especially if the researcher has inadequately explained the benefits of these research methods for the participants. Lack of motivation was illustrated when at an initial meeting, I told a participant about the project and the methods and he replied that taking photos was “boring”, and not something that he wanted to do. This blunt reluctance can be understood in terms of being a teenager and ‘doing’ young age (e.g. West and Fenstermaker 1987)

Furthermore, one, perhaps quite obvious, reason is that they felt one interview was enough. After our walk-along, Mahdi, whom I had met for the second time, asked if I was coming back. When I said no, he replied “good” and then laughed. My initial reaction was to understand his reply as a dismissal of both myself and the project. After some time, however, I came to see it more as a way to clarify that he felt done with his participation. To conclude, the statement from Mahdi can be seen as a reminder that research and the importance of it can be understood in different ways by researchers and those who are the subjects of it. Despite efforts to emphasise the benefits of a research project, the participants have to balance it with other dimensions of their everyday lives.

Researching a ‘vulnerable’ group II – Sensitivity and power

My social position and life experiences differ greatly from those of the participants. This kind of outsider position has a potential to allow questions that may not have been raised in an interview where the researcher is conceived as more of an insider (e.g. Merriam et al 2001). The difference may however also be analysed in terms of power.

Bearing in mind that unaccompanied children and young people are in many ways in a vulnerable and marginalised position in the host country, there is a need to address questions of sensitivity and power in research concerning them. This is even more the case when potentially threatening topics (Gunaratnam 2003) are brought up in the interview, such as negative experiences in the country of origin or during the migration, loss of family members, social exclusion, racism and discrimination (e.g. paper III). As an adult 30-something researcher, I share many traits with the professionals that unaccompanied children and young people have met at the Migration Board, in social work, at school and in the group-home. In order to establish trust I informed the participants about my role as a researcher, and I assured them of their right to confidentiality and that I would not pass on information from the interviews. However, there may be other reasons for the young people to maintain cautiousness in the interviews. Kohli (2006a) has noticed that unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors are at times silent or guarded in meetings with authority figures, such as social workers, when it comes to questions about their origin and previous experiences. He suggests that these ‘thin stories’ could be understood both within the frame of (forced) migration and “as an advantageous aspect of ordinary adolescence” (p.710).

(...) it is possible to view the emergence and maintenance of silence and secrets as part of becoming autonomous, and as part of healing, as well as a way of concealing and managing hurt. (ibid)

Hence, to be silent or to tell a thin story can be seen both as a coping strategy and as a way to maintain autonomy in relation to authority figures, and friends. This is something that I noticed in this project. In relation to the method of listening, the participant’s vocalisations – or lack thereof – became worthy of acknowledgement. In the interviews, some of the participants were circumspect and reticent throughout the interviews or in parts related to their previous experiences, their wellbeing and negative experiences in Sweden and elsewhere. Others, however, were more talkative and forthcoming. These differences may be related to age, gender, how long they had been in Sweden, their knowledge of the Swedish language, and whether the interview was interpreter-mediated. Those who had been in Sweden longer, and those who spoke Swedish more fluently, tended to be more

talkative, but with regard to the limited number of participants, I cannot draw any conclusions. Furthermore, the interviews may have touched upon sensitive topics for the participants. What topics are seen as sensitive or threatening may vary between participants. Moreover, when looking back at the interviews in this project I have found that topics, such as previous experiences, family members, racism and discrimination became threatening and, thus, challenging to talk about both for the participant and me in some of the interviews (e.g. paper III). My sense of sensitivity in the interviews was manifested by not putting certain questions to certain participants who were circumspect and showed reluctance to talk about these questions. My feelings of uneasiness also sometimes made me avoid pushing for more developed answers. This kind of sensitivity may be a drawback for the project due to the empirical disparities between the interviews it may produce. On the other hand, qualitative interviews may be very different in content within one and the same project. I suggest that the researcher needs to be sensitive to the verbal and non-verbal signals the participant gives, and should not always push for answers when they show reluctance to talk about certain topics. This is for ethical reasons even more the case in research with individuals in vulnerable and marginalised positions.

