

Children's lived rights

The everyday politics of asylum-seeking children

Sandra Karlsson



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Abstract

This thesis explores asylum-seeking children's *everyday politics* in relation to their situation in the Swedish reception system. It engages in af children's political agency in which a broad definition of politics is adopted to examine and acknowledge the politics embedded in children's everyday spaces and children's everyday actions. Methodologically, it draws on a one-year ethnographic fieldwork and participatory methods with 18 children aged 6-12 years in two institutional settings: the school and the asylum centre. The thesis involves three empirical studies, covering arenas that the children *themselves* identified as important in their everyday lives.

The first study explores the children's *articulated standpoints* on "home" underpinned by their experiences of an institutional housing lacking home-like conditions. It shows how the children's articulations identified spatial and relational conditions of "house" and "home" and how they criticized the asylum centre's regulated time-space, which denied them these conditions, for example, desired food practices, spaces for play, privacy and family life. Moreover, the children's experiences of living in an unsafe housing was reinforced through their *lived fears*, that is, their experiences of threats from the "Police" or "Security" and overly strict treatment from staff members of the "Reception" in addition to their fear of deportation. This study shows how the children's critique implicitly identified how their right to wellbeing in their housing was restricted or denied.

The second study focuses on children's *politics of play*, manifested in what I have called their *play tactics* in the asylum centre's strongly regulated time-space. It shows how the children developed a *hidden resistance* when they navigated in the asylum centre, that is, how they identified and handled the institutional regulations, amid their lived fears. This article specifically analyses how children's play tactics can be understood as rights claims in a context where the children were denied spaces for play due to the asylum centre's spatial restrictions, in the form of rules, prohibition signs and threats of repercussions from staff members.

The third study explores *belonging* and the *politics of belonging* through the children's *articulated emotions* as responses to practices of inclusion or exclusion in the school setting. It shows how the children responded positively, with love and happiness, or negatively, with anger, fear or sadness, depending on how practices and relations affected their sense of belonging in school. This article shows how the children's articulated emotions contested exclusionary practices that positioned them as Others who could potentially be deported, revealing how the children were emotionally affected when their rights were denied.

In conclusion, this thesis shows how the children were affected by the conditions embedded in asylum politics and how their political agency was evoked and enacted in relation to the politics that permeated their everyday lives. It argues that the children's ways of engaging in *hidden politics* should be understood in relation to their uncertain position in this high-stakes context. The combined analyses of children's everyday politics in the three studies have also illuminated, what I have called, children's *lived rights* in an asylum context.

Keywords: *everyday politics, asylum politics, deportability, no-go zones, lived rights, lived fears, politics of play, agency, navigation, play tactics, belonging, emotions, articulations, standpoints, home, regulations, ethnography, children's geographies.*

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Till mina älskade barn
Elton och Aston

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List of studies

Study I

Karlsson, S. (2019). "You said 'home' but we don't have a house": Children's lived rights and politics in an asylum centre in Sweden. *Children's Geographies*, 17(1), 64–75.

Study II

Karlsson, S. (2018). "Do you know what we do when we want to play?": Children's hidden politics of resistance and struggle for play in a Swedish asylum centre. *Childhood*, 25(3), 311–324.

Study III

Karlsson, S. (2019). "They cry, cry, they want to go to school": The micro-politics of asylum-seeking children's articulated emotions and belonging in relation to the Swedish school. *Children & Society*, 33(5), 429–442.

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1 Introduction

The “solidarity crisis” of 2015 and 2016 – or what has commonly, and quite problematically, been framed as the “refugee crisis” (Schierup et al., 2017) – was characterized by the enforced politics of migration control and the abandonment of human rights perspectives (Elsrud et al., 2021; Lundberg, 2018). In this political context, Sweden further restrained its asylum policies when restrictions in asylum-seekers’ access to social rights were applied as a tool for migration control, and many asylum-seeking children were denied their human rights (Hagelund, 2020; Lundberg, 2018). This political “crisis” affected the conditions for the rights of the children arriving in Sweden at this time (Elsrud et al., 2021). In 2015, around 70 000 children, and around half of them, approximately 35,000 (most of them 0-12 years old), were seeking asylum with their families (Swedish Migration Agency, 2016). Many families with children were then housed in asylum centres, in the form of large, collective, institutional housing facilities. During this period, I had the unique opportunity to be given access to undertake a one-year fieldwork, in one of the largest centres in Sweden, exploring children’s everyday experiences of living there.

In several respects, my research interest reflects discussions on how asylum-seeking children are constructed as *out of place* within “the national order of things” (Malkki, 1995) when placed in asylum centres or detention centres. This, in turn, is related to the human rights of asylum-seeking non-citizens (Arendt, 1951; Benhabib, 2004) and in particular the tension between the nation state’s interest in migration control and the rights of asylum-seeking children within the contrasting political approaches to them as children, on the one hand, and as asylum-seekers, on the other (Bhabha, 2009; 2019). This thesis also connects to another theoretical discussion that is related to children’s rights, namely the *politics of belonging* (Yuval-Davis, 2006) in which asylum-seeking children are entangled. A politics of belonging constructs formal boundaries for membership (citizenship) that affect asylum-seekers’ rights as well as their possibilities for *belonging* (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005) while facing potential deportation (de Genova, 2002; de Genova & Peutz, 2010). A politics of belonging also constructs Otherness that divides people into “us” and “them” through relational exclusion of people based on their positions in societal power relations (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In this way, asylum-seeking children are entangled in a politics of belonging in multi-layered ways.

The inquiry into asylum-seeking children’s rights and belonging is particularly interesting in the Swedish context, as Sweden has often been

perceived and upheld as a pioneer nation for children's rights (Freeman, 2000). An overall concern of this thesis is how asylum politics affect the conditions for asylum-seeking children's rights in the Swedish reception system. But, most importantly, this thesis takes an interest in how asylum politics affect how asylum-seeking children's rights are lived in their everyday lives, and in how children, in their everyday spaces, navigate within the local politics of asylum regulations. In this thesis, I have explored these issues with an ethnographic approach, exploring asylum-seeking children's lived experiences and perspectives amid asylum politics.

Asylum-seeking children's experiences, and their own perspectives on the conditions affecting their everyday lives, have largely been overlooked in both childhood studies and migration research (Bak & von Brömssen, 2013; Seeberg & Goździak, 2016). While the conditions that render asylum-seeking children vulnerable are important to acknowledge (Ensor & Goździak, 2010), much adult-centric migration research with an uncritical focus on asylum-seeking children's victimhood has tended to overshadow their agency (for critical discussions, see, Bak & von Brömssen 2013; Dobson, 2009; Seeberg & Goździak, 2016). In the past decade, there has been a childhood turn in the research on migration contexts (Bak & von Brömssen, 2013; Seeberg & Goździak, 2016) that takes into consideration both asylum-seeking children's agency and vulnerability in relation to specific conditions (Ensor & Godziak, 2010). But such research on asylum contexts has mostly concerned older unaccompanied children. In this thesis, I instead explore young asylum-seeking children's everyday experiences and perspectives when they are placed in the Swedish asylum reception system with their families.

I have explored the everyday lives of asylum-seeking children arriving with their families in Sweden, drawing on a multisite fieldwork (autumn 2015 to autumn 2016) *with* a group of young children (6-12 years old), over the period of one year, in their school and the asylum centre where they lived. Methodologically, it is based on an ethnographic approach and endeavours to explore asylum-seeking children's everyday politics in their lived worlds at school and at the asylum centre.

My thesis connects to childhood studies and children's geographies, my goal being to arrive at an interdisciplinary approach to children's rights in dialogue with these two fields. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) can indeed provide an important political tool for children's rights but my approach instead focuses on children's perspectives and practices (cf. Holzscheiter et al., 2019; Kallio, 2012; Skelton, 2007). In line with Karl Hanson and colleagues, I advocate an approach to children's rights that moves away from legal inquiries into explorations of children's own notions of rights (Hanson, 2014; Hanson & Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Reynolds et al., 2006). But such an approach has mainly been applied to the third world to explore the meanings of rights in relation to the supposed discrepancy between human rights policies and local conceptions. In this thesis, I instead explore

asylum-seeking children's lived experiences to understand their particular conditions from their marginalized position. Here, the discrepancy instead lies in the tension between migration control and children's rights in a Swedish asylum context.

In my work, I thus engaged in an empirically grounded and contextualized exploration of children's rights in dialogue with methodologies and theories developed in childhood sociology and children's geographies (e.g., Aitken, 2015; Alanen, 2010; Freeman, 1998; Kallio, 2012; Mayall, 2000, 2015; Quennerstedt, 2013; Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014). An important starting point is that children's rights are *human rights* – an inherent right to dignity – that *all* children as human beings are equally entitled to without discrimination in relation to other children or in relation to adults (cf. Alanen, 2010). In line with Berry Mayall (2000, 2015), I argue that Childhood Sociology can provide a critical analysis of the relations and conditions that realize or deny children's rights in children's lived worlds, but also of how children relate to and challenge the political contexts that shape these conditions. This is a perspective that entails an exploration of rights and that considers and critically analyses the unequal power relations that children are entangled in (see also Reynaert et al., 2012). It is also a methodological approach that can enable children themselves to provide insights regarding the realization or denial of their rights, without necessarily talking about formal rights. It can contribute to our understanding of how children can perceive that their rights are respected relationally in child-adult relations (Mayall, 2000; 2015). In line with Stuart Aitken (2015), I argue that children's geographies can contribute to a study of children's rights that takes into consideration children's spatial and relational politics in their everyday lives. Thus, this entails an understanding of how rights are lived within the politicized realities in which children lead their lives (Kallio & Mills, 2016), taking into consideration how rights are unequally realized in relation to the politics that shape children's spaces (Aitken, 2015; Kallio & Mills, 2016).

Another underlying theoretical issue in this thesis concerns children's political agency and how their everyday actions, in relation to the power relations they are entangled in, can be understood as *everyday politics* (Kallio, 2009; Kallio & Häkli, 2011b; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012). Kirsii Pauliina Kallio and Jouni Häkli have argued that children should always be recognized as potential *political actors*, advocating for a broadened understanding of politics that recognize the politics involved in children's everyday practices and in the events that unfold in their everyday lives (Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Kallio & Häkli, 2010; 2011a; 2011b). The distinction between “politics” (the personal) and “Politics” (the public) is called into question, favouring a more inclusive definition. Instead of predefining what counts as politics, they have argued for empirical explorations of *how* something is political and that such a “contextual open-endedness of everyday political agency invites curiosity toward issues, experiences, events, and actions that are or may

become political in a given situation” (Häkli & Kallio, 2018, p. 3; see also Mitchell & Elwood, 2012).

Within such an approach to politics, children’s legal-political in-betweenness makes them highly interesting political subjects (Skelton, 2010) and perhaps even more so for asylum-seeking children given their uncertain socio-legal position. Kallio and Häkli criticize how childhood generally has been viewed as an apolitical field, but the fact that children have been considered the least likely political actors also makes them a particularly fruitful case for the exploration of politics (Kallio & Häkli, 2011a, p 107). Recently they have also taken an interest in the political aspects of asylum-seekers’ mundane agency from their subordinate position in asylum institutions that greatly constrain their agency (Häkli & Kallio 2020; Kallio et al., 2020). However, the everyday politics of children in asylum contexts, who are marginalized both as children and as asylum-seekers, has rarely been explored. In my thesis, my ambition is to engage in an exploration of young asylum-seeking children’s agency and *how* and *when* their everyday actions can be understood as political, exploring how the children in this study negotiate their position as asylum-seeking children, that is, that is, their legal status as asylum-seekers and their social position as children, and the political conditions for the rights that come with this position.

Inspired by such a political approach to everydayness, I will here discuss, and develop, what I mean by children’s *lived rights*, that is, taking children’s lived experiences as a starting point for an exploration of how rights are lived and enacted in the everyday lives of children. Children’s lived rights involves the ways in which children experience that their rights are restricted or denied in their everyday lives. This approach to children’s rights also considers children’s emotions, or how rights *feel*, which can be revealed in the ways children’s emotions show how children are affected when their (notions of) rights are realized or denied. It also concerns the ways in which children’s everyday political actions may disclose how they claim their rights in their everyday lives. It is thus a perspective that takes into consideration how children, through their everyday actions and ways of navigating, may explicitly or implicitly contest the conditions for their rights.

This thesis is an ethnographic exploration of children’s lived rights in children’s everyday experiences of housing and school in an asylum context. It is an ethnography that involves three studies covering three arenas that the children themselves have identified as matters of importance – namely their housing, their play, and their school arenas. These studies together shed light on different aspects of the children’s everyday lives, and together the studies present a broader understanding of asylum-seeking children’s lived worlds.

Aims and research questions

The overall aim of this thesis is to explore the everyday lives of children who are placed in a Swedish asylum reception system together with their families. It is an ethnographic study conducted *with* asylum-seeking children, focusing on their lived experiences and everyday practices. In this thesis three empirical arenas are explored, namely the participating children's asylum centre housing (Study I), their school (Study III) and their arenas for play (Study II). An important aim of this thesis is to discuss different aspects of *politics of belonging* (Yuval-Davis, 2006) and in particular the affective and emotional aspects of asylum-seeking children's *belonging*. Another aim is to approach, what I have chosen to call, children's *lived rights* using ethnographic methodology and participatory methods to document and analyse what children say and do in matters relevant to understanding their everyday politics, with a view to also contributing to discussions on children's lived rights. One important underlying aim is to advance our theoretical and empirical understanding of asylum-seeking children's political agency. The marginalized position of asylum-seeking children in this high-stakes context makes them the least likely political actors, and their conditions therefore constitutes a critical case for the study of children's everyday politics. To this end, I have formulated four research questions:

An overall question is:

*In what ways do asylum-seeking children show agency in their everyday lives and how and when can their agency be understood as political?

From this overall question follows three more specific research questions:

*How do asylum-seeking children express notions of *home* and how can this deepen our understanding of their *belonging*? (Study I)

*How can asylum-seeking children's everyday lives be understood through their ways of *navigating* in their play arenas? (Study II)

*In what ways do asylum-seeking children's *articulated emotions* provide insights into their experiences in relation to school? (Study III)

2 Research on asylum-seeking children's lives

This thesis draws on research in childhood studies and children's geographies. It also connects to research on migration and children's rights. In this chapter, I will present previous research in these overlapping fields with an overall focus on asylum-seeking children's lives in various asylum systems. As such, this brief review will primarily be restricted to the European context. This chapter presents research on policy and practices that illuminate some of the ways in which asylum-seeking children are placed in ambivalent positions in relation to their rights, in that they are both children *and* asylum-seekers. These studies point to the contradictions between policies that stipulate their rights as children, on the one hand, and policies of migration control, on the other. However, this chapter mainly presents empirical studies that shed light on the asylum politics in which asylum-seeking children are embedded and how these conditions affect their everyday lives. These studies, in particular, will be used to illuminate the power relations in which asylum-seeking children are entangled in their everyday places, such as schools and asylum centres, both crucial arenas for a contextualized understanding of asylum-seeking children's agency, rights and belonging. My presentation will mainly concern studies with a focus on the everyday lives of young children seeking asylum with their families, but will to some extent also present studies on other groups of children in migration contexts.

Conditions for children's rights amid uncertain belonging

Within European Nation States' contrasting political approaches to children's rights and migration control, asylum-seeking children are targeted as vulnerable children with rights, on the one hand, and as asylum-seekers with limited rights in the face of migration control, on the other (e.g., Crawley, 2006; Giner, 2007). In her analysis of the asylum policy framework in the UK, Clotilde Giner (2007) shows that asylum-seeking children are entangled in divergent political approaches to asylum and childhood and that restrictive asylum policies offer families with children the same asylum standards as those applied to single adults. Similarly, Heaven Crawley (2006) discusses how approaches to asylum-seeking families in the UK reveal that migration control takes precedence over the best interest of the child and that the children are ultimately treated as asylum-seekers first and as children second. Moreover, she claims that children in asylum-seeking families are among the

poorest and most deprived children and that migration control results in conditions that would not be acceptable for children in general. In her view, asylum policies infringe on asylum-seeking children's rights in the UK through imposed child poverty, which can be understood as a tool for migration control. In the Swedish context, Marita Eastmond and Henry Ascher (2011) have similarly discussed the ambiguous constructions of asylum-seeking children, showing that they are cast as vulnerable victims, on the one hand, and as untrustworthy Others, on the other. This ambiguity reflects a tension between the politics of care and the politics of control in the Swedish asylum reception system. In a similar vein, Kathrine Vitus and Hilde Lidén (2010) have discussed the conditions of asylum-seeking children in Norway and Denmark and the political identities that are offered to these children in the tension between the asylum discourses and the childhood discourses that surround them and that, in turn, affect the realization of their rights.

In European asylum contexts, asylum-seeking children thus find themselves in a highly uncertain position in relation to their rights, all in the face of migration control and potential deportation (Bhabha, 2009, 2019; Seeberg, 2016). In her work on human rights, Jaqueline Bhabha (2019) has discussed the tensions embedded in asylum policies – tensions that derive from the conflicting regimes of children's rights and migration control. She argues that children's rights are recurrently subordinated to migration control in the adult-centred migration framework and that this has implications for asylum-seeking children's everyday lives. Elsewhere, Bhabha (2009) has applied Hanna Arendt's (1951) famous discussion on *the right to have rights* to her inquiry into the rights of Arendt's children of today (migrant children who are de facto or functionally stateless). Bhabha argues that these children are essentially rightless as an effect of their non-citizenship status. Bhabha means that, in many respects, Arendt's children are denied their rights, that they have a weak status as rights holders and that their possibilities to make rights claims are impeded by the threat of deportation. She concludes that:

Arendt's children regularly live their lives in the zone of exception. Where advocacy is weak, the rights holder weaker still, and political will absent, de facto rightlessness is the norm (Bhabha, 2009, p. 170).

Bhabha (2009) argues that asylum-seeking children's precarious situation in contradictory asylum policies infringes on their rights, and she especially raises concerns about asylum-seeking children's social rights.

Marie Louise Seeberg (2016) has discussed the ways in which migration control establishes territorial, social and symbolic boundaries that ascribe different statuses to children — children, refugees, asylum seekers, citizens — as well as how these statuses give them access to different social rights (e.g., the right to education) and social spaces (e.g., schools) within nation states. Moreover, she shows that even if asylum-seeking children are formally

granted social rights, the state's interest in migration control renders their position in relation to these rights highly uncertain, as they might be deported from the state territory at any time. Seeberg argues that, within such a position, asylum-seeking children's belonging is highly uncertain and that notions of personhood are at the very core of their ambivalent position in relation to their rights. Asylum-seeking children's position in relation to their rights and belonging is thus, according to Seeberg, intrinsically related to their overriding uncertainty and potential deportation. This condition has been identified as characteristic of the asylum system that, as Whyte (2011) argues, works as a technology of power in which uncertainty is intrinsic to the system's operation. For asylum-seekers, the underlying core of their *temporal uncertainties* (Griffiths, 2014), is shaped by the seemingly endless waiting for the unknown outcome of their asylum cases:

People wait for what might be long periods of time, longing for an end to the waiting, but with little idea when it might happen and fearful of the change it might bring (Griffiths, 2014, p. 2005).

In the Swedish asylum context, Anna Lundberg and her colleagues provide insights into the everyday lives and the conditions for rights among children subjected to migration control (e.g., Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012). More specifically, Anna Lundberg and Jacob Lind (2017) show that asylum-seeking children find themselves in a highly uncertain position between a potential residence permit and the threat of deportation, by exploring how the Swedish asylum process becomes a space for the *deportation regime* (de Genova & Peutz, 2010) through practices identified as technologies of displacement of children's rights. On the other hand, Lundberg and Lind conclude that rights have a radical potential to disrupt oppressive vehicles of power. In another publication, Lundberg and Spång (2016) discuss the overall condition of *deportability* (de Genova, 2002), that is, the conditions of fear that the constant threat of potential deportation produces in relation to children's rights in Sweden. They focus on investigating the conditions for undocumented unaccompanied children's rights, showing that their fear of claiming the rights they are entitled to is deeply rooted in their uncertain situation, with an imminent threat of deportation.

The fear of deportation (or related threats) might thus prevent asylum-seekers from claiming their rights, but the research has provided insights into how children experiencing deportability nonetheless claim their rights and their belonging. Jonathan Josefsson (2016) shows that, in Swedish media, children who face deportation engage in socio-political rights claims for their right to stay. Jakob Lind's (2020) doctoral thesis explores the politics and rights of undocumented children in Sweden and the UK. In one of his ethnographic studies in the UK, the children's emotions are foregrounded in his analysis of everyday politics. In his study, Lind (2017) illuminates the

children's struggles for belonging and their contestation of being positioned as "deportable" and non-British. These contestations were often shown in the children's anger about being positioned as non-white or being subjected to migration control. In another ethnographic study, Åsa Wahlström Smith (2018) reveals undocumented children's fear management, by documenting the strategies the children deploy to hide in plain sight in response to the constant threat of deportation (see also Ascher & Wahlström Smith, 2016). Nonetheless, another study demonstrates that, at times, these children also challenge the deportation regime (Wahlström Smith, 2021).

These studies show the politics that affect the conditions for rights in children's everyday lives. Within the reception system, these political implications may concern access to different social places (such as a home place and a school), as well as the ways in which the children's rights unfold within these settings in their everyday lives.

The school as a social space for asylum-seeking children

In the Swedish research, the school has been discussed as an important social space for asylum-seeking children and their wellbeing in an otherwise uncertain situation. Åsa Löwén (2006), drawing on in-depth interviews in her thesis on asylum-seeking children's existential meaning-making, has identified the school as the children's main resource, in that it provides a safe sanctuary and a highly significant social space in an asylum context. These findings are corroborated in other interview studies with asylum-seeking children and their parents (see e.g., Lennartsson, 2007; Tursunovic, 2010) and in ethnographic work, as below.

In her ethnographic study, Lisa Ottosson focuses on the perspectives of school-age children (7-16 years) seeking asylum together with their families. She shows that the children's aspiration for an "ordinary" everyday life largely revolved around school (Ottosson et al., 2017) and that the children's delayed school start interfered with their aspirations, as did recurrent meetings with the migration authorities. Her work also reveals the different *tactics* the children used to deal with how the politics of asylum reception interfered with their aspirations. For instance, one of the children recounted that she used her school attendance as an excuse not to participate in meetings with the case officer at the Migration Agency.

Malin Svensson's (2017) thesis presents another ethnographically grounded work that offers insights into the everyday lives of school children, age 6-16 years, in asylum-seeking families. One of her studies documents some of the ways in which school becomes an important social space for children's wellbeing (Svensson & Eastmond, 2013). In particular, school fulfils or responds to the children's striving for a sense of "normality" in the

overarching uncertainty affecting their everyday lives in the asylum context. Her study illuminates how – in the children’s hopefulness and longing – the school is seen as a bridge to their future belonging in their host society and how acquisition of the Swedish language is seen as an important link to this future. Having access to school becomes especially important for asylum-seeking children’s opportunities to establish social relations with peers and teachers (cf. Ottosson et al., 2017). Svensson’s thesis shows that, on the whole, the children in her study seldom had relations with peers or recreational activities outside the school. This also became evident in the children’s longing for school during the holidays. Moreover, the children’s economic situation meant that they sometimes did not have appropriate clothes for traveling to school in cold weather or for participating in sports lessons (Svensson & Eastmond, 2013; see also Svensson, 2010).

Thus, regarding these primary school settings, it has been shown that the school has the potential to provide asylum-seeking children with a sense of belonging through social relations as well as with an education strongly connected to their aspirations for a future in the host society. However, in addition to the positive meanings that the asylum-seeking children ascribed to school, Svensson and Eastmond (2013) document some of the ways in which the introductory classes were depicted by the children as socially and spatially exclusionary from the school community. Although the children felt socially attached to their peers and teachers in the introductory classes (*Förberedelseklasser*), they wanted to escape the marginalization associated with being an “IC kid” (“FK-barn”) and associated the transition to a mainstream class with Swedish-speaking peers as a major accomplishment and as a way of belonging to the “normal” school (on children’s longing to advance to the regular or “normal” class, see also Nilsson Folke, 2016).

Moreover, Svensson and Eastmond (2013) show that asylum-seeking children’s inclusion in school is conditioned by their social and legal status in the host society. The authors argue that the children’s hopefulness, in connection with the school, was conditioned by their uncertain position, in relation to their constant fear of being deported. In school, they were reminded of the threat of rupture from their established social connections and place attachments when, for instance, a classmate suddenly disappeared after being deported.

Asylum-seeking children’s strong desire for a residence permit may result in solidarity, but also in acts of rivalry or social rejection between asylum-seeking children, affecting their wellbeing in school settings (Svensson & Eastmond, 2013). Jan-Paul Brekke (2010), for instance, shows that young asylum-seekers experienced waiting as *random and unjust* in relation to others who received their decision before them. In school, then, asylum-seeking children’s silence about the progress of their asylum application can be a tactic to avoid being constantly reminded, or reminding other asylum-seeking children, about their precarious situation (Ottosson et al., 2017). Mirzet

Tursunovic (2010) also documents asylum-seeking children's worries about not being allowed to stay in Sweden, worries that meant they did not dare to attach too much hope to school in case, as one child said, her dreams would be shattered. In addition to the fear of deportation, Wahlström Smith (2018) reveals that some of the complexities that undocumented children must deal with in school, in order to hide their legal status, also involve dealing with markers perceived as non-Swedish or non-white. This shows that asylum-seeking children's belonging is not only a matter of formal boundaries such as a residence permit, but also one of informal boundaries linked to "Swedishness".

In Swedish schools, *Swedishness*, as a cultural and racial norm, is closely linked to the boundaries of belonging (Léon Rosales & Jonsson, 2019). For instance, drawing on a classroom ethnography, Åhlund and Jonsson (2016) show that refugee youths are positioned as, but also contest being categorized as, the non-Swedish Other in everyday school practices. Ulrika Wernesjö (2015), drawing on an interview study with unaccompanied refugee youths, highlights experiences of degrading and racist comments as barriers to social relations and belonging in Swedish school settings. Similarly, some studies focusing on younger asylum-seeking children at school have shown that they struggle with experiences of bullying and being teased for their beginner-level spoken Swedish (Lennartsson, 2007; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013; Tursunovic, 2010). Taken together, these studies have documented both inclusionary and exclusionary practices in school settings and revealed the complex social relations in which asylum-seeking children are entangled.

In research on newly arrived students' experiences in the Swedish school, Nihad Bunar and colleagues underscore the importance of a supportive and socially inclusive school atmosphere, as both regular and introductory classes may otherwise create exclusionary school environments (Bunar, 2015, 2021; Nilsson & Bunar, 2016; Tajic & Bunar, 2020). Studies show that newly arrived students experience being marginalized and positioned as "immigrants" in school (e.g., Hagström, 2018; Sharif, 2017).

Jenny Nilsson Folke has explored some of these issues in her work on newly arrived students' encounters with the Swedish school system. Her exploration of migrant children's embodied experiences and feelings of exclusion reveals how migrant student's bodies are recurrently positioned as the Others (Nilsson Folke, 2016). In a study on temporality, she discusses migrant children's emotional aspirations to belong and the temporalities that have affected their feelings of exclusion (Nilsson Folke, 2018). The children in her work reported being separated in "non-Swedish" places and being blocked from reaching certain desired contexts perceived as more "Swedish" (see also Hagström, 2018) but at the same time, she challenges the idea that inclusion is simply created by placing newly arrived students in a "Swedish" mainstream class (Nilsson & Axelsson, 2013).

These Swedish studies echo some prior European research in that they highlight the importance of a supportive school environment for asylum-seeking children's wellbeing. Drawing on interviews with asylum-seeking children in the UK, Neil Spicer (2008) explores their experiences of places of inclusion and exclusion in their settlements, showing that neighbourhoods and schools that enabled these 8- to 16-year-olds to develop friendships and engage in free play (in the streets, parks and playgrounds) were crucial to the children's construction of places as inclusive (where they felt safe and happy). He shows that the children's friendships with peers in school and in after-school activities were important and helped them to manage exclusionary neighbourhoods (where they felt unsafe and fearful). In addition to the social aspects, the school was also connected to the children's aspirations for future settlement in the UK. Children's long waiting to start school was therefore experienced as difficult. Moreover, the children shared experiences of bullying based on their ethnic and religious identities in schools in excluding environments.

Mano Candappa, a scholar working on the educational rights of asylum-seeking children in the UK, has acknowledged the potential role of school, but she has simultaneously argued that adequate support for these children is often lacking (Candappa, 2000, 2001, 2016; Candappa & Igbini, 2003). In her interviews with children (age 11-14), she shows that their acquisition of English was crucial, not only to their education, but to their opportunities to establish social relations. Her studies, however, also show that asylum-seeking children's right to education is conditional in relation to access to school, educational quality, as well as rights associated with their wellbeing within their specific schools. The children reported difficulties in having to wait for school for several months as well as experiences of being subjected to bullying in school due to their ethnic background or basic level in English. In her work, Candappa shows that asylum-seeking children may be subjected to racism and Othering at school, which is in line with other studies demonstrating how linguistic, cultural and racial norms may categorize the migrant child as the Other.

In a study in Scottish school settings, Hopkins et al. (2017) reveal how racist misrecognition impacts young migrant's belonging, but they also reveal the different strategies (humour, clarifying, ignoring, withdrawing, downplaying, accepting) the children used to deal with and respond to these encounters. Valentine et al. (2009) show how young Somali refugees in Denmark and the UK must negotiate their identities as Muslims in schools, as integration policies reflect norms of nationhood based on secularism and whiteness, including linguistic norms, which label them as outsiders. Similarly, Sporton et al. (2006) demonstrate that racialized norms, oppressive asylum policies and prejudice against asylum-seekers affect the positions asylum-seeking youth have to negotiate in UK schools. Their study also indicates that dispersal of housing for asylum-seekers results in disadvantages

in the school system. These studies have revealed some of the processes of belonging and Othering in which refugee and migrant children are entangled.

These issues have also been discussed by Halleli Pinson and Madeleine Arnot (2007, 2010), two scholars who have contributed policy analysis on asylum-seeking children's access to education and processes of inclusion or exclusion in schools in the UK. Pinson and Arnot argue that asylum-seeking children's education should be understood through a broad political frame of the logics of rights and the politics of belonging, as the children cannot be separated from the discourses that surround them as asylum-seeking non-citizens. The authors mean that hostile anti-immigration and racist discourses shape asylum-seeking children's educational experiences and that the school has a significant role to play for asylum-seeking children's inclusion and recognition amid these discourses. They argue that a *politics of belonging* (Yuval-Davis, 2006) is helpful in understanding the discourses on asylum-seeking children's education as well as the recognition (or misrecognition) that takes place in schools (Pinson & Arnot, 2007). They have specifically identified how the asylum policies that apply to asylum-seeking families hinder the children's access to school, particularly the housing policies in the context of housing dispersal (Pinson & Arnot, 2010).

In an Irish context, Dymphna Devine has contributed work on migrant children in the school context. For instance, Devine and Kelly (2006) show that children's (6-11 years) social interactions in a primary school are deeply embedded in the dominant discourses of Otherness, such as when the majority ethnic group children draw on cultural and racial stereotypes, marking out certain children as "different", and when the minority children employ strategies for coping with these norms. The authors argue that social positioning is an active process that is deeply embedded in the politics of recognition. Elsewhere, her research has analysed the positionings of migrant students in primary and secondary schools in relation to children's rights (Devine & McGillicuddy, 2016). This study shows some of the structural dimensions that influence how teachers position students differently and how this affects (especially migrant) children's equal opportunities concerning their right to education. In other work, building on fieldwork and interviews with children age 9-12 in Irish schools, Devine (2009, 2013) draws on Bourdieu's concepts of *social* and *cultural capital* to demonstrate the children's constant negotiations of social positionings in their aspiration to be recognized as "insiders". The school had an important role to play for children's access to social after-school activities that served to strengthen their cultural capital. However, these activities were often only accessible to children with parents with sufficient economic resources. In the school setting, the children's strategies included striving for symbolic markers of belonging through learning and speaking "proper" English or Irish, and for developing friendships and minimizing embodied aspects of cultural difference. These coping strategies, Devine argues, involved substantial emotional work, which

emerged through the children's feelings of gratitude when experiencing recognition at school as well as their reluctance to be overtly critical of any experiences of misrecognition. In other work, McGillicuddy and Devine (2018, 2020) have suggested that ability grouping in school is a form of symbolic violence that children embody, and that their experience of being in "low-ability" groups evoked emotional responses such as feelings of being "ashamed", "upset" or "inferior".