When considering the relationship between the researcher and the participants it is also important to note the power relations that are imbedded in it. As an adult, white Swedish-born researcher I occupy a more privileged position than the young people who participated in this project, for instance in terms of age (Christensen and James 2000), ethnicity, race (Lundström 2007), education and living situation. Furthermore, the discussion in paper III adds to the understanding of the position the participants occupy in Sweden as newly arrived refugees, in contrast to my position as a Swedish-born adult, and how this may have an impact on the interaction. It is important to note, however, that difference and power relations between researcher and participants should not be presumed beforehand, and for that reason there is a need to be sensitive to differences and similarities within and across groups. In my encounters with the research participants I sometimes felt uncomfortable because of my privileged position, and, thus, tried to reduce the unequal power relations in various ways, for instance I tried to present myself (i.e. in how I dressed, talked and interacted) in a way that decreased unequal power differences due to age and educational level. However, as Back (1996) puts it in his sociological study on young people in London, it is “foolish to think that our relationships were completely free from the effects of racism” (p.24). The challenge, and I suggest potential, is then listening through the noise of racism. Back’s comment is relevant, and I suggest that it can be extended to include other hierarchies of power and domination, such as age, gender and class. So far I have discussed power with a focus on the unequal power between the researcher and participants. Such a dimension is important to address, in particular because the researcher who conducts the

research, and who, through the analysis and writing, becomes responsible for the direction the project takes. However, I would also like to add a Foucauldian understanding of power (Foucault 1985), where power is circulating and the participants can resist and gain power in the interview situation. Moreover, the young people concerned can choose not to continue their participation or to withhold aspects of their lives they do not want to share with a researcher. The young people participated in the interviews in different ways; some by being compliant whereas others were more reluctant and tried to gain power by, for instance, asking for clarifications and answering a question with a question. The interviews with Simon, 20 years old from Iraq, can serve as an example of the former case, where compliance may be a challenge in conducting research. During our walk-along I asked him to show me places that *he* wanted me to see, and I told him that we could go wherever he decided in the town where he lived. To this Simon replied (four or five times) that he could show me what places that *I* wanted to see. After walking back and forth on a pedestrian strip without any plan in the town centre, we eventually ended up at a café where Simon frequently went with his friends and continued the interview. Whereas Simon could be described as acting like a “perfect host”, Arash, 16 years old from Afghanistan, showed more resistance in the interview:

Arash: Do you have many questions left?

Ulrika: Well, it's actually up to you as well, are you going somewhere soon?

A: No, it's not that. I'm a bit bored [both laugh]

U: Okay, well, then we can conclude soon. It's good that you tell me [both laugh]

A: Well, if it's just a couple more questions, then you can ask them [to me]

This excerpt serves as an example of when Arash gained control of the interview. When I later read the transcripts from this interview, I came to see that Arash showed his agency by directing the trajectory of the interview. He did this, for instance, by answering open-ended questions with questions and by keeping track of whether I had received answers to previously asked questions. Turning the interaction in the opposite direction means agency and control for the participant in a situation where the interviewer is directed and has to answer. Interestingly, Arash was one of the participants who agreed to meet with me again for a walk-along. In addition, I suggest that my position as a 30-something female researcher interviewing young men could have had an impact in the interview interaction in both these interviews (e.g. Fernqvist 2010, p.1319). The participants' resistance to talk about racism,

discrimination and negative experiences in Sweden, which is discussed in paper III, may also be a way for them to take control over the interview situation, by directing attention away from potentially threatening topics.