In migration research, emotions have been rather understudied. However, the work of Michalinos Zembylas (2011, 2015), drawing on Sara Ahmed's (2014) cultural politics of emotions, has contributed to children's *emotional geographies* and work on exclusion in school contexts. In his ethnographic work, Zembylas has explored emotional geographies among children in a Cypriot school, showing how the socio-political context (discourses of racism, nationalism and anti-immigration) permeates the politically charged school settings. In this school context, practices of exclusion were reproduced through the majority children's expressed feelings of disgust and hatred towards the minority children. Among the minority children, these relationally underpinned emotions resulted in feelings of pain, fear and sadness and affected their sense of belonging.

In much prior work, the school unquestionably appears to be a highly important social space for asylum-seeking children's belonging in the midst of uncertainty. The school has the potential to provide them opportunities to establish social relations with peers and enhance their access to play. The, often prolonged, waiting before starting school might therefore reinforce asylum-seeking children's experiences of social exclusion. But several studies also show that, in school, asylum-seeking children's inclusion is conditioned by their spatial and temporal locations and how they are positioned as the Others in school contexts. In addition, temporary asylum housing units seem to affect asylum-seeking children's schooling and local attachments.

Children's everyday lives in asylum housing

Swedish research focused on children in asylum-seeking families has, to some extent, included issues concerning children's housing situation during the asylum reception process. These studies have shown that asylum-seeking families recurrently raise concerns connected to housing standards (Andersson et al., 2010; Eastmond, 2010; Lennartsson, 2007; Svensson, 2010). In Svensson's (2010) ethnography, the children talked about their housing in negative terms, related to overcrowding and isolation, and in terms of not having school friends, play spaces and activities within walking distance. Moreover, the unstable housing situation of their families often resulted in ruptures in the children's schooling and their social attachments in

the local school, as their families moved around (see also Lennartsson, 2007). These studies show that the housing situation greatly affects asylum-seeking children's everyday lives. However, these studies do not include *children's experiences of living in asylum centres*, although two siblings in Svensson's study (2010) did mention negative experiences (overcrowding and the taste of food) during their short-term stay at a transit centre. The children in Löwén's thesis (2006), reportedly, lived in an asylum centre, but their housing situation was not explicitly discussed. In a recent study, Karin Brunsson (2021) briefly discusses how adult residents spent a long time waiting in a provisional asylum centre in 2016 with scanty entrees emptied of furniture and closed communal areas with many prohibition signs. The residents said they only slept, ate and waited and were longing to be able to cook their own food. In another study, Sharam Khosravi (2009) discusses the placement of children in Swedish detention centres as a human rights violation. In general, however – regarding the Swedish asylum context – research on the everyday lives of children and families in asylum centres is quite limited.

In a Norwegian context, Marie Louise Seeberg and her colleagues (2009) conducted fieldwork in two asylum centres to observe the children's lived realities and to analyse the spatial locations and social positions of small children (under the age of 5). In their study, the family room is described as the temporary "home" for the children, but the housing situation as such is not in focus. Rather, their study highlights the ways in which the children negotiated the spatial and temporal boundaries that restricted their access to spaces for wandering around and playing in the centres. It shows that the children struggled to create *children's places* in these centres, which were primarily designed as places for adults. These struggles included finding places to play inside the centre when the arranged playrooms were closed as the centre did not offer safe play areas outdoors. Seeberg and her colleagues have reported that the spatiotemporal boundaries in the asylum centres interact with the children's ambiguous social position as both children and asylum-seekers, suggesting that the children's situation within the centres strongly diverges from Norwegian childhood norms and that this reveals a tension between migration control, on the one hand, and children's rights, on the other:

Within the field of children's welfare, all agree that the situation is unacceptable. Once the discussion moves into the field of migration management, however, the same situation is construed as unavoidable (Seeberg et al., 2009, p. 409).

Children in asylum centres, the authors argue, therefore experience a dual exclusion, in that they are both *children out of place* in Norwegian society and *children with no place* in these centres (Seeberg et al., 2009).

In a Danish context, Kathrine Vitus has conducted fieldwork among asylum-seeking children (age 2-17 years) and their families in asylum centres. She (2011) analyses how asylum centres create *zones of indistinction* (Agamben, 1998), dissolving the social institution of the family and its separation from public life through the state's politicization of the private lives of asylum-seekers' bodies. Vitus shows that family life in asylum centres is partly dissolved through the absence of domestic duties when families are offered prepared meals, with no opportunities for parents to prepare the family's own food. Moreover, she argues that the distinctions between adult and child spheres within the family are dissolved in overcrowded housing conditions where adults and children are forced to sleep and live in the same rooms (see also, Christensen & Vitus Andersen, 2006). Such housing conditions leave the children little space for privacy or for developing peer relationships in their home, and children often have no alternative places to go after the leisure facilities at the centres are closed. Vitus (2010) draws on Bourdieu's theorization of subjectivity and time to explicate the children's difficulties in creating a stable time-space. For instance, she documents how the children in her study experienced the open-ended waiting time in these centres as endless and how, over time, this created a state of powerlessness with little control over their own time (cf. Brekke, 2010; Griffiths, 2014; Whyte, 2011). Vitus shows that the children "waited for something crucial to happen but also waited without knowing when the waiting would stop" (p. 39). Vitus argues that, when children are trapped in time and space for years in asylum centres, this situation reflects a clash between their human rights and asylum regulations. Moreover, she shows that waiting invalidated the children's here-and-now in a present filled with boredom and despair as well as their insecure future. Relocations between centres were also common, and the constant moving meant that the children's peer relations were disrupted and that they again and again had to establish attachments to new people and places.

Somewhat similarly, Melanie Griffiths (2014) reports that multiple temporal tensions in the asylum system cause asylum-seekers to feel outside "normal" time and that time is not only slowed, but also rushed through *frenzied time* and *temporal ruptures*. She exemplifies this through short-notice transfers between housing units, resulting in asylum-seekers losing social ties to peers and their material possessions (cf. Vitus, 2010). In a somewhat similar vein, Jan-Paul Brekke (2010) shows that young asylum-seekers' uncertain future in Sweden made them less attractive as friends.

These studies – focusing on children in relation to time and space in asylum centres – suggest that there are political implications associated with asylum-seeking children's temporal and spatial positions. These studies include important aspects of how asylum policies affect children's housing conditions and family life in asylum centres. Moreover, they provide insights into the political control that is exercised over asylum-seekers and their family lives.

However, as can be seen, these studies have not analysed asylum centres in relation to the children's own notions of "home".

One exception is Josée Archambault (2012), who offers an analysis of asylum-seeking children's (7-12 years of age) narratives on home-making in their transition from living in an asylum centre to settling into a "home" with their parents in Norway. His study, drawing on interviews and participatory encounters with twelve families, documents the children's narratives of an ideal "home" while they were living in asylum centres waiting to settle in a more permanent house. It shows that these narratives were connected to their hopes that, in comparison to the confined and sometimes "scary" asylum centres, a house would be more "normal" (cf. Fichtner & Trần, 2020). The children's expectations included both material aspects (a room or space of their own) and relational matters (family life). The children also aspired for continuity and imagined a more inclusive environment after settling in their new neighbourhood. In contrast, the children's everyday lives during the asylum process were marked by *discontinuity*, as they often had to move between different housing arrangements. Most children, after receiving a residence permit, also had to change school and leave friends when they moved out of the asylum centres. Moving out of confining asylum housing was filled with anticipation for a dwelling that corresponded to an ideal home, based on past impressions or an imagined future. For instance, the children wanted to have a type of living standard (size of house etc) similar to that of Norwegian children, so that they would feel comfortable inviting friends over. Archambault's study shows that, during the settlement phase, the children's emotions were founded on their hopes, imaginations and expectations, but that their encounters with their new houses were not only met with feelings of satisfaction, but, to a great extent, with feelings of disappointment.

Within a broader European context, Bryan Fanning and Angela Veale (2004), looking at interviews with families (parents, children, adolescents) living in Irish asylum centres, identify the impact that housing deprivation, in the form of overcrowding, has on family life. The authors show how food is an issue in asylum centres, in that it neither meets the children's dietary needs nor the families' desire to choose their own food (cf. van der Horst, 2004). Moreover, their study demonstrates that the absence of appropriate spaces for play had a negative impact on children's wellbeing. They show that children's social exclusion was connected to the family's economic situation (e.g., not being able to provide the children with toys) and their housing situation, as children could not invite friends from school (see also White, 2012). In addition, the children talked about being affected by tensions at the asylum centre and adults shouting at them. Fanning and Veale claim that such a housing situation is inconsistent with children's rights and that the asylum policies foster poverty and social exclusion, thus infringing on asylum-seeking children's right to an adequate standard of living.

In another Irish policy analysis, Breen (2008) shows that asylum centres impinge in various ways on the residents' right to adequate housing. In a UK context, Mano Candappa (2001) reaches similar conclusions in her discussion of child asylum-seekers' right to an adequate standard of living. The housing, she argues, is often inadequate in relation to the children's and their family's needs, and she shows that the children, in her study, often moved between numerous cramped and low-standard accommodations, before settling in more permanent housing (cf. Candappa & Igbini, 2003). Candappa (2001) claims that asylum-seeking children continue to be housed in such provisional hostels, as housing legislation in the UK does not include the principle of the best interests of the child. These studies thus indicate that asylum policies recurrently stand in contrast to children's rights, and they highlight the impact that poor asylum housing and a problematic economic situation in the family can have on children's wellbeing.

In other European studies, children's spatial navigation in asylum centres has been in focus. For instance, Sarah Fichtner and Hoa Mai Trần (2020), in a recent ethnographic study of German asylum centres, focus on three preschool children's space-making *tactics*. In their study, the children's *lived citizenship* (Lister, 2007) is explored "between the 'sandpit' (as a space for children to act and shape their environments) and 'deportation' (as an extreme limit for agency related to 'refugee' status)" (Fichtner & Trần, 2020, p. 160). Here, the children's socio-spatial belonging was revealed through their playful spatial practices within the blurred boundaries between the public/private space and the security enforced rules that governed the children's activities. Their study shows that the children had little private space, but that they nonetheless engaged in space-making, in that they created space in the family rooms, in the corridors, the adult common rooms and the child-care rooms that had the potential to extend the children's otherwise restricted space and their scarce material for play. One of the children in particular appropriated these interspaces, despite the restrictive rules that caused him to interpret this housing as "not real" and instead to wish for "a real" house.

In a German study – drawing on grounded theory – Penelope Scott and Thi Huyen Trang Le (2019) offer detailed descriptions of childhood in an asylum centre through interviews with parents and professionals, combined with observations of five children (age 4-6). Their study reveals tensions between the institution's spatial practices, which produced space and governed children within it, and children's active engagement in seeking out, creating and defending spaces for play within this restricted and adult-imposed social order (see also Fichtner & Trần, 2020; Seeberg et al., 2009). The kindergarten, although an adult-ordered space, was an important place for children's recreation (cf. Seeberg et al., 2009; Vitus, 2010; White, 2012). The children had limited access to toys in their individual family room, which left little available space for the children to retreat to play *or* for their older siblings to do homework. The children nevertheless created play spaces in the family

rooms and also appropriated available playground spaces in the corridors and in the reception area, although the security guards framed these spaces as “no play areas”. The researchers also observed how staff and security guards failed to show child-friendly attitudes towards the children or their minor violations of spatial rules. Nonetheless, their study shows that the children’s use of spaces for play offers tactical opportunities for participation in daily life (cf. Lester, 2013).

Drawing on child-centred methods in an Irish asylum centre, Allen White (2012) has similarly explored the complex spatialities that shape school-age children’s everyday lives. His study documents the children’s social marginalization in relation to peers in school (e.g., being unable to invite friends for play dates or birthday parties) and their geographical isolation from the local community. Nonetheless, his work also points to the spatial proximity to other children at the asylum centre as an opportunity for developing peer friendships, and he underscores the importance of the staff-monitored after-school club as a space that offers opportunities for play. However, to escape adult supervision, the children also actively sought out “secret” routes to access play in outdoor spaces. His study deepens our understanding of the ambiguous positions and contradictory spatial conditions created for children living in asylum centres. White shows that the children are subject to micro-controls through the Irish asylum system, controls that permeate the childhoods of children living with their families in cramped institutional spaces. Nonetheless, White argues that, despite the surveillance intrinsic to the asylum system, the overlapping public and private spaces in the asylum centres created opportunities for the children to express their agency.

On the other hand, Spicer (2008) shows that a clear distinction between the public and the private can be important in asylum-seekers’ constructions of a private home place that becomes a safe refuge from hostile public places where they, for instance, experience racist aggression (cf. hooks, 1991). Drawing on fieldwork in the Netherlands, Hilje van der Horst (2004) argues that institutional asylum centres do not provide such private home-like features, but instead tend to turn into public places owing to the presence of authorities (migration authorities and police or security guards) who are there to control the residents. Van der Horst’s fieldwork explored adult asylum-seekers’ search for home in asylum centres, analysing them as *total institutions* (Goffman, 1961), that is, as a highly regulated time-space. Her study shows that the residents evaluated their housing in the asylum centre in relation to what a “home” should provide, with a particular focus on their desire for the home-like feature of food preparation. Food practices, then, are understood as important aspects of the construction of “family” and “home”. In a policy analysis, Fox O’Mahoney and Sweeney (2010) point to the exclusion of asylum-seekers from having a home and argue that asylum centres are used as a tool for migration control that deliberately prevents

asylum-seekers from pursuing family life and private life in housing units that discourage home-like conditions (see also van der Horst, 2004). However, there are only a few studies on asylum-seeking children's own constructions of "home" while living in asylum centres.

One such study was conducted by McDonnell (2021), who has contributed to this research area by using visual methods to explore a 5-year-old boy's "home-making", analysing his spatial and narrative practices as *everyday politics* in an asylum centre in Ireland. Her study suggests that material possessions – toys and a bike – were significant in this child's concept of "home", as was his connections to spaces in the wider community (cf. Spicer, 2008). In the asylum centre, the boy also conceptualized the dining room, in the communal area of the centre, as an important "family-like" place for eating, playing and establishing social relationships with residents. McDonnell argues that this appropriation of home-like spaces in the asylum centre can be seen to redefine idealized notions of what constitutes a home. However, when asked about food practices, the boy talked about the food prepared in the family room – through his mother's discreet resistance – highlighting the role of food in home-making and family life. The boy's mother similarly depicted the restrictions on food preparation as being particularly disruptive of family life and the making of a home (see also van der Horst, 2004). In another study, Ravi Kohli and colleagues (2010) explore the meaning of food for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children's feeling of "being at home" when living in foster families. The authors show that children's influence over choice of food is connected to their sense of belonging in the host society. Moreover, they argue that food has a central role to play in young asylum-seekers' rights, as their position makes them dependent on adults being responsible for food provision (for research on the role of food in children's rights in institutions, see Punch et al., 2010).

David Marshall (2013, 2016) has made an original contribution through his documentation of refugee children's narratives on "home". In a Palestinian refugee camp context, he shows the political subjectivity involved in the children's challenges of dominant representations of refugee childhood through their home narratives, in that they chose to focus on beauty through everyday acts of care in their spatially restricted home spaces. Marshall also analyses children's play as creative resistance against the spatial politics of refugee camp conditions. At the same time, Marshall claims that Palestinian refugees view attempts to improve the conditions of the camp as threatening to their refugee status and, for this reason, even the demand for new places of play becomes high-stakes politics (Marshall, 2016).

In sum, these studies show that asylum-seeking children often live in deprived and cramped housing and that children in asylum centres lead their lives in a controlled and regulated space. These centres can thus be experienced as unhomely, with limited access to play areas and the lack of desired food practices. However, these studies also show that, as actors,

asylum-seeking children engage in space-claiming while striving to find and create places of their own.

A final comment on prior research

This chapter has provided insights into both asylum-seeking children's lives in diverse European asylum system contexts and the asylum politics that asylum-seeking children are entangled in. By revealing the everyday struggles of children and their families, these studies show some of the ways in which asylum politics permeate the children's everyday school lives and their private lives in matters that concern their housing. Taken together, previous studies have offered important insights into the ways in which asylum politics politicize asylum-seeking children's everyday spaces and affect their everyday lives. Several studies have also shown how asylum-seeking children's everyday lives are permeated by uncertainties and the looming threat of deportation. In their everyday lives, they are constantly reminded of their uncertain position as asylum-seekers, with the threat of deportation always present. The politics that surround asylum-seeking children thus shape and constrain their scope of action but several of these studies have simultaneously shown that asylum-seeking children do not passively accept but actually contest these conditions, mainly through their space-making. However, in general, there are not that many ethnographic fieldwork studies with young asylum-seeking children and, there is, in particular, a lack of studies on their lives in Swedish asylum centres. Moreover, scholars have seldom analysed the political aspects of asylum-seeking children's ways of handling their conditions in these politicized spaces or how children's actions can be interpreted as rights claims.

3 Theoretical frameworks

This thesis builds on an ethnographic exploration of children's *everyday politics* while following a group of children within an asylum context. In this chapter, I will present the theoretical approaches that have helped me analyse my ethnographic data and gain a deeper understanding of the children's everyday lives. The main theoretical approach involves children's everyday politics and children's political agency within the politicized everyday spaces of asylum-seeking children. Two theoretical perspectives have been important for my analyses: *children's everyday politics* and *children's geographies*. In particular, I will present theoretical considerations regarding how children's *navigation* in their everyday lives, as well as their *articulations* and *practices*, can be understood as *everyday politics*.

Children's everyday politics

In this thesis, I have specifically explored children's *everyday politics*, inspired by scholars in the area of *children's political geographies* (Kallio & Häkli, 2011b; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012; Philo & Smith, 2003; Skelton, 2010; 2013). In this research field, the focus is on "children as political actors in everyday life" (Kallio, 2007, p. 123) and to "the politics taking place in children's everyday environments" (Kallio & Häkli, 2011a, p. 100). Kirsi Pauliina Kallio and Jouni Häkli understand children's everyday politics as "the politics children practice in their mundane environments" "in their mundane action", claiming that children's everyday politics is about *children's own political matters of importance* and how these are addressed in children's everyday practices (Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Kallio & Häkli, 2011a; 2011b, p. 102). In their everyday lives, children's politics is enacted in relation to the adult-imposed policies and large-scale politics that affect them (Kallio, 2009; Kallio & Häkli, 2011a; Philo & Smith, 2003). Kallio and Häkli argue that it is vital to acknowledge the power relations that children are entangled in and how these are embedded in their lived worlds. Thereby, they advocate a relational reading of politics and for understanding children as political actors in relation to adults and to the power relations embedded in their everyday lived spaces (see also Skelton, 2010). Kallio and Häkli (2011b) propose that children's politics concerns how children, from their socio-spatial positions, acknowledge the power relations that they are entangled in and negotiate or contest the subject positions that are offered to them.

However, this does not mean that the children themselves are always aware of the politics involved in their actions (Philo & Smith, 2013).

In a rather similar way, Sarah Elwood and Katharyne Mitchell argue that children's representations of the everyday can constitute a significant space for children's political agency. In addition to children's practices, they underline how children's everyday politics can be understood through their articulations of the power relations in which they are enmeshed and how these play out in their everyday spaces (Elwood & Mitchell, 2012; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012). They mean that *children's articulations* – both verbal and embodied – may reveal relational and spatial aspects of children's lived worlds as well as the emotional politics that matter to children (Mitchell & Elwood, 2012). Through such articulations, children may identify underlying spatial rules and regulations of the time-space of their everyday spaces. These representations may indirectly also explain how they *navigate* within these regulations as well as how they criticize imposed subject positions and contest the power relations that inform their everyday lives (Elwood & Mitchell, 2012; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012). When children articulate their everyday politics, they may also be articulating it in relation to the broader political issues that surround them (Mitchell & Elwood, 2012). Mitchell and Elwood (2012) argue that, if we are to understand the political importance of children's articulations, a critical analysis of the highly constrained contexts in which children's lives are situated is required. They claim that articulations “as a site of politics allow us to recognise children as political even in circumstances in which they are not free to confront, act, or intervene” (Elwood & Mitchell, 2012, p. 4). It is thus important to recognize that children are political in relation to their particular socio-spatial positions and that they, because of these positions, may not feel free to engage in confrontational politics, but rather engage in politics that is not always visible to adults (Kallio, 2009; Kallio & Häkli, 2010; 2011c; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012).

This is particularly true because children may be punished or disciplined for certain forms of agency when adults attempt to control or correct their behaviour (Bordonaro, 2012; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012). It is therefore crucial to pay attention to the specific contexts of children's actions and how their political actions are relationally and spatially conditioned (Kallio & Häkli, 2013). The asylum context inevitably adds another dimension to the exploration of mundane agency, as it involves everyday politics from a marginalized position in highly constrained asylum centres (cf. Kallio et al., 2020; Häkli & Kallio, 2019).

In this thesis, I have turned to James Scott (1992) to analyse and understand the *hidden politics* of the children from their position, not merely as children but as asylum-seeking children in a high-stakes context. In his theorizing, Scott explains how people in high-stakes contexts can be seen to engage in politics from the margins. People who feel there is too much at stake may not be in a position to engage in confrontational resistance in the presence of those

in power, but they may instead engage in disguised or hidden politics and express their critique safely behind the back of those in power. In my work on children's hidden critique, I have analysed in particular their articulations in relation to home and belonging.

Children's geographies

My work, like some prior work on children as political actors, has connections to *children's geographies* and its interest in children's experiences of time and space (Aitken, 2015; 2018; Holloway, 2014; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Philo, 2000; Skelton, 2010; 2013). This is a research field that engages with childhood sociology, which has foregrounded the idea that children should be seen as *being* (present), that is, as actors in their own right in the here and now, rather than as *becoming* (future) actors (e.g., James et al., 1998). More recently, it has been argued that children's "been" (past) should also be considered in childhood studies (Hanson, 2017). In childhood studies, the attention is turned to how children as actors shape their social worlds, while at the same time being constrained by how they are positioned in relation to adults and the local social order (Christensen & James, 2000; James & Prout, 1990; James et al., 1998). Childhood studies, in particular, is concerned with the critical analysis of the ways in which children are relationally and socially positioned and how their lives are regulated in different ways (Alanen, 2011; Mayall, 2015).

Children's geographies consider places to be sites for understanding children's social worlds (Aitken, 2015). This research field particularly explores the relational and spatial practices that shape children's spaces and children's spatial positions within these spaces (Aitken, 2015; Holloway & Valentine, 2000). This is also a perspective that contributes to our understanding of the politics involved in the power relations that produce children's spaces (Massey, 2005), but that also takes into consideration how children themselves shape and produce space (Aitken, 2015), particularly how children engage in politics through their navigation in and use of space (see, e.g., Cele & van der Burgt, 2016; Kallio, 2007, 2008; Wood, 2012). The field of children's geographies thus contributes insights into the adult-child relations that shape children's socio-spatial contexts (Aitken, 2001; Holloway, 2014). In these contexts, children's agency is understood in relation to how children are relationally and spatially positioned within power relations and political contexts (Bordonaro, 2012; Holloway, 2014; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012). In this thesis, I explore in particular how asylum-seeking children's agency can be understood as political in their everyday spaces and more specifically the asylum centre and their school. Asylum centres have been understood as temporal semi-public and regulated

time-spaces that are shaped by the control and surveillance intrinsic to asylum politics (van der Horst, 2004; Vitus, 2010; 2011; White, 2012). Similarly, schools have been understood as social spaces that reflect the social norms in society large and affect children's feelings of belonging (Devine, 2009; 2013; Sporton et al., 2006; Pinson & Arnot, 2007, 2010; Valentine et al., 2009; Zembylas, 2011).

Children's emotional geographies of home and belonging

In this thesis, I have explored asylum-seeking children's *home* and, more specifically, their notions of home as a home place, while living in an asylum centre. In my work, I draw on previous work on asylum-seeking children's own notions of home and experiences of home in their home-making within the asylum context (e.g., Archambault, 2012; McDonell, 2021; Spicer, 2008; see also van der Horst, 2004). In my analysis of the children's notions of home, I have turned to geographical work that has theorized the spatial and social dimensions of an idealized house-as-home (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Saunders & Williams, 1988). This is also related to the emotional aspect of home, that is, the feeling of being at home, in this sense involving having a home place that feels like a home (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Sara Ahmed (1999) means that home is sentimentalized as a space of belonging that "can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being at home is here a matter of how one feels or how one might fail to feel" (p. 341). Indeed, children's feelings are closely linked to their sense of home and belonging in particular places (Spicer, 2008). In relation to the children's notions of home, I have also analysed how a housing – where the conditions do not coincide with a resident's needs – may feel "unhomely" (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Fox O'Mahoney & Sweeney, 2010).

Institutional asylum centres have been analysed as purposefully unhomely (Fox O'Mahoney, 2010) and as public rather than private spaces (van der Horst, 2004). The emotional aspects of unhomely places, or places of exclusion, have, for instance, involved fear and particularly how fear in public spaces renders a private home place even more important (Spicer, 2008). bell hooks (1991) underscores the importance of having a private domestic home place for marginalized groups to help them restore of a feeling of dignity in the midst of oppression in public space. The emotional experiences of a place that feels unhomely can be related to a feeling of non-belonging locally and to an experience of not feeling at home in the political home (nation). Feeling at home may thus be understood as a more abstract feeling of belonging within a broader political context, because home, both as home place and as homeland, is an important political marker of boundaries for belonging (Boccagni, 2017).

As mentioned in the introduction, I have been inspired by Nira Yuval-Davis (2006), who defines *belonging* as the feeling of being safe “at home” through emotional and social attachments to people and places, as well as a desire and possibilities to establish such attachments. I have also turned to her theorizing to understand how *the politics of belonging* constructs boundaries of belonging that categorize someone as belonging or as the Other – who does not belong – both through territorial formal boundaries and through exclusionary relational and spatial practices. The politics of belonging inevitably constructs formal boundaries (citizenship or residence permit) that limit asylum-seekers’ possibilities to be recognized as people with rights and their possibility to develop safe attachments in their new society while facing potential deportation (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). But in addition to formal boundaries, Yuval-Davis argues that people’s sense of belonging is affected by everyday experiences of exclusion entangled in the politics embedded in how people are positioned within power relations (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005).

Being labelled as a member of a racialized group, such as asylum-seekers, often has determinant effects on their position in the world and how they see themselves and in terms of ideas of belonging and otherness (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005, p. 530).

These categorizations underlie the politics involved in the maintenance of boundaries of belonging in relational encounters (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In these relational encounters, asylum-seeking children may be constructed as the Other, in an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983), that is, those who do not belong. These processes of Othering can be based on anti-immigration views focused on maintaining border controls, but are also related to how racialization of asylum-seekers is intertwined with the cultural, racial and linguistic norms of, for instance, “Swedishness” (Jonsson & Milani, 2009; Mattsson, 2005; León Rosales & Jonsson, 2019; Ljung Egeland, 2015). “Swedishness” as a linguistic norm involves what is considered “proper” Swedish, derived from the prevailing societal attitudes about what it means to be an “immigrant” (Bunar, 2011; Jonsson & Milani, 2009). The labelling of people as “immigrants” is often based on both racial and linguistic norms and involves a politicized label that draws a line between “us” and “them” regarding membership to the Swedish nation (Eliassi, 2010, p. 79). This form of labelling can result in relational misrecognition and racial microaggressions against, for instance, Muslim children (Hopkins et al., 2017; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). However, such boundaries for belonging can also be contested:

The politics of belonging involves not only the maintenance and reproduction of the boundaries of the community of belonging by the hegemonic political powers but also their contestation and challenge by other political agents (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 205).

Yuval-Davis (2006) explains that such contestations may be enacted through a practised or lived citizenship (Lister, 2007). In my work, I instead analyse how children, through their everyday political agency, may contest the relational or spatial practices of exclusion that deny them a sense of belonging (cf. Hopkins et al., 2017). Yuval Davis argues that it is when belonging is threatened that it becomes politicized and that the emotions that exclusion evokes can reveal the affective dimension of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005).

To document and analyse the affective dimension of children's belonging, I have turned to work in the area of children's emotional geographies to understand how emotions or affects work in children's everyday lives, in terms of both their representational and their non-representational feelings (Kraftl, 2013). Horton and Kraftl (2006) have argued for taking the banal and affective stuff of children's everyday lives seriously. I have also been inspired by work that seeks to understand asylum-seeking or migrant children's felt experiences through representations of their emotions (e.g., Archambault, 2012; Spicer, 2008; Zembylas, 2011). In the context of migration, belonging is a highly affective and emotionally charged notion (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015), perhaps especially in the asylum context where *deportability* creates conditions of fear among those threatened by deportation (de Genova, 2002). Yet, in the field of migration, emotions and migrants' felt experiences have been understudied (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015)

In the context of belonging, Michalinos Zembylas' research on *children's emotional geographies* is important for exploring the ways in which children's feelings can reveal how they are affected by experiences of exclusion and how emotions can be understood as political in their everyday lives (Zembylas, 2007; 2011; 2012). In his work, Zembylas draws on feminist thinkers in an attempt to understand how emotions (such as anger) can be read as a political emotion that may challenge power relations (Ahmed, 2014; Lorde, 1984).

In order to understand children's affect as entangled in politics I have turned to feminist geographers who have analysed affect as embedded in wider power relations and who have also explored the felt experiences of marginalized groups through their articulated emotions (cf. Bondi, 2005; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012; Thien, 2005). Moreover, I have found Sara Ahmed's (2014) theory of sociality of emotions useful for understanding how emotions can be conceptualized relationally both as displayed through *and* as embedded in power relations. Ahmed (2010b) is interested in what emotions *do* and how they become active instead of what emotions *are*, and instead of separating emotion and affect, she argues that emotions involve affect. She

means that to be happy (or sad or angry) is to be affected by something that in turn may evoke action (Ahmed, 2010a). She argues that attending to emotions might show us how actions are evoked, affective reactions that respond to our relations and experiences. She moreover claims that both our feelings and the naming of emotions can reveal important understandings of how we feel about our experiences. She concludes that “how we are affected by what comes near” may reveal how “feelings might be how structures get under our skin” (Ahmed, 2010b, p. 216).

In my analytical work, I have deployed this theoretical framework to explore the emotional and affective dimension of asylum-seeking children’s home and belonging through their felt experiences as revealed through their articulated emotions and their affective reactions in response to exclusionary experiences of non-home or non-belonging. In some ways my work connects to prior research on migrant children’s belonging in their everyday lives (e.g., Laoire et al., 2010; Ljung Egeland, 2015; Mathisen & Cele, 2020). As discussed in the previous chapter, some prior work on asylum-seeking children has also explored children’s play and space-making in their everyday spaces as important aspects of their belonging (e.g., Fichtner & Trần, 2020; Spicer, 2008; White, 2012).