The process of analysis

The analysis presented in this thesis is based on transcriptions from the interviews and field notes. All the interviews, including the walk-alongs and photography-based interviews, were recorded and later transcribed. In the interviews where an interpreter was used, I transcribed what was said in Swedish and marked when the interpreter was speaking (and asked for clarifications or made other comments). I also wrote down field notes from the walk-alongs and photography-based interviews and short field notes after the qualitative interviews. After the interviews had been transcribed I continued the analysis by carrying out close readings of the transcripts and field notes, which was followed by coding of the texts. Since the interviews were conducted during a period of over one year, I began the process of analysis before all the interviews had been conducted. In line with Back's (2007, p.22) conceptualisation of sociological listening, the analysis is aimed at relating the individual's stories and experiences to larger social processes. The empirical material was coded vertically, by focusing on one interview and participant at a time, and horizontally, by focusing on themes across the different interviews (Lundström 2007, Mason 2002). I started by coding the empirical material based on what was said (and not said) and which issues were brought up, and I then coded the empirical material again based on the theoretical concepts. After that I alternated between these approaches. I was also looking for similarities and differences between the interviews and within one and the same interview. I did not use a computer-based program in this process. Instead I highlighted sections from the interviews with different colours and wrote quotes and comments in the margins of the page. The codes were then categorized into themes. In this process I categorized the codes – which had quotes from the interviews as subcategories – within the different themes. Coding and analysis are delicate tasks in which the researcher needs to be aware of her/his own frames of references.

Rather than saying that coders use a manual, it would be more precise to say that they interpret it. In this act of interpretation, coders rely on the various assumptions and presuppositions they employ as ordinary language users. Although coders may share a common linguistic culture, there is considerable individual variation in frames or references, values, levels of understanding (Mishler 1991[1986], p.4, underlines in original)

The question of language and (potential) language barriers has already been addressed in this thesis (see p.62f). In adding to this discussion, I suggest that the interviews conducted in this thesis project show the possibility for communication between me and the participant despite our (potentially) different frames of reference. In order to be aware of my own subjectivity in the interpretation of the material I re-read the transcripts on a number of occasions looking for alternative codes and meanings. I also presented sections from the interviews (anonymised) at seminars to further discuss possible interpretations.

The process of analysis in this project could be described as an abductive process of coding the material. My approach to the analysis is informed by what Lundström (2007) describes as ‘theoretically charged empirics’ and ‘empirically charged theory’ (my translation). This means that the empirical material has been analysed with the help of a theoretical framework that was developed during the research project (e.g. Alvesson and Sköldbäck 1994, p.39-51). At its outset, the thesis was aimed at focusing on young people’s everyday lives, and in particular their social relations, and theoretically I was particularly interested in investigating belonging, place and racialization. However, there were also concepts such as gratitude, which is developed in paper III, and home, discussed in paper II, which became important during the course of the analysis in order to understand the young people’s situation. In addition to this, the analysis showed that the young people in this study were very focused on the future, in particular with regard to education. While I saw the school as an arena for social relations, they focused more (than I did) on getting a good education, getting a job and becoming fluent in the Swedish language in order to create their future life in Sweden. These findings need to be investigated further. Unfortunately though, this theme could not be incorporated within the realms of this thesis.

Ethical considerations

In all research that in some form or other concerns individuals, the ethical dimension must be taken into consideration. However, in research concerning certain categories of people, ethical considerations are seen as of even greater significance, especially in research with individuals in marginalised positions and in research about sensitive topics (Broch 2012, Hopkins 2008, Campbell 2008, Lee 1993). In accordance with Swedish legislation, the research project has undergone an ethical trial by the local Ethical Vetting Board.³⁶ Since this thesis concerns young people with a history of forced migration, ethical considerations have been particularly important in terms

³⁶ The Act Concerning the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans, in Swedish: *Lag om etikprövning av forskning som avser människor*, SFS 2003:460, available at www.vr.se

of taking measures that sensitive to their potentially vulnerable position, but also, as argued in this thesis, allow them to be actors who make decisions in their own right.

Sociological ethics “are staged through time” (Back 2007, p.114), which means that research ethics are not only to be considered in the initial planning phase of a research project, but should rather be seen as on-going, starting from the initiation of the project, and continuing to be observed in the relationship with research participants, in the analysis and in the way of writing.