Children’s geographies of play in a regulated time-space

In my thesis, I have explored children’s play in a highly regulated asylum centre as part of their everyday politics, a research field that has been inspired particularly by work on children’s play within children’s geographies (e.g., Lester, 2013; Punch, 2000; Skelton, 2009) as well as work on children’s play in asylum centres and refugee camps (e.g., Fichtner & Trần, 2020; Scott & Trang Le, 2019; Seeberg et al., 2009; Marshall, 2016; White, 2012). My analytical work has especially been inspired by studies on children’s play within a regulated time-space – studies that take into consideration political aspects of children’s play (e.g., Aitken, 2001; Lester, 2013, Marshall, 2016). David Jones Marshall (2016) has explicitly explored refugee children’s *politics of play* through their practices and their narratives in the high-stakes context of a Palestinian refugee camp. Marshall argues that children’s play challenges the spatial politics of the refugee camp and that children’s “playing despite the conditions of occupation becomes an act of resistance” (p. 253). In a somewhat similar vein, Stuart Lester (2013, p. 33) has analysed “playing as a practice of resistance” in relation to adults’ spatial practices that constrain children in their daily lives.

In my analyses of children’s *navigation* I draw on Michel de Certeau’s (1984) theory on *tactics* to understand children’s practices as everyday politics. His theory is central in children’s geographies, especially his focus on tactics in an attempt to understand children’s everyday practices. De

Certeau argues that tactical agents are dependent on the place of power in which they operate, but that they, through their tactics, might break or manipulate the rules to create opportunities and promote their own objectives at a given moment, wherever there is space for it. Tactics, he argues, might at times even disturb the prevailing order. His notion of everyday tactics has been vital in theorizations concerning children's everyday politics (e.g., Kallio, 2007; 2008; Kallio & Häkli, 2011b). Kallio (2007) has explored children's tactics as everyday politics in relation to the strategies of adult representatives of institutions and how children's tactics constitute ways of handling adult authority. Children's tactics can reveal the everyday politics involved in their use of space and time in ways that challenge adults' regulations of time-space (Kallio, 2008; see also Cele & van der Burgt, 2016). Children's tactics have also been explored in asylum contexts (e.g., Fichtner & Trần, 2020; Ottosson et al., 2017).

A final remark on theory in relation to my fieldwork

In this chapter I have presented the theoretical frameworks that have helped me analyse the themes that emerged as central in my ethnographic data. My analyses of asylum-seeking children's everyday politics partly draws on, Kallio (2007, 2008) who has also analysed children's *tactics* to understand how children's practices may reveal their everyday politics in a given context (Kallio & Häkli, 2011b). In order to gain a deepened understanding of how these practices could be analysed as political I have combined such analyses of children's practices with an analysis of children's articulations (Mitchell & Elwood, 2012). I have chosen to call children's verbalised representations of their situated experiences their *articulated standpoints* and the articulations that involved children's representations of their emotions – their *articulated emotions* – has helped me analyse their emotional and affective experiences (cf. Ahmed, 2014; Zembylas, 2011). In my analyses of children's navigation – drawing on de Certeau's (1984) notion of tactics – I have deployed an analysis of children's *tactics* to examine how the children navigated in the asylum centre, while avoiding control and surveillance, and, in particular, how they engaged in, what I have called, their *play tactics*. In my analysis of navigations, I have combined an analysis of the children's articulated representations of their navigations (cf. Mitchell & Elwood, 2012) with an analysis of their embodied practices revealed in the tactics they deployed in their navigations (Kallio, 2007; 2008). In my analysis of children's navigation, their embodied affective reactions also emerged as central for analysing their everyday experiences as entangled in politics (cf. Horton & Kraftl, 2006; Kraftl, 2013; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012).

4 Children's rights and Swedish asylum politics

In this background chapter, I will present some of the conditions for asylum-seeking children's rights and parts of the social and political contexts that posed profound challenges in relation to the children's (and their families') potential belonging in Sweden during the specific period of my fieldwork. This chapter first presents the broader political context in which asylum-seeking children found themselves in Sweden, from the autumn of 2015 to the autumn of 2016, that is, the period that, somewhat problematically, has come to be known as the "refugee crisis". This chapter then engages in a presentation of the formal international rights framework that, since 1990, has applied to asylum-seeking children in Sweden, which is a ratifying state to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). It then moves on to present the conditions for their rights in the specific political and social context of this period, particularly the contradictions between children's rights and migration control in the asylum reception policies and practices that regulate asylum housing, education and play for children in asylum-seeking families in Sweden. This chapter thus presents some of the asylum reception policies that affected asylum-seeking children's everyday lives in Sweden in 2015-2016. It specifically points out conflicting interests between policies promoting children's rights and migration control policies that are partly built into the Swedish asylum reception system. This involves what would seem to be political ambivalence between human rights policies for children's housing, education and play, on the one hand, and the policies and practices regulating the asylum reception of children in asylum seeking families, on the other. In sum, this chapter presents the political framework for asylum-seeking children's childhoods.

The "crisis politics" in Sweden 2015-2016

The number of people who struggled to cross the European borders increasingly intensified in the summer of 2015, and the media coverage of the dangerous routes over the Mediterranean Sea initially spurred a mobilization of solidarity (Sager & Öberg, 2017). However, the narrative in Europe rapidly changed into what has been constructed in the dominant narrative as the "*refugee crisis*", the political responses to which can rather be understood as a *crisis of solidarity* (Schierup et al., 2017) with enforced politics of migration control and the abandonment of a human rights perspectives (Elsrud et al.,

2021; Lundberg, 2018; Sager & Öberg, 2017; Schierup et al., 2017). Europe eventually attempted to outsource its “refugee problem” into camps and violent border controls at the Turkish border (DN, 2016; Sager & Öberg, 2017; Schierup et al., 2017). Sweden’s political approach to a welcoming of refugees, using slogans like “open your hearts” and “my Europe builds no walls”, rapidly shifted to a focus on how Sweden needed a “breathing space in Swedish refugee reception” (Karlsson & Eriksson, 2014; Swedish Government 2015a, 2015b). In this political context, Sweden, a nation that has taken pride in its international reputation as a defender of human rights, thus, moved rapidly to stricter regulations in its asylum policies and tightened (external and internal) border controls until finally closing the borders in an attempt to limit the number of asylum-seekers (Elsrud et al., 2021; Hagelund, 2020; Sager & Öberg, 2017; Schierup et al., 2017). Sweden’s political response to the increased number of asylum-seekers who arrived in Sweden in 2015 was thus characterized by a rapid move from solidarity to enforced migration control at the expense of human rights (Elsrud et al., 2021; Lundberg, 2018; Schierup et al., 2017). The Swedish government’s dramatic change in its approach to asylum policy curtailed asylum-seekers’ possibilities to be granted asylum, introducing highly restricted opportunities for family reunification, replacing permanent residence permits with temporary ones, and rescinding financial support and housing for rejected asylum-seekers (Bunar, 2021; Hagelund, 2020; Lundberg, 2018; Sager & Öberg, 2017; Schierup et al., 2017; Zetterqvist Nelson & Hagström, 2016; for an overview of these changes, see Swedish Migration Agency, 2020c).

All these interventions marked a critical shift in Swedish asylum regulations, and restrictions in asylum-seekers’ access to social rights were applied as a tool for migration control (Hagelund, 2020; Hernes, 2018; Lundberg, 2018). The Swedish policy was changed to meet European minimum standards for asylum-seekers’ living conditions, the goal being to avoid appearing attractive to asylum-seekers, and Sweden thereby entered the European “race to the bottom” (Hagelund, 2020; Hernes, 2018). These measures were officially taken to push other European countries to assume shared responsibility (Hagelund, 2020), but were also politically significant push factors signalling to asylum-seekers that they were not welcome (Bunar, 2021).

While some studies have pointed out that the Swedish asylum policies in practice impinged on asylum-seeking children’s rights in Sweden even before the “crisis” (e.g., Lundberg, 2011; Lundberg & Lind, 2017; Ottosson et al., 2012; Ottosson & Lundberg, 2013), these policies now became even more restrained. While during this period Sweden was planning to incorporate the UNCRC, many asylum-seeking children were, as Lundberg (2018) puts it, quite paradoxically denied their human rights.

The political climate in Sweden also hardened during this period, with an upswing in anti-immigration attitudes (Hagelund, 2020; Mulinari &

Neergaard, 2017). The public discourses that were informed by these negative attitudes towards those constructed as non-Swedish were reproduced through hostile media coverage, where asylum-seekers (and especially Muslims) were constructed as a threat to Sweden (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017). Local residents protested against the opening of asylum centres in their neighbourhoods, and parents raised concerns about asylum-seeking children attending school together with their children (Högström, 2016; SvD, 2016). Sweden also witnessed some manifestations of racist violence against asylum-seekers and other people constructed as “non-Swedish” (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017). This violence included attacks on accommodations that housed, or were planned to house, asylum-seekers and involved act of arson and cross burnings (DN, 2015a, 2015b; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017; Swedish Agency for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning, 2017). During this period, there was also a racially motivated attack against non-white children in a Swedish school (DN, 2015c; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017).

The hardened climate in Sweden spurred resistance from civil society through actions for solidarity from human rights organizations, but also from individuals through the many local grassroots initiatives and social media campaigns (Hagelund, 2020; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017; Schierup et al., 2017; Zetterqvist Nelson & Hagström, 2016). The most well-known initiative is probably *Refugees Welcome*, which, together with human rights organizations and religious communities, tried to provide the people who were arriving in Sweden with supplies to meet their most urgent basic needs (e.g., food, beverages, clothes, shoes) and emergency housing solutions (Makelä, 2021). There were also many local initiatives that stepped in to arrange activities and provide support at local asylum centres (Brunsson, 2021). During this period, civil society was an important force that mobilized quickly (Elsrud et al., 2021) in an effort to compensate for a strained asylum reception system, in which the social rights, that asylum-seeking children are entitled to, were in practice not being upheld.

The formal rights of asylum-seeking children in the UNCRC

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), to which Sweden has been bound since 1990, stipulates child specific human rights that apply to all children regardless of their juridical status. It is built around four core principles: the right to non-discrimination (Article 2), the best interest of the child (Article 3), the right to life and development (Article 6), and the right to be heard (Article 12). The UNCRC proclaims that children’s wellbeing should be promoted through children’s entitlements and access to social rights, such as the right to a reasonable standard of living and adequate housing (Article 27), the right to education (Article 28 and 29) and the right

to recreation and play (Article 31). The right to a reasonable standard of living and adequate housing includes the right to adequate food and clothing and dignified safe housing with adequate privacy and space. The right to adequate housing is a human right, which especially stipulates children's right to dignified and safe housing with adequate privacy and adequate space for play (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1991; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013; UNESCR, 1966). The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR, 1991) has also, in General Comment No. 4 on the Right to Adequate Housing (Art. 11 (1) of the Covenant, paragraph 7, stated that the right to *adequate* housing:

should not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which equates it with, for example, the shelter provided by merely having a roof over one's head or views shelter exclusively as a commodity. Rather it should be seen as the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity.

Fulfilment of the right to adequate housing is closely linked to other rights of the child, including the right to play and the right to education. The right to education is enshrined as a specific right for children in the UNCRC. The right to education includes both equal access to school and to equality and quality in education. Children's right to education also includes children's right to an educational space free from discrimination and therefore also involves a number of other rights that unfold relationally within the school.

Children's right to play and recreation spans over both children's school and housing contexts. In the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's (CRC) (2013) general comment on Article 31, it is stated that children's play refers to activities that are initiated and controlled by children themselves and that take place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. While adults should contribute to the creation of environments that enable play, children's play also involves the exercise of autonomy. Children's right to recreation involves their right to voluntary participation in a broad range of activities (like music, art, sports, hobbies) that often take place in organized forms managed by adults in specifically designed spaces. The committee states that special efforts should be taken to ensure that asylum-seeking children have the same opportunities as resident children to enjoy their rights. In asylum centres, children's opportunities for play and recreation should not be limited or denied. These institutions should also guarantee children *free* play in safe spaces and enable their play with peers through adequate spaces and equipment as well as trained (motivated) staff (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013).

The Swedish asylum reception for families in 2015-2016

In Sweden, the strong impact of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has afforded asylum-seeking children formal entitlements to rights. The Swedish asylum reception system is therefore influenced by the UNCRC, and asylum-seeking children are formally granted social rights (Andersson, 2012). The Education Act stipulates that all children residing in Sweden (between 3 and 18 years of age and regardless of their legal status) have a formal right to education and that asylum-seeking children (who attend school together with resident children) have the same formal right to health and dental care as resident children do (Andersson, 2012; SFS 2008:344 §5; SFS 2010:800 Ch. 7 § 2). When implementing the policies that regulate asylum reception for children and families, the Migration Agency (the state agency with primary responsibility for the reception of asylum-seeking families) is bound by the UNCRC and the EU Directive that lays down minimum standards and formulations intended to secure children's best interests in European asylum reception (European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, 2013; Swedish Migration Agency, 2021). The Migration Agency also has its own guidelines for the reception of asylum-seeking families; these guidelines stipulate that a child perspective must be considered in the asylum reception process (Swedish Migration Agency, 2011). The Swedish asylum policies that regulate asylum reception rest on a principle of "normality", and the policies state that asylum-seeking children should be provided living conditions *similar to* those of resident children (SOU 2009:19). Previous research has pointed out that the Swedish Alien Act, which regulates asylum-seekers' housing and daily allowances in asylum reception, does not contain the principle of the best interest of the child and that the implementation of this principle in the Migration Agency's guidelines is weak, as the safeguarding of children's best interests is marginalized and a child perspective is often lacking (Ottosson et al., 2012). Previous research on the rights of children placed in an adult-centred asylum system with their families has thus pointed to discrepancies between policies and practices when the interest in migration control trumps children's rights (Lundberg, 2011; Ottosson & Lundberg, 2013; Ottosson et al., 2012). One such concern is that the daily allowance that asylum-seeking families are expected to live on is considerably less than the minimum amount that is deemed necessary for a reasonable standard of living in Sweden¹². In 2015 and 2016, the economic support for families living in accommodations where meals were served was 19 SEK/day per adult or 24 SEK/day in single adult households, with an extra

¹ This daily allowance should cover clothes, shoes, leisure activities, hygiene products and other consumables as well as healthcare and dental care for adult family members (Swedish Migration Agency, 2020a).

² The level of economic support that asylum-seeking families are entitled to is below the national norm for income support (*Riksnormen för ekonomiskt bistånd*), which represents the minimum amount needed for a reasonable standard of living in Sweden (Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, 2019).

allowance of 12 SEK/day per child under the age of 17. These daily allowances have long been below the minimum level of Swedish social security (Andersson et al. 2010; Ottosson et al., 2012). Research conducted prior to 2015 also shows that the possibilities for asylum-seeking families to apply for an extra allowance (e.g., to afford winter clothes for the children) have at times been limited (Ottosson et al., 2012). Children in asylum-seeking families have thus been subjected to structurally imposed child poverty, something that the child rights committee has criticized (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2015).

The already conditional rights of children in asylum-seeking families in the Swedish asylum reception system became even further conditioned in 2015. A report on what implications the reception system in 2015 had for the children involved shows that the economic difficulties for these children increased during this period as the possibilities to get extra allowances were reduced (Zetterqvist Nelson & Hagström, 2016). The economic situation of asylum-seeking children might impede their possibilities to participate in social activities with peers in school and might restrict their access to recreational activities outside school (Svensson, 2010; Zetterqvist Nelson & Hagström, 2016). These economic circumstances can therefore infringe on asylum-seeking children's right to an adequate standard of living.

Housing

During the period of 2015-2016, the housing situation for children in asylum-seeking families was certainly strained (SOU 2017:12). The Migration Agency has the overall responsibility for providing housing for asylum-seeking families (normally in shared apartments) during the asylum process if the families are not able to arrange their own accommodation (SFS 1994:137). But in the Swedish Migration Agency's housing policies, a child perspective is lacking, and although families at times would prefer to arrange their own housing, they often feel obliged to accept the housing offered by the Migration Agency (Andersson et al., 2010; Lennartsson, 2007; Ottosson et al., 2012).