As has been discussed in a previous section, I came into contact with the participants through gatekeepers such as social workers and other service providers. Hopkins (2008) notes that when unaccompanied children and young people, and other children who are in vulnerable positions “are accessed in such a manner, it is important that extra care is taken to ensure that they know that they can refuse to answer particular questions without giving a reason and can opt out of research at any time” (p.40). In my initial meeting with the participants, I informed them of their rights as participants and their right to decline participation. They were given the same information in writing (appendix 1). In order to ensure informed consent they were given time to decide if they wanted to participate, and they were encouraged to discuss their participation with their guardian, or someone else they could confide in. Since some of the participants felt they had only a limited command of the Swedish language, this was also an opportunity for them to get information about the project and to ask questions. However, relying on consent given beforehand is risky, since the consent given may change during the research process (Back 2007, p.113). At the beginning of the interview I repeated what was written in the information letter regarding ethics and their rights as participants and also highlighted that they could refuse to answer questions if they felt uneasy or did not want to answer. Moreover, all the participants were given the opportunity to read the transcripts, discuss the interview in a follow-up interview, and make changes in the transcript. However, as was discussed in a previous section, eight of the participants did not reply when I contacted them again and have for that reason not read the transcripts. None of the other nine have said that they wanted to make changes or additions to the transcripts. It is possible that few of them read the transcripts; only two of them replied to me by e-mail to say they had read them and had no comments. One participant declined to read the transcript saying that she “trusted me”. This lack of feedback could be understood in relation to the drawbacks discussed earlier (p.63f); some participants may have felt a reluctance to read the transcripts while others may not have felt a need (for themselves) to read and comment upon them.

In order to ensure confidentiality for the participants, names and information that could reveal their identity have been changed or left out. For the same reason I have also decided not to reveal the names of the places where

the participants were living. In addition to these measures, the empirical material is presented thematically rather than biographically in order to conceal the participants' identities. With regards to ethical conduct and the possibility that the interview situation may raise sensitive topics for the participants – topics such as experience of violence, separation from family and friends and experiences of exclusion and racism – all participants were given contact information for available counselling services. This was done whether the participant requested it or not. I did not, however, see any (visible) signs that the participants became upset or emotional during or after the interview.

Up until now, this discussion has been focused on ethical concerns in the initial parts of the research project. Now I turn to ethical considerations in the analysis and writing. As has been discussed in the introduction and the section on previous research, unaccompanied refugee children and young people are often portrayed as stereotypical figures in public and political discourse (e.g. paper I). According to Doná (2007), there is a propensity in forced migration studies to represent refugees in essentialist ways that particularly focus on trauma and suffering. In this way, refugees are often represented in a binary logic, for instance as “victims” or “survivors”, “resilient” or “vulnerable”, and “bogus” or “genuine” (Doná 2007, Bracken et al 1997, Eastmond 1998). As has been discussed before, such representations are problematic and often marginalised, or even exclude, the group's own perspectives on their situation. In an effort not to contribute to the reproduction of such stereotypes when writing I have sought to show the complexities of the empirical material by including differences and similarities in the interviews in the papers. This could have been done to a greater extent by including more quotes from the interviews, but the format of articles for presenting the analysis has made that rather a challenge. Despite this drawback, my ambition is to challenge the image of unaccompanied refugee children and young people as a homogenous group and as inherently vulnerable by bringing forward their own voices and their agency.

A final comment

What is it like to arrive and (re)build belongings and to make a home in Sweden as an unaccompanied refugee minor? And, how can we who listen to these young refugees' stories understand their experiences, hopes and struggles at the time when they have been granted the right to stay in the country? In the thesis I contribute to the research on unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children and young people in mainly two respects: by bringing forward their voices and listening to what they have to say about their situation, and further by exploring their situation in Sweden by paying particular attention to how belonging is negotiated and the ways in which the boundaries are drawn between who is seen as belonging and who is not.

For the young people, the residence permit may act as an acknowledgement that they have been accepted as belonging to Sweden. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, negotiations of belonging are more complex than that. With the theoretical and methodological approach used, I have been able to show the complexities of belonging in the context of migration and conclude that, for these young people, belonging is in many ways 'conditional'.

I suggest that to describe the young people's position within or in relation to the imagined national community as conditional, sheds light on how they, when being positioned as strangers, need to deal with and negotiate racialization (and how this it is created in intersections with gender and age). In that process they struggle with the discourses on unaccompanied refugee children as either vulnerable or bogus, which both contribute to the process of drawing a boundary between "us", who belong, and "them", who do not. In these processes of othering, unaccompanied refugee youth become deviant in relation to the Swedish imagined community and othered, both as children who are separated from their parents and as "immigrants". They have gotten their permits of residency, but in order to understand their claims of belonging to the collective of inhabitants in Sweden there is a need to pay attention to how they seem to how they struggle with different discourses as well as to negotiate belonging in interaction on the local level.

The young people, and in particular the young men, who were interviewed in this thesis showed agency by adopting different strategies to distance themselves and their friends from stereotypical and racialized images of "immigrants" as linked to social problems and aggressive masculinity, and by stressing that they want to live somewhere "quiet", that they are

“nice”, want to work and make a contribution to society. Even though they negotiate potentially racialized stereotypes and have experienced discrimination they rarely describe these experiences in terms of racism or xenophobia, but rather as an effect of ignorance, shyness or fear of the unknown among “Swedish” youth. They also negotiate the image of themselves as vulnerable by stressing their own agency, and their will to study and work. This is particularly the case for the young unaccompanied men, who in terms of making favourable presentations of self may both show agency (in contrast to showing vulnerability) and distance themselves from an aggressive masculinity. There is some ambivalence in how the young women negotiate the image of themselves as vulnerable. On the one hand their potential vulnerability may be seen as an asset; on the other, they may try to challenge the very same image.

The gendered patterns in the analysis point to a limitation in the thesis. In the thesis I do not focus on gender. Gender, and particularly male gender, is sometimes brought to attention in the analysis, but is not discussed at length. The same can be argued for other social locations such as class positions and nation, i.e. country of origin. When looking back, I can see how the thesis would have benefited from paying more attention to gender, and how gender both shapes the ways in which the stereotypical images of young refugees are constructed and how the conditions for everyday interactions are framed. More attention needs to be paid to these social locations, and particularly to how the young people’s experiences and situation in Sweden are shaped in the intersections of these social locations. Against this backdrop I argue for the need for further research on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people that will bring in the issue of gender to a greater extent and will include intersectional perspectives.

The thesis contributes to the exploration of belonging; how belonging is developed, claimed and disclaimed by individuals and how they experience belonging as ascribed, confirmed and denied by others. In exploring this subject, I argue for the need to pay particular attention to the local context as a socially produced place. Their meaning-making of belonging encompasses experiences related to the particular place that they stayed in which also involved feeling at home or not – understood as a process of change for some of them. Against this backdrop and the various previous experiences the young people carry with them, there is not one, but rather multiple experiences of living in exile in Sweden due to forced migration. In order to be sensitive to the issue of place, the young people who were interviewed for this thesis were chosen from both urban and rural areas. This thesis should not, however, be read as a comparative study. What I would like to stress is that the urban and rural areas both set up different conditions for the young people’s negotiations of belonging, and for which belongings and prospects seem available from the young people’s perspectives. These differences can

also vary between different rural and urban areas in Sweden, due to variations in social, political and historical contexts.

The discussion has, up until now, concerned the ways in which the unaccompanied young refugees' belonging in Sweden is conditional, and how their claims and feelings of belonging are challenged by racialization and notions of "Swedishness". In the more local context, the analysis also shows that the boundaries between "us" and "them" set up challenges for the young people as regards getting to know and become friends with people that they categorized as "Swedish". Some of the young people who were able to cross the boundary emphasised their own agency and initiative.