In 2015, many asylum-seeking families were accommodated in large provisional collective facilities (RIR 2016:10), a type of housing that has been criticized for its potentially negative impact on children's wellbeing (SOU 1992:133). While, on the whole, such housing arrangements were avoided for families, in 2015, the Migration Agency installed and ran a number of such asylum centres or procured such housing facilities to be run by private actors in former hotels, hostels, hospices or camping grounds. In these provisional facilities, residents were often not able to prepare their own food, and the standard was lower than what is typical in Swedish asylum reception housing facilities (RIR 2016:10). In the Migration Agency's housing policies,

overcrowding is the rule rather than the exception,³ but in 2015 overcrowding was increased in already crowded housings, which resulted in residents living in cramped spaces for a longer period of time than what is usual (SOU 2017:12; SOU 2018:22; Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, 2015; 2018; Swedish Public Health Agency, 2020).

The Migration Agency made several exceptions to their procurement guidelines: the limit on the number of residents in the same housing facility was increased from 200 to 650, and the amount of space for each resident was decreased to allow an increase in the number of residents. The Migration Agency also lowered the demand for fire protection in these procured housing facilities and these often cramped housing facilities also increased the conflicts between residents (Swedish Agency for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning, 2017). At larger asylum-seeker centres, there have been reports of abuse of children and women perpetrated by other residents (Sweden's Children's Ombudsman, 2019). Another report states that residents in asylum centres witnessed how the management in some centres used punishments and threats of relocations to remote camps as a disciplinary tool and that health issues in poor housings were ignored (Elsahly & Rojas, 2016). The requirement for a playground within 500 m of the accommodation was also removed, as was the requirement for access to public transport within walking distance (Swedish Agency for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning, 2017). These housing facilities were especially precarious for children living in them for a period of several months (Zettergren Nelson & Hagström, 2016). Parents also recounted that the housing instability and forced moves to new asylum accommodations in new municipalities impacted the continuity of children's schooling (Elsahly & Rojas, 2016).

School

The school is especially important for asylum-seeking children living in poor housing, and asylum-seeking children do have a right to start school within a month of their arrival in Sweden (SFS 2011:185, Ch. 4 § 1a; SOU 2017:12). The local government is responsible for school arrangements, whereas a state agency, The Migration Agency, is to provide parents with support and information on how to safeguard the rights of their children (including the right to education) during the reception period (Ottosson et al., 2012). But in 2015, many families were not invited to the meetings that provided this information (Zetterqvist Nelson & Hagström, 2016). The realization of

³ Children's housing situation is at the same time given its due importance in Swedish child welfare policies, where overcrowding is considered to have a negative impact on children's wellbeing (Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, 2018).

asylum-seeking children's right to attend school is dependent on this information and on the Migration Agency's contact with the municipality in which the child resides, in order to prepare the local school for a new student (SOU 2017:12; SFS 2011: 185, 4 Ch. § 1a). The division of responsibilities in ensuring asylum-seeking children's access to school is somewhat unclear and may result in children not being enrolled in school at all or having to wait longer than a month before they can start school (Swedish School Inspectorate, 2013; 2015; Svensson, 2017). Research has shown that a prolonged waiting time to start school has negative consequences for the children involved (e.g., Svensson & Eastmond, 2013; Svensson, 2010; Tursunovic, 2010) and, in the autumn of 2015, this waiting time was further prolonged (Zetterqvist Nelson & Hagström, 2016).

The deficient or at times hazardous or shaky collaboration between state and municipal actors has meant that practical responsibility for the child's access to education has primarily been placed on the parents. Newly arrived parents, however, might not know how to navigate in the new society or have the language skills necessary to demand that proper efforts be made for their children (BRIS, 2018; Tursunovic, 2010; Zetterqvist Nelson & Hagström, 2016). Nonetheless, in 2015, many parents themselves sought up the local schools after their children had been waiting to start school for several months (Zetterqvist Nelson & Hagström, 2016). Inadequate communication between the Migration Agency and the municipalities may thus impede asylum-seeking children's right to education (Swedish School Inspectorate, 2013; 2015). Overall, in 2015, there was a substantial risk that asylum-seeking children in families would fall between the cracks in the Swedish reception system (Zetterqvist Nelson & Hagström, 2016).

The asylum settlement process also poses a risk of ruptures or interruptions in the children's schooling and consequently the realization of their right to education (BRIS, 2018). The temporary housing arrangements for asylum-seeking families in Sweden and the housing dispersal in settlement means that families receiving a residence permit will often be settled in another assigned municipality (Swedish Migration Agency, 2020b), at times in another far away region in Sweden, meaning that the children must change school (BRIS, 2018)⁴. Sweden's municipal self-government has also resulted in great variation in the fulfilment of children's educational rights owing to the varying structure of school reception across municipalities and schools (BRIS, 2018; Zetterqvist Nelson & Hagström, 2016).

School reception for asylum-seeking children has varied between two main educational forms depending on the specific municipality and the local school, namely, separate introductory classes or direct integration into mainstream classes based on age group (Bunar, 2010; 2015; Svensson, 2017; Tajic &

⁴ The Swedish municipal school system rests on the principle of proximity, meaning that children attend school in the municipality in which they reside (Education Act, 2010:800).

Bunar, 2020). Studies have pointed to deficiencies in schools' reception systems and the realization of asylum-seeking children's educational rights (Bunar, 2010; 2021; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013). The prolonged time that some newly arrived students spend in introductory classes has, for instance, been criticized as segregating, but critique has also been directed at the lack of the support needed for them to actively participate in education in mainstream classes (Bunar, 2010, 2015, 2021; Nilsson & Bunar, 2016; Tajic & Bunar, 2020). The resources for asylum-seeking children's education have also been criticized for being too scarce to ensure these children's educational rights (Swedish School Inspectorate, 2013, 2015)⁵. The new regulations that were enacted in January 2016 (SFS 2010: 800) – regulations designed to ensure the educational rights and inclusion of newly arrived students in the school setting through the introduction of an upper time limit of (partial) education in an introductory class (*Förberedelsklass*) and class placement in a mainstream class from the very start – meant that the individual child may attend an introductory class, but spend some of his or her scheduled time with future classmates (for an overview of the new regulations, see Bunar, 2021).

After-school recreation centres

The possibilities to attend after-school recreation centres (*Fritidshem*) tend to vary between schools (BRIS, 2018). In school contexts, the right to play and leisure is closely linked to the after-school recreation centre and its mission to promote and provide possibilities for children's play and meaningful leisure (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2014; Swedish School Inspectorate, 2010). The after-school recreation centres have become an integral and fundamental part of the Swedish school and its curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011). At these centres, the children, who are enrolled, play and interact with other children both before and after school, supervised by after-school teachers, and afternoon snacks are also served. Research has shown that asylum-seeking children identify school holidays as periods of loneliness (Andersson et al., 2010; Svensson, 2010). This means that enrolment in an after-school centre might be beneficial, or even vital, for realizing asylum-seeking children's right to play and leisure, both during school days, at breaks, and during after-school hours as well as holidays (see, e.g., Karlsson, 2021).

However, children in asylum-seeking families do not have the formal right to attend these after-school centres if their parent/s do not work or study. Children's enrolment in such centres is normally linked to their parents' employment. Nevertheless, the Education Act (2010: 800 Ch. 14 § 5) does

⁵ The municipality is entitled to apply for state compensation for each student from the Migration Agency (SFS 2002:1118).

offer a child whose parents do not work or study the right to attend based on the individual child's needs, in relation to the overall family situation and the child's wellbeing. Moreover, schools have the right to economic compensation for all children who attend the after-school recreation centres. This creates room for inclusion, meaning that the municipalities and the schools can let asylum-seeking children attend, depending on their interpretation of the child's situation.

A final reflexion on asylum-seeking children's rights

The children in focus in this thesis were of course affected by this political context with a prolonged waiting period before starting school and prolonged waiting for their asylum application to be processed. This resulted in an especially precarious situation, as they were housed in a provisional asylum centre and had a strained economic situation while waiting for a potential residence permit. The fact that permits were restrictively granted, and sometimes were only temporary, risked increasing and prolonging their period of uncertain belonging in Sweden. Moreover, the children who had family members in other parts of the world had limited possibilities to reunite with them. In this thesis, I have chosen to engage in fieldwork for a year *with* a group of children, focusing on the children's experiences in relation to their social rights (housing, education and play). This focus means I have been able to explore what Swedish asylum policies during this period have meant for the asylum-seeking children's everyday lives. In this chapter, I have presented the asylum context in 2015-2016, as well as the Swedish asylum context as a whole. The children's local conditions in relation to these contexts will be presented in the next chapter on the fieldwork setting.

5 The fieldwork setting

In this thesis, I have had the unique opportunity of following a group of asylum-seeking children over a school year. This fieldwork, which was initiated in October 2015 and phased out in October 2016, was conducted with a number of asylum-seeking children arriving to Sweden with their families, covering their first year in a Swedish school setting. When I was searching for a suitable setting for my fieldwork with asylum-seeking children, I contacted a school with a nearby asylum centre, where I was introduced to an introductory class (*Förberedelseklass*) with around twenty children of different ages (children aged 6 – 12).

This thesis has involved multisite fieldwork, in that I followed the children both at school and in their asylum housing. The initial part of the fieldwork was conducted at the school where the children attending the introductory class were recruited to participate (regarding consent see my chapter on ethics). On average, I spent three or four days a week at the school and followed the children during the school day, between approximately 8 am and 2 pm. Eventually, I was also invited to follow the children after school, walking back with them to the asylum centre and spending time with them at the “Hotel”, that is, the asylum centre. Normally, a day in the field with the children would begin early in the morning and finish around 4 in the afternoon.

When I first met the children, they were in a mixed class and I therefore deemed it unethical to deploy a strict selection of participants based on age or legal status, as these are sensitive matters in asylum contexts (cf. Bhabha, 2018) and as the children were sometimes questioned about their age in school. While all the children in the introductory class (later divided into lower and middle school classes) were invited to participate, some children received a residence permit shortly after the fieldwork was initiated (and moved to another municipality and school), and thus only the children who were still in the asylum process participated. The participating children, with a few exceptions, were placed in an introductory class with no parallel class placement (in a regular class) during the entire fieldwork year⁶.

I got to know approximately 25 children who moved in and out of the introductory classes during the year, but in total 18 children participated in the research. In our walks from school, I sometimes also engaged in conversations with their older siblings attending the same school. In my visits to the asylum centre, I also met the participating children’s other siblings, as well as children

⁶ The school did not change these circumstances, although the new regulations went into effect in January 2016.

from other schools or preschools to whom the participating children sometimes introduced me.

The children and their families

In total, 18 children formally participated during the year I spent in the field. The participating children were between 6 and 12 years of age when the fieldwork was initiated; there were 7 boys and 11 girls from 12 different families. Most of the participating children spoke Arabic as their first or second language, and a few of the children spoke Mongolian. In the field, however, several other languages were represented, and some of the participating children spoke Swedish and/or English in addition to their first languages. The participating children's countries of origin included Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, and Mongolia.

Most of the children had recently arrived in Sweden; they started school the same day the fieldwork was initiated and participated throughout the fieldwork period. Nonetheless, 4 of the participating children had been in Sweden a while before the fieldwork was initiated. The participating children were in the asylum process together with their families (except for Amir, who was included because he was a close friend of Mohamed and sometimes visited the asylum centre). The fact that the children were situated in an uncertain asylum context also meant that they moved in and out of the research setting. Therefore, the children participated to a varying extent, and some children are more visible in the thesis, although I have tried to include as many of the children as possible in the three studies and other empirical presentations of the thesis.

The children and their families lived at the asylum centre for approximately 12-18 months. All the children had at least one sibling, and the number of family members in each family varied from 4 to 7. I use the term "family" when referring to the children's parent/s and siblings, who were seeking asylum together with them, but the family compositions of course varied, and although most of the children lived with two parents, some of them lived with one parent (their mother). Many of the children, moreover, had transnational family connections to parents, siblings, cousins and aunties/uncles, and one family also had a relative in another part of Sweden.

This fieldwork primarily concerned the children, and for ethical reasons I did not engage in any formal interviews with the parents and also avoided such formal conversations with the children (cf. Seeberg et al., 2009). Interviews can be highly sensitive in an asylum context, as they may remind participants of interviews with the migration authorities. But I, of course, met the parents at an initial stage to inform them about the research project and to get their consent. Thereafter, I engaged in many informal conversations with parents

both at school and at the asylum centre. The nature of these conversations varied depending on language barriers, and although we managed to communicate, the conversations were of course facilitated when the parents spoke some English. I also engaged in a few conversations with transnational family members over the phone.

To ensure the children's and the families' anonymity, all of the children's names, like all other names, have been anonymized, and I do not reveal any individual information (like family size, age, siblings, country of origin, language). The fictive names of the participating children are: Ahmed, Aline, Aliyah, Amel, Amina, Amir, Enya, Hamid, Jasmine, Mohamed, Nadir, Nadia, Nohr, Oyun, Rahi, Rashid, Tuya and Yassin. These children participated to different degrees and of course had different perspectives and scopes of action in the asylum context.

In the field, some of the aspects that seemed to affect the children's perspectives and ways of navigating, included their time spent in Sweden and their established social relations, their language skills in Swedish or English, having a residence permit, or their perceived possibility of getting one depending on their country of origin, as well as their level of fear of being relocated or deported. I am aware that the children's different social positions (categorizations based on ideas on age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class, country of origin, ableism) would have effects on their experience, but in my data, these aspects did not surface. Instead the children's shared (but of course to some extent also varying) experiences at the asylum centre and at their school emerged as the central themes – as expressed in their *lived fears*, their experiences of belonging and non-belonging, their hopes and aspirations.

The “Hotel”

The asylum centre was a former hotel often referred to as *Hotellet* or *the Hotel* by the children. The former hotel was located in an industrial area on the outskirts of a suburb of a larger Swedish city. The hotel had been turned into a rather large temporary collective asylum centre. In 2015, it was one of the bigger centres in Sweden, procured by a private actor to house more than 600 hundred asylum-seeking residents, including many families with children (and a few unaccompanied children).⁷⁸ However, after talking to resident children in her class, Enya realized that it wasn't actually a hotel because, as she said,

⁷ At this asylum centre, the Migration Agency increased the number of residents from the initial 200 to more than three times as many residents.

⁸ In the autumn of 2016 (as a result of the decreased need for housing due to Sweden's closed borders), this asylum centre started to phase out and was turned into settlement housing for residents with a residence permit. The residents without a residence permit were, on short notice, relocated to the north of Sweden, with little consideration taken of the children's attachments in the local school and community.

“hotels have a pool”. The hotel used to have a pool for conference guests, but it was now closed and the room was instead used as a prayer room.

The asylum centre occupied several floors, at least six, and there were many staircases to access long, dark and scarcely furnished corridors with dark wall-to-wall carpeting. When the children took me to show me their family rooms, we often passed adults and children sitting in the corridors looking at their phones or iPads. The family rooms were accessed by staircases, but the children sometimes used the elevators, which were formally only accessible for families with children in strollers or people using wheelchairs. I initially got lost several times when trying to navigate in the premises without the children. In the entrance area of the asylum centre, men were often gathered outside smoking, and when entering the reception area, you had to pass a few guards, before getting to the high reception desk behind which the reception staff members could barely see the youngest children, when they were trying to get their attention. The canteen was located in front of the reception area. The entrance floor otherwise consisted of a corridor of closed conference rooms, leading to the former hotel rooms in which the children and their families lived. The wall decorations in the rooms and the corridors consisted of Swedish pictures of the royal guards and castle, churches, the city hall and fir trees or other indigenous Swedish trees.

The family rooms

Initially, I had not planned to visit the family rooms in which the children lived with their families, but I accepted the children’s and their parents’ invitations to visit them. Therefore, I ended up visiting most of the participating children’s family rooms.

The children and their families lived in former hotel rooms, crowded with metal bunkbeds to enable 4-6 people to sleep in the same room, even if two of the families, with older children, had access to an extra bedroom. The children recurrently talked about this overcrowding and about their longing for a bed or a place of their own. The children said that they needed their own rooms to be able to have some privacy for homework or play. Their beds were often the only place that the children could claim as their own but – as the bunk beds were not child-friendly – some younger children slept on a mattress on the floor. This underpins why Yassin said “it’s very crowded where we live in the small room” and explained why he wanted a bed of his own. During the day, the beds were also used as the family’s storage of clothes, food, toys, which meant that the child’s bed was not necessarily a private place.