The young people do, however, develop belonging, and are accepted as belonging, both to social collectivities and in relation to particular places. The relationships with other young refugees, and particularly unaccompanied young refugees that they live with are important to them. Even though the young people may not share their inner-most thoughts and feelings with their friends, they share the experience of being newly-arrived in Sweden. They may share experiences from the country of origin and of the migration journey and since they often live and/or go to school together, they also share everyday lives. Similarly to other youth they mostly establish friendships with others the same gender and age. These relationships seem to contribute to the young people's sense of belonging. In addition, the group-home may be a place where belonging is developed between the young people, and at times with the staff. The group-home can be described as a deviant form of housing, and problems may arise between the staff and the young people. However, I suggest that it may also be a place where social relationships are formed, and where – at least some of – the young people feel at home. To feel at home is an important dimension of what it means to belong, and for the young people home is connected to closely knit social (and family) relations, familiarity and knowledge of the place in which they live (or would call home).

The concepts of belonging and home are understood in this thesis as processes that are shaped in interaction with others and related to place and the contexts where they are negotiated. Process and time are issues that are also addressed by the young people, who suggest that their belongings and feelings of home may change over time. As was noted above, the young people's claims of belonging may be rejected, and instead they may be positioned as strangers and ascribed as belonging to another (subordinate) social collectivity. However, changes may come about as time passes, which some of them bring forward and illustrate. If they have not already, they will have developed belonging and come to feel at home, and they will cease to be strangers, and will be accepted as belonging in Sweden by others.

This thesis contributes to knowledge on unaccompanied refugee children and young people by bringing forward their voices on their situation in the host country. To listen to their voices has been one of the primary aims for

me since I started working on this thesis. With sociological listening there is a potential to over-bridge the dichotomy between agency and vulnerability, and see the children and young people as social actors who may be vulnerable in some situations but not in others. However, during the course of this project I have come to reflect on the difficulty of accessing their voices. As the methodological section has shown, it was at first a struggle to get into contact with gatekeepers, and later with the young people. These difficulties I suggest are to some extent a consequence of the organization of the reception system and of the view of unaccompanied children, and particularly unaccompanied girls, as vulnerable and in need of care.

When I finally began interviewing the young people, their vocalisation – or lack thereof - became an issue. Topics such as negative experiences, discrimination and racism became sensitive and potentially threatening topics in some of the interviews and some of the young people were reticent all through the interview. I suggest that the reluctance of some of them to speak can be understood as agency to uphold a sense of integrity or as an available form of resistance in the interview situation. In addition, what they say, do not say and what they choose to say has to be understood in relation to their position in the interview setting as well as in the host country. In paper III, I argue that expressing gratitude towards the host country can be seen as a form of impression management and, thus, a strategy to negotiate their position as newly-arrived refugees. Even though these expressions of gratitude could be understood in relation to their past and present experiences, I suggest that it also has to do with managing the position in Sweden; expressing gratitude rather than being critical towards the host country, may be a way to make efforts to be included, or, put differently, not be excluded from an imagined community. Hence, there is a potential in exploring negotiations of belonging by taking impression management into the analysis. By this analysis the thesis contributes to the understanding of the need to consider the impact of the difficulty of researching experiences of racial discrimination among young refugees in Sweden, an understanding which may be relevant also in research on refugees and other marginalised groups.

The thesis is a contribution to the knowledge on the situation facing unaccompanied refugee children and young people in their host country, but has not focused on the reception and care system as such. However, some aspects of it has been addressed, such as the lack of participation in decision-making about living arrangement and where to live, the lack of (close) social relationships with practitioners who give support and with whom the young people could have long-lasting relationships with after the age of majority. In the political debate and policy, I suggest that the increasing numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who arrive in Sweden in recent years has become an “organisational problem” that must be resolved politically and by the authorities. In such a context, the child’s individual needs and wishes are not considered to any greater extent. The children and young

people are not allowed to decide in which municipality they are going to live (if they do not have relatives to live with). Furthermore, the forms of housing available may be limited, particularly for teenagers and teenage boys.

Against the backdrop of the difficulties that the young people in this study express when it comes to getting to know “Swedish” youth of their own age, there may also be a need for municipalities that provide housing and care to work more on creating available venues – other than sports activities – for them to meet and interact with others. To listen to the voices of the individual refugees may contribute to a better understanding of the extent to which they are both similar and different from “Swedish” same age young people and from each other, hence, smoothing out some of the frictions in their negotiations of belonging.

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Appendix 1

Information till personer som deltar i forskningsprojektet ”Att vara ett ensamkommande barn i Sverige” - erfarenheter bland unga med bakgrund som ensamkommande asylsökande barn”

Vid Sociologiska Institutionen, Uppsala Universitet pågår ett forskningsprojekt om erfarenheter bland barn och unga som kommit till Sverige som ensamkommande asylsökande barn. Det saknas idag forskning om hur ensamkommande barn själva ser på sin situation och hur deras erfarenheter av livet i Sverige ser ut. Vi vill därför be Dig att hjälpa oss med detta.

Projektets syfte

Syftet med forskningsprojektet är att få fördjupad kunskap om hur det är att leva som ensamkommande barn eller ungdom i Sverige. Projektet vill särskilt lyfta fram de ungas egna erfarenheter och upplevelser av sin situation. Genom fotografi samt intervjuer med efterföljande promenader vill projektet bidra till ökad kunskap och fördjupad förståelse av ensamkommande barn och ungas erfarenheter och hur de

själva ser på sin situation. Vi hoppas att projektet kan bidra med kunskap som kan bidra till att förbättra mottagande och stöd av barn och unga i denna situation.

Material från denna intervjustudie kommer endast att användas för forskningsändamål, och presenteras i en doktorsavhandling i sociologi samt artiklar i vetenskapliga tidskrifter och på nationella och internationella konferenser.

Projektansvarig och kontaktperson

Huvudman för projektet är Uppsala universitet. Keith Pringle, professor vid Sociologiska institutionen, har huvudansvar för projektet. Ansvarig för genomförande av projektet och kontaktperson är Ulrika Wernesjö, doktorand vid Sociologiska institutionen, Uppsala universitet.

Vid frågor kontakta:

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Att delta i studien

För att delta i denna studie ska du ha kommit till Sverige som asylsökande när du var under 18 år och du ska ha kommit utan dina föräldrar. Du ska nu ha beviljats permanent uppehållstillstånd. Du ska dessutom bo, eller ha bott, på ett grupphem för ensamkommande barn i en svensk kommun.

Deltagandet är frivilligt. Du har rätt att när som helst avbryta ditt deltagande i studien utan att ange skäl till varför. Du har också rätt att under intervjun avböja att svara på frågor som du känner att du inte vill eller kan svara på.

Intervjun kommer att ske vid ett eller flera tillfällen. Antalet tillfällen bestäms av dig i samråd med intervjuaren. Du kommer ha möjlighet att i samråd med intervjuaren välja vilket språk du talar under intervjun. Om du inte känner dig trygg med att tala svenska eller engelska finns möjlighet att använda tolk. Du kommer att erbjudas möjlighet att i samråd med intervjuaren välja den plats där du vill att intervjun ska äga rum – där du bor, på intervjuarens arbetsplats, på café eller på annan plats du finner lämplig. Efter intervjun kommer du och intervjuaren gå en promenad där du visar intervjuaren en gång- eller cykelväg du brukar använda. Det kan vara vägen till skolan eller till en fritidsaktivitet.

En del frågor under intervjun kan vara känsliga att prata om. Om du har behov av stödsamtal efter intervjun kommer du (oavsett) att få kontaktuppgifter av intervjuaren.

Intervjun och promenaden

Innan intervjun kommer du att få en engångskamera för att ta fotografier med som vi sedan kommer att prata om under intervjun. Vid intervjutillfället kommer du att träffa intervjuaren på den plats du själv har varit med att välja. Du kommer att intervjuas enskilt. Under förutsättning att du har gett ditt samtycke kommer intervjun och promenaden att spelas in. Syftet med att spela in är för att det är svårt som intervjuare att hinna anteckna allt som sägs. För att minimera risken för feltolkningar av dina svar är inspelning viktig. Inspelningen av vårt samtal är det endast intervjuaren som kommer att ha tillgång till och kunna lyssna på. Intervjuaren har tystnadsplikt. Ingen obehörig kommer att få ta del av dina svar. I samband med att intervjuerna och samtalet under promenaden transkriberas kommer ditt namn och andra uppgifter som kan användas för att identifiera dig att ändras eller tas bort (se nedan).