The asylum centre provided each family member with a bed and sheets and some hygiene products. Moreover, volunteers provided many families with other small pieces of furniture and useful equipment like kettles, TVs, lamps,

and for this reason some rooms also had a small table with a few chairs, a small sofa and an old armchair.

The family rooms were used for sleeping, watching TV (the news or children's programmes were often on during my visits), talking on the phone, studying Swedish, doing homework, playing and surfing for information or using social media. However, to access the asylum centre's Wi-Fi, residents had to pay for a limited amount of GB. Through their established social networks at the asylum centre, some of the residents shared this amount and slots between them. The family rooms were also used for having coffee/tea with family members or guests. The guests, including myself, often had to sit on one of the family members' beds when visiting.

Each family had access to a private bathroom, but only a few rooms provided access to a small kitchenette with a water tap and, at best, also a fridge. Food that needed to be kept cold was sometimes stored in a bag, outside the window. In their family room, many of the families had a kettle and sometimes, in secret, a microwave. This made it possible to prepare tea or coffee and simple snacks for the children. However, the residents were not allowed to cook in their rooms nor did they have any opportunity to prepare their own meals on the premises.⁹ This was something the children criticized; Enya explained: "We cannot cook our own food. Then someone will come and tell us that they will throw away our clothes. The Reception says that, if we cook food, then we will not be allowed to be here".

The rooms were spartan, and the families were not allowed to put up pictures or textiles or anything else on the walls (in ways that would create marks). The children longed to be able to personalize a place of their own – to decorate the walls in pink, purple or blue, and to be able to choose and own personal objects. Yassin, for instance, wanted his room to be blue, and he also wished he had a teddy bear.

Despite these restrictions, the family room was recurrently described as the children's favourite place at the asylum centre, and it was the only place where they could claim some level of privacy, access to play and family life. However, the children also mentioned disturbance and noise from other residents, as well as family members disturbing each other.

In their family room, the parents often invited me to have something small to eat and drink. Many parents talked about not being able to cook for their children, but also regretted not being able to cook for me, as I was seen as a guest. The mother in one family, however, managed to prepare the cold dish Tabbouleh in their bathroom and invited me to eat with them.

The visits in the family rooms and conversations with parents gave me insights into the children's family life at the asylum centre. Moreover, I learnt more

⁹ When the hotel was turned into a settlement housing for residents with a residence permit in the autumn of 2016, a number of rooms were transformed into kitchens with several stoves to enable the residents to prepare their own food.

about the everyday lives of the children's younger and older siblings. The parents sometimes also turned to me for help to, for instance, contact the SFI (Swedish for Immigrants), arrange one of the older sibling's application for *Gymnasiet* (the upper secondary school) or to translate healthcare documents from the school nurse. Such issues concerning the families' navigation in their new society also gave me insights into parents' and siblings' everyday struggles.

The parents' concerns mostly revolved around their children's wellbeing, such as being worried that the children were not eating or did not have enough access to play. After experiencing a prolonged waiting period, several of the parents from the asylum centre contacted the school and gathered at the school reception to try to enrol their children. The parents also talked about their own aspirations to learn Swedish and to be able to work, but some of them were able to study Swedish in classes arranged by volunteers at the asylum centre. One parent, a teacher, held classes in Arabic for the children at the asylum centre, and I sometimes participated in these classes.

The line between my role as a researcher and that of a friend of the family was sometimes blurred. Both the children and their parents sometimes had a hard time grasping why I could not accept their invitation to come visit them with my son during the weekends or stay the night at the asylum centre. Amel was, at one point, very disappointed at me for not staying longer to play with her and, although I promised to do so, she doubted I would come back another day. She said "they all say that" and then ran off yelling at me "I will not talk to you anymore!" This made me aware of the importance of keeping my promises to the children I met in the field.

In addition to meeting the families at the asylum centre, I was invited to come with one of the families to go shopping in a second-hand shop. After the families had moved out from the asylum centre, I also kept in touch with several of the children and their parents over the phone. I was also invited to come eat with two of the families after they had moved to another housing facility, and I celebrated Eid with one these families in their new apartment.

The regulations at the Hotel

The visiting hours at the Hotel were regulated and, on a note in the reception area, it was written that visitors were only allowed between 10 am and 7 pm and were not allowed to sleep over or enter the canteen. The note stated that, if these rules were not followed, the resident who was visited would be reported to the Migration Agency (for a more detailed discussion on threats, see Study I and II).

The visitors also had to register and turn in their IDs at the reception desk in exchange for a visitor's badge to be carried openly, which allowed being on the premises. This set up a boundary between me and the children, but also

between the children and their classmates who did not live at the asylum centre. I remember how Amel, when seeing my ID card as I waited in the reception area, exclaimed amazed “do you have a residence permit!?” On another occasion, Amir, one of the children from the same class, tried to visit his friends at the Hotel but was not allowed to enter because he didn’t have an ID.

The entrance to the asylum centre was manned with guards, and in the reception area there was a bulletin board with information from the Migration Agency, as well as local rules imposed by the management of the asylum centre. There were also prohibition signs put up around the asylum centre’s premises, including a prohibition to play, as well as regulations about the use of distinct spaces and objects. The sign of a football crossed over in red was put up on many walls and windows on the premises.



The prohibition signs with rules were written in different languages, and some of them directly involved regulation of children’s independent use of space, such as a red warning triangle with a picture of an adult holding a child by the hand with the text “NO CHILD ALONE ZONE”. Ahmed, pointing at the sign, explained that they mean that “the kids cannot go outside without the parents”.

NO CHILD ALONE ZONE



The Reception staff at the asylum centre were recruited from members of the former hotel staff without any specific requirements. The reception desk was manned around the clock by approximately five persons during daytime and one person at night. The children referred to the staff representatives of the asylum centre as the “Reception”. Even if the children sometimes named, and talked positively about, individual staff members, the centre’s representatives

(including both regular hotel staff and security guards) were most often described in a negative manner and grouped together as an entity of power and control. Mohamed, for instance, said that “the treatment is really bad” and “they are very aggressive”.

Some of the children seemed especially aware of the authority of “the Boss” at the asylum centre. Ahmed, for instance, told me that if the Boss was at the Hotel, he could not play outside because “if children are alone, they will take the child and give them a black mark, and if they don’t listen they will be sent away from the Hotel”. I also observed his embodied reactions when the Boss was around.

The children often talked about threats of being sent away from the asylum centre and related threats of being sent to “the North” (that is the northern part of Sweden), which had been described to them as an isolated “dark” and “very cold place”.¹⁰

The premises were also routinely patrolled by uniformed security guards. The children referred to these guards as “Security” or the “Police”. These guards did not seem to create a feeling of security, but rather the children felt that “the police” patrolled the premises to control the children and to ensure that the institutional rules were followed. As Hamid said to me, “the Reception engages the police if a child plays in the corridors”. Ahmed also explained that he was scared because “there are many police here”, while lowering his voice and showing me the police office at the asylum centre. “In that bag they have guns and they have a stick. They can do like this [he simulated an electric chock] to the whole body”.

Moreover, the children were well aware of the presence of the Migration Agency who had set up a local office on the premises of the asylum centre. Like Amina put it “If someone lives at [an asylum centre] (...) it is the Reception and the Migration Agency who decide.”

The Hotel served prepared meals in a canteen at certain hours, and the mealtimes were strictly regulated, with security guards dismissing late residents at the entrance. In the canteen, self-catering was the local practice and seating was free at the available tables, but residents could not invite visitors into the canteen. I visited the canteen once or twice before these rules were changed. Unlike some hotel settings, the residents did not have specific tables of their own. The children recurrently talked about the strictly fixed mealtimes and the regulated food practices at the asylum centre, and at times complained about the food being served, which was quite different from the food customarily eaten by their families. Oyun, for instance, said the food was “too much disgusting. I only drink milk and juice”.

The residents were not allowed to bring food from the canteen, but the schoolchildren were allowed afternoon snacks from the reception, outside the

¹⁰ When this asylum centre closed in the autumn of 2016 – somewhat tragically – many asylum-seeking families and children were in fact relocated to other asylum centres in northern Sweden.

fixed mealtimes, if they could present a food card. I was present when Amel once tried to pick up her younger brother's snack without his food card, and the staff member told her "that's not how we do it here. We have a well-established system!", sounding a bit ironic and possibly discretely critical of the rules.

The "no play" areas at the "Hotel"

In my first visit to the asylum centre, I asked Moahmed where the children played, and he informed me in a serious tone of voice that there was "no play" and that the Reception had rescinded the children's prior possibilities to borrow games and toys. Shortly afterwards, during a tour of the grounds with Amina and Amel, they exclaimed disappointedly "the toys are gone!" upon discovering that the former playroom had been emptied. During the first six months of the fieldwork, there was no formal space for children's free play on the shared premises. The children were formally allowed to play in their family rooms, but these offered little space for play. Later, a table tennis room was made available in one of the conference rooms, but it was often booked by the adult residents.

The "Hotel" was surrounded by a road and a large parking lot in an industrial area, and the outside environment therefore did not offer many (safe) spaces for play. However, the children often used the parking lots outside to, for instance, ride their bikes. Moreover, many children used the small asphalted and fenced court in the industrial area to play football and basketball.

However, the outside area was not always deemed to be safe for children's play, not merely owing to the traffic, but also because of other threats. For instance, at least two of the children mentioned being scared of being kidnapped, and one child recounted that he had been chased by a stranger outside the asylum centre. Moreover, the asylum centre had been exposed to at least two racist attacks, consisting of the burning of a cross and a nationalistic racist slogan sprayed outside.

The children spent most of their free time at the asylum centre, both while waiting to start school and outside school hours, as they did not have access to the after-school recreation centre (*Fritidshem*). At the asylum centre, volunteer organizations arranged activities for both adults and children, such as classes in Swedish, sewing circles, sports activities, music and dancing; they also brought the children to cultural events and museums. There were also important initiatives from civil society, in which people gathered clothes, strollers, toys and bikes from the local community to hand out to the families. They also raised money for the children's summer activities and arranged a Christmas party with gifts for the children at the asylum centre. In March/April 2016, a volunteer organization also arranged playrooms for the

children, one for the youngest and one for the older group. These rooms were open during specific hours, one or two days a week, and were staffed by volunteers or resident parents. During these opening hours, each child could only spend a limited amount of time in the room. The city library occasionally arranged for a mobile library to visit the children at the asylum centre (*Barnens Bokbuss*).

The school

The children attended a suburban school, located about 2 km from the asylum centre. The school had been receiving newly arrived students for a while, and when I initiated my fieldwork, it housed around 700 students in regular classes (including an introductory class corresponding to grades 7-9). The introductory class for younger children was an ad-hoc solution, as the large asylum centre had opened with short notice in this school area. The increased number of school-age children at the asylum centre in the autumn of 2015 meant that this school received a number of new students, and it actually had the highest number of newly arrived students in this urban district during this period.¹¹

When entering the school, you had to pass a reception desk on the left-hand side where visitors had to register. The receptionist also handled the system that was set up for the children's borrowing of toys and games during school breaks. After passing the reception desk, the lower school classrooms were located in the corridor to the left, and straight ahead was an open area with floor chess and tables. On the right-hand side, each high school class had an assigned bathroom, including one with the sign "FK" (short for *Förberedelseklass*) on it. When you had passed the bathrooms, you came to a recreation room (with a pool table, table tennis and table football) and a café for the high school children.

The introductory classes were located along an exterior corridor on the second floor. The letters "FK" on the classroom doors were highly visible from the bottom floor through an open ceiling. To get to the staircase leading to these classrooms, the participating children had to pass the recreation room, where they were not allowed to play.

The participating children were divided into a lower (children age 6-8) and a middle school class (children age 8-12). The middle school class children were installed in a small office space that was used as a classroom next to the primary school class. In these two classes, the teachers Gerd and Mina worked

¹¹ The school also had a sister-school where a few newly arrived students were integrated into regular middle school classes (grades 4-6) and, at the beginning of my fieldwork, two children were transferred to a regular class in this school.

together with the after-school recreation centre pedagogues Hakim and Amanda.

A third introductory preschool class was later installed for the youngest children (age 6) in a former storage room in the same corridor as the regular preschool classes. The youngest children had a little more contact with their peers in school through singing assemblies and sports, but they did not have their lunch break at the same time as the other same-age children from the regular classes. The primary and middle school class children had their breaks at the same time as other classes, but they almost exclusively played with the other children in the introductory classes. Many children gathered at the swing, skipped rope, played tag or played in a little “forest” in the middle of the schoolyard. The boys who played football or basketball sometimes, but rarely, played with children from the regular classes, but these contacts were obstructed when the after-school recreation centre decided to remove their outdoor toys during the first break.

In this school, none of the children in the introductory classes had a class placement in a regular class, based on his or her own age group (e.g., in class 1A, 3B, 6C). The children were generally separated from the rest of the school community, with very limited contact with children in the regular classes. The children’s classes were held separately without any joint lessons with the children in regular classes (although some sports or arts activities could have been accessible also for children without full fluency in Swedish). The children in the introductory classes were often forgotten or only partly included when the school arranged activities for the whole school, such as craft days or events during Easter and Christmas.

When the children described what the school meant to them, they used words like “love”, “joy” and “happiness”, and the teachers working in the introductory classes also seemed important to the children. In school, it became evident that the teachers and pedagogues in the introductory classes had important insights into the children’s overall situation, and often fought for the children’s inclusion in the school community. For instance, they were openly critical of the school’s decision to exclude the children from the after-school recreation centre. Moreover, the Arabic-speaking teacher and pedagogue often bridged the communication gap between the school and the parents.

At the same time, some of the children expressed their disappointment over not feeling fully included in school and that school, at some levels, did not live up to their expectations. When talking about being placed in the introductory class, Mohamed, for instance, said “I am sad. I do not accept this”, and Amina talked about being sad when other children in the introductory class were moved to a regular class before her.

Moreover, the children were recurrently singled out or positioned as Others in school through the use of signs and verbal categorizations of the children as *FK-barn* (that is, children in *Förberedelseklasser* highlighting their non-

belonging to the mainstream school community). Alternatively, they were called the Flower Hill Hotel children (which referred to them being residents at the asylum centre and, thus, highlighting their positions as asylum-seekers). Almost all children in the introductory class (except two unaccompanied children and two children in other housing arrangements) lived at the asylum centre.

In school, a few teachers also used threats of calling the police or involving security guards as a disciplinary practice for minor transgressions, such as children's fussing with each other when they were supposed to be standing quietly in line. At times, some teachers would try to correct the children's behaviour with reference to purported cultural norms concerning "how we do things here in Sweden". The importance of adapting to Swedish food practices was discussed at parental meetings, such as teaching the children to eat with a knife and fork. I also overheard teachers discussing whether or not the canteen should have to adjust to the food practices of Muslim students. Some teachers criticized the children, as well as their parents, when the children would not eat the food that was served. In line with other work on food practices, eating was at times cast as part of a moral order (Aronsson & Gottzén, 2011). In the school canteen, the children would therefore at times engage in hidden tactics, changing plates with me when they did not like the food.

The school's recreation centre as a no-go zone

The children in this study were not offered the possibility to attend the after-school recreation centre, where they would have met resident children and gained access to play and recreation. This meant leaving the children out of many activities at school, even during the breaks.

The teachers at the after-school recreation centre did not know the children in the introductory classes and, therefore, seldom engaged in conversations with them. The children were therefore rarely invited to join in on the activities arranged by these teachers during the breaks, and this increased their schoolyard segregation. Moreover, to borrow toys in school, the children had to leave something of value at the school reception, but the children's economic situation meant that they did not have that many objects to trade with, and the objects they had were sometimes not deemed to be valuable enough.

The fact that the children did not have access to the after-school recreation centre thus furthered their exclusion from recreational activities within the school community. It also exacerbated their overall restricted access to play both at school and outside formal school hours. In school, the primary and middle school children's classrooms were located above the school's large recreation room, with a pool table, table tennis, table football and floor chess. The children had to pass this room to access the staircase leading to their

classroom, and they often stopped to play in this room during their breaks. However, they were not allowed to play there and were therefore sent away (to the outside area), because they had to spend their breaks in the schoolyard. Later, this room became the place where the children gathered to play before and after formal school hours.