Efter intervjun och promenaden

Den inspelade intervjun kommer efter intervjun att skrivas ut och i samband med detta avidentifieras, d.v.s. ditt namn och andra uppgifter som skulle kunna användas för att identifiera dig (som specifika händelser, eller hänvisningar till vissa personer och platser) att ändras eller uteslutas. Detta görs för att säkerställa din anonymitet. Du har rätt att läsa utskriften från intervjun och promenaden vid ett tillfälle för att då kunna ändra felaktigheter. Därefter kan de inte ändras. Inspelningarna, utskriften, anteckningarna och fotografierna kommer att vara säkert inlåsta i skåp på Sociologiska institutionen på Uppsala universitet. Obehöriga kommer inte att ta del av materialet.

För dig som är under 18 år är det viktigt att du pratar med din gode man eller ställföreträdande vårdnadshavare om att delta i studien. Har du, eller din gode man eller ställföreträdande vårdnadshavare, frågor före eller efter att du har deltagit i studien hör av dig till projektets kontaktperson Ulrika Wernesjö (för kontaktuppgifter se ovan).

Appendix 2

INTERVJUGUIDE

Berätta om din tid i Sverige *alternativt* Berätta om ditt liv fram tills nu
Hur var det när du kom till Sverige?

Berätta om en vanlig dag (idag *och/eller* då, i ditt hemland)

Vad tycker du är en viktig fråga för mig att ställa? (Vad tycker du att jag bör fråga om?)

Fråga om framtiden – hur vill du ha det *och* varför? Vad händer om det inte blir så?

Skolan

- *Vad läser du?*
- *Vad tycker du om skolan? Läsa vidare?*
- *Relationer till lärare och andra vuxna/anställda i skolan?*
- *Skolkamrater?*

Fritid

- *Vad gör du på din fritid?*
- *Är det något annat som du vill göra på din fritid (som du inte gör)? Vad? Varför (kan) du inte göra det?*

Förebilder och personer att få stöd och hjälp av

- *Vem går du till när du behöver hjälp med myndigheter?*
- *Vem går du till när du behöver hjälp med ekonomi/ekonomiska frågor?*
- *Vem går du till när du har frågor om 'passager till vuxenblivande' som bostad, yrkesval etcetera?*

Relation till myndigheter

- *Hur är det nu, vilka myndigheter har du kontakt med nu?*
- *Hur fungerar det?*
- *Vilka resurser som samhället ställer till förfogande? Är det något mer du önskar?*

Platsen och boendet

- *Hur tycker du det är att bo i X?*
- *Hur är det att bo på boendet*
- *Vill du stanna på orten, i staden där du nu bor? Stanna i Sverige? Stanna tillfälligt (i väntan på något annat, i så fall vad)?*

”Hemma”

- *Vad betyder ”hemma” för dig? Kan det betyda olika saker? Hur tänker du kring det?*
- *”Hemma” i Sverige eller där du bor?*
- *Relationer till familjemedlemmar, släkt och vänner (från hemlandet)*
- *Till hemlandet – är det hemma, vill du tillbaka dit?*
- *Upplever du att du har ett ansvar att ha kontakt med familjen, med andra i ursprungslandet? Vill du det? Varför?*

Sverige och svenskhet

- *Vad visste du om Sverige innan du kom?*
- *Vad var det första du tänkte på?*

Negativa erfarenheter, diskriminering och rasism

Framtiden

- *Vad tänker du om din framtid?*
- *Hur skulle du vilja att ditt liv ser ut i framtiden?*
- *Vad drömmer du om att göra i framtiden?*
- *Vad vill du arbeta med? Var skulle du vilja bo? Varför?*

Om du skulle få ändra något i hur du blev mottagen när du kom, vad skulle det vara? Är det något du skulle vilja ändra på i din situation just nu?

Vad tycker du är en viktig fråga för mig att ställa? (Vad tycker du att jag bör fråga om?)

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