The school reacted to the children's playing with strict regulations, in its attempts to limit the children's access to school spaces and objects and to make them leave the school premises after formal school hours. The receptionist was also instructed not to lend out any toys to children in the introductory classes after school hours. The role of the after-school recreation pedagogues, working in the introductory classes, was in this context to make the children leave school instead of granting them access to play spaces and recreational activities at school.

On another note, the after-school recreation pedagogues, working with the children in the introductory class, started arriving early or staying longer, the goal being to ensure that an adult was around when the children (despite the school's effort to deny them this access) hung out at school, outside formal school hours. On their own initiative, the same after-school recreation centre pedagogues also arranged activities for the children during one of the school holidays. Moreover, the head teacher brought some of the children to sports activities after school and sometimes offered the children shoes and clothes. Through the activities in school, the children also visited a sport arena in the local community and a theatre in town, but overall, the children had little knowledge of the local community. For a long time, they, for instance, did not know where the local library was located, and at school the children were not given access to the school library on the same terms as other children (e.g., to bring books from school), in that they were only allowed to borrow books to read in the classroom. The teacher explained that otherwise the books might get lost.

In this chapter, I have presented the local setting of my ethnography with asylum-seeking children. In the next chapter, I will present my methodological approach to following the children in this fieldwork setting.

6 Ethnography *with* asylum-seeking children

In this thesis I have explored asylum-seeking children's experiences and practices in their everyday lives through an ethnographic fieldwork. "Ethnography is a methodology which entails 'being there' as an ethnographer in 'the field' among 'the people' under study with the ambition of understanding and theorizing the meaning of lived experience" (Trondman et al., 2018, p. 31). It is a way to "see people in action, or perhaps more precisely, to see people in interaction" (Fine, 2003, p. 46). Ethnography is also a theoretically informed methodology that help us understand and analyse lived experiences (Fine, 2003; Willis & Trondman, 2000) and enables theoretical claims grounded in detailed observations (Fine, 2003). Ethnography has been advocated as a fruitful methodology to gain a deepened understanding of children's experiences and perspectives (James, 2001; 2007; James & Prout, 1990) and fieldwork has been a way of learning from being in the field with children in their everyday lives over extended periods of time (see for instance, Ambrose, 2016; Corsaro, 1979; Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998; Jonsson, 2013; Wiltgren, 2017; Rindstedt, 2002).

In my fieldwork I systematically turned my ethnographic focus to children's lived experiences and to children's thinking, feeling and action in response to these experiences. I have deliberately tried to exclusively listen to and learn from the children, my aim being to gain a deepened understanding of their perspectives and lived experiences. As discussed, the main focus of this ethnography is on children's *everyday politics* (Kallio & Häkli, 2011b; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012) and thereby also on children's political agency. I have therefore been attentive to the matters the children themselves find important (Häkli & Kallio, 2018), that is, their everyday concerns, and what they wanted to share with me. In my commitment to understand the *children's* lived worlds, I have chosen not to foreground or even examine the perspectives of adults, like their parents, the guards or staff members at the Hotel or their teachers at school.

Ethnography of lived rights: Asylum-seeking children's everyday politics in their housing and school setting

My fieldwork has involved a participatory approach to research *with* children (Christensen & James, 2000). In my yearlong fieldwork, a participatory approach to fieldwork observations meant following the children and taking part in their practices in their everyday spaces. In particular, I have explored children's perspectives through their ways of *navigating* in their everyday spaces, that is, how they oriented to different persons, places and events, as well as what the children did and said, but also felt, about their experiences (cf. Mitchell & Elwood, 2012; Wood, 2012). It has been argued that children's navigations in their everyday spaces can enable them to gain critical perspectives that differ from those of adults (Wood, 2012). In this way, children's perspectives are not merely understood through what children say, their "voices", but also through their embodied and emotional experiences, expressed through their embodied responses to events and interactions and their ways of navigating in their everyday spaces. This made it very important for me to be there *with* the children, that is, to follow them in their everyday spaces and engage in their everyday practices. More specifically, I have followed several asylum-seeking children by *playing with*, *walking with* and *talking with* them in the two main settings of their lives, their school and the asylum housing, as well as on their walks between these places. Playing *with* the children turned out to be one of the most important ways of understanding the children's lived worlds. In engaging in the children's play practices in different settings, I was able to interpret their "voices" through their affective reactions, such as freezing, going silent, changing their tone of voice, facial expressions or bodily postures (cf. Kallio, 2007; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989; Rindstedt, 2013). Taking children's silence seriously adds important insights to an understanding of their voices (Spyrou, 2016), particularly in asylum contexts (Kohli, 2006). My participatory approach and attention to children's navigations enabled me to observe, firsthand, their experiences in their everyday environments, but also to listen to children's nonverbal, embodied and emotional ways of expressing themselves (for a discussion on embodied ethnography see, e.g., Pink, 2009). In the field, children's verbal "voices" were elicited (mainly) through informal conversations, but also by using a number of participatory methods that engaged the children in the construction of ethnographic data (Christensen & James, 2000). My ambition has consistently been to take children's *standpoints* as the starting point in my exploration and analysis of their situated experiences (Mayall, 2000; 2015).

In this thesis, I have in particular been inspired by scholars within children's geographies who advocate the study of children as political actors (Kallio, 2007; 2008; Kallio & Häkli, 2011b; Marshall, 2016; Mitchell &

Elwood, 2012; Skelton, 2010; Zembylas, 2011; 2015). I have been inspired in particular by previous work employing related ethnographic methods to disclose children's everyday politics and the politics embedded in children's geographies (Cele & van der Burgt, 2016; Marshall, 2013, 2016; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012; Wood, 2012). In particular Kallio and Häkli have advocated ethnographic explorations of children's everyday politics (Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Kallio & Häkli, 2011b; see also Zembylas, 2015) and the importance of developing methods for capturing children's particular feelings and experiences of the political (Kallio & Häkli, 2011a).

Häkli and Kallio (2018) argue that children's political agency is encouraged when matters of importance to them are challenged and that only the people involved in children's lives can understand what the stakes are in any given context. Ethnographic research with a political commitment to children's matters of importance thus has the potential to reveal children's everyday politics. In this endeavour, I have employed a *critical ethnographic* approach to explore the power relations at play in asylum-seeking children's everyday life. This is an ethnographic approach that engages in efforts to broaden our understanding of the political with a view to revealing the everyday politics of marginalized people (Schatz, 2009). It thus also involves an empirical investigation of how children's everyday politics is entangled in large-scale politics (Philo & Smith, 2003; Zembylas, 2015). This approach to ethnography may illuminate the power relations in which children, in general, and asylum-seeking children, in particular, are entangled as well as how they, in their everyday practices, might challenge these power relations. In attempts to explore children's everyday politics, the adult researcher has to critically analyse the power relations embedded in children's everyday lives (Kallio & Häkli, 2011b). A critical ethnography may increase the adult researcher's acknowledgement of children's everyday politics, including the political aspects of children's emotions and enable an analysis of affect as embedded in larger fields of power relations (Mitchell & Elwood, 2012; Zembylas, 2015). In my thesis, an important starting point is thus to acknowledge children's everyday practices as *potentially* political and to engage in ethnographic work, as a way of exploring *when* and *how* their agency is political (Kallio, 2007, 2008, Kallio & Häkli, 2011b; Philo & Smith, 2013; Skelton, 2010).

In my fieldwork, this approach to ethnography has been chosen to explore asylum-seeking children's everyday politics, with a view to also document their lived rights. In this thesis, I thus explore children's everyday politics in an attempt to understand how children experience that their rights are realized or denied, but also how children may contest conditions that deny them rights and claim their rights in their everyday lives. This entails a relational exploration of rights that analyses the power relations in which children are entangled, allowing an examination of how children's rights are respected in child-adult relations in the political contexts they live in (Aitken, 2015; Mayall, 2000, 2015; Reynaert et al., 2012). In my endeavour to explore

children's rights as they are lived, I was initially inspired by work on children's rights (e.g., Bhabha, 2009; Lundberg & Dahlqvist, 2012; Lundy & McEvoy, 2011; Seeberg et al., 2009), but while in the field I never talked with the children in terms of formal rights. In the following sections I will present my chosen methods in more detail.

Playing, talking, walking, feeling *with* children and writing about their everyday lives

Children's everyday spaces, and the everyday practices within them, are explored here through participant observations and, in particular, by playing, talking, walking and feeling *with* the participating children. This participatory approach to ethnography was employed to allow me to participate in the children's everyday activities on somewhat similar terms as the children themselves. In the field, I strived to give the children influence over when, where and how I could participate in their lives, that is, which places, activities and conversations I would gain access to. However, in the two main settings, the different institutional rules and the presence of other adults also affected which places I had access to and which activities I could join in on. I therefore assumed somewhat different ethnographer roles in different contexts.

In school, I was with the children for all of their activities during the school day, which meant playing with the children on the schoolyard, eating with the children in the canteen and observing the educational practices in the classrooms. I also came with the children to their sports lesson in school and to other sport activities in the local area, for instance, swimming and ice-skating. Moreover, I participated in crafting days, Christmas celebrations, graduation days and singing assemblies, as well as in cultural events outside school, such as, theatre and musicals. In addition, I participated in summer school with some of the children during the holidays. In the classroom, I deliberately assumed something of an observer position, sitting with the children at their tables and striving to participate on the children's terms. But I was sometimes invited to participate even during class, both by the children and by the teachers, and the children sometimes turned to me for help with their schoolwork. This role differed from my role during the breaks and in the schoolyard, where I was often the only adult.

At the asylum centre, I often visited the children and their families in their individual family rooms, and I also visited the canteen prior to the new rules prohibiting non-residents to enter the canteen. Nonetheless, I spent most of my fieldwork alone with the children in the shared premises of the asylum centre as well as outside, mainly on the football pitch and, later on, I made a few visits to the then recently installed playroom.

Initially, I had planned to include children's experiences of health care services as a third setting. But the children pointed me in another direction, towards focusing on children's play arenas, that is, areas that spanned over the school, the walk to school and the housing arenas.

Playing

In the field, I often actively participated, after the children's invitation, in their playing (cf. Corsaro, 1979; Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998), both in school and at the asylum centre. In the school, I often played football or basketball on the schoolyard with the children, but I also played inside in the school's recreation room, although they were not allowed to be there.

At the asylum centre, I spent most of my time alone with the children in the shared premises. I was often actively involved in their play, both inside, where playing was formally prohibited, and outside, mainly on the football pitch, where we played football and some children played with their bikes. I also hung out with the children in the corridors or in their family rooms watching TV, looking at iPads and mobile phones or doing homework.

Later on, I also made a few visits and played in the then recently installed playrooms. I also visited the mobile library to borrow books with some of the children, where they could also draw with colour pens. My main form of participation in the children's practices at the asylum centre hence involved playing. Moreover, during the walks between the school and the asylum centre, the children often engaged in play activities, and we sometimes stopped on the way to use the swings in the playgrounds we passed.

The children would often protest, and make me put down my notebook, if I tried to write fieldnotes when I was spending time with them, because they wanted me to play with them instead. Playing with the children can be understood as one of my main practices in this fieldwork and was crucial to being accepted by the children and to learning from them about their lived worlds.

Walking

In the field, I participated in many walks with the children between the school and the asylum centre. This created opportunities for talking *with* the children, when they were more at ease outside of the institutional settings. These walks or *walking tours* (cf. Cele, 2006; Marshall, 2013; 2016; Svensson, 2010) were guided by the children themselves, and the routes from school therefore varied, depending on with whom I walked (eventually, some children started taking the bus).

The informal walking tours after school enabled me to learn about the children's embodied attachments to and experiences of different places in their local community. The children, for instance, pointed out places where they played (cf. Marshall, 2016; Svensson, 2010). Moreover, the children, during these walks, often encountered objects or witnessed events that spurred their associations to experiences that they shared with me. For instance, Ahmed once spotted an ambulance while we were walking and started telling me about how often he had seen ambulances and witnessed violence at the asylum centre.

The walking tours also took place inside the asylum centre where the children, as my self-appointed guides, took me on tours through the indoor premises and the outdoor environment. These walks enabled me to learn from the children's embodied affective reactions to different places and to adults that we encountered, like reception staff members, the Boss and security guards at the asylum centre. I would, for instance, observe how the children changed their behaviour, bodily postures, such as freezing, and their facial expressions when we passed places or people that made them feel uncomfortable. During these walking tours, the children also pointed out no-go areas and prohibition signs and talked about their experiences of distinct places and people at the asylum centre. However, they also showed me the places they liked and where they played. The walking tours, and especially how the children navigated them, thus enabled me to gain a better understanding of the children's embodied and spatial experiences in their everyday spaces at the asylum centre.

Talking

My participation in the children's everyday lives, in school and at the asylum centre, together with the walks, initiated or sparked much of the talking with the children. This means that the talking with the children was primarily informal. However, initially most of the children and I did not share a common language, which could of course be seen as a methodological problem. Nonetheless, this meant that the children and I developed nonverbal ways to communicate and that I had to be more attentive to the children's ways of navigating and their non-verbal language (see e.g., Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989). In addition, we used translating apps. At times, some of the children would turn to their multilingual friends to translate into English or Swedish, who then engaged in peer-to-peer *language brokering*. Moreover, the number of children who learned Swedish increased over time, and I learnt some Arabic from the children. This successively increased our ability to communicate more freely in our everyday interactions. The children thought it was both hilarious and confusing when I eventually understood and responded in Arabic. This way of approaching language barriers enabled everyday

conversations with the children without any co-presence of an adult interpreter. The fact that the children could choose to talk to each other in another language when I was around also gave them more power over when and what to share with me.

In addition to the informal conversations, a few children participated in somewhat more formal audio-recorded conversations in Swedish or English and a couple of brief conversations in Arabic with the interpreter present. However, in general, this was not the children's preferred way of talking to me.

Feeling

In the field, I attended to children's feelings (cf. Rindstedt, 2013) and I often participated in situations where I became aware of the children's affective reactions to certain experiences, people and interactions in school and at the asylum centre. These embodied expressions would appear, for instance, as sighs or as changes in the children's tone of voice, bodily posture, facial expressions and gaze direction. Such subtle forms of affective expressions can be hard to notice and describe in fieldnotes (Kallio, 2007). But in my fieldwork, these embodied expressions were crucial to my understanding of the children's non-verbal communication (cf. Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989) of their experiences, including their emotions. Therefore, I was attentive to the children's emotions in their conversations with me, which allowed me to understand their feelings about what they told me, but also to be perceptive about how they felt about talking to me about certain things. Naturally, these non-representational affective expressions involved my interpretations of the children's feelings (see Mitchell & Elwood, 2012) but the children would often also verbalize their emotions in their conversations with me about specific experiences. Ethnography is emotional work to a great degree, and my emotional participation in the field in some ways meant *feeling with the children* (cf. Darling, 2014) and trying to read or understand their feelings. In line with Darling (2014), I argue that my own emotional work in the field prompted my attentiveness to the children's emotions in my observations. However, while in the field, my affective reactions and emotions of course had to be managed, and I was especially careful not to turn the focus to my own feelings in conversations with the children (Wettergren, 2015). My emotional work also entailed processing my own feelings when reading the data after having left the field.

Writing

The fieldwork practices enabled me to write about the children's everyday lives in my fieldnotes, which have provided a deepened and empirically grounded understanding of the children's experiences (Emerson et al., 2011). The fieldnotes have thus helped me provide "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973, pp. 3–30) of the children's lived worlds

In my handwritten notes, I included relevant observations of the children's activities and relations in school and at the asylum centre. This means, for instance, that I wrote about children's play practices, their talk about their (non)access to play and my observations of their play opportunities at their housing facility and at school. I also wrote about the food practices in the children's lives and about my participation, while eating with the children as well as how they talked about food and food practices in these two settings. My fieldnotes also included observations of practices of inclusion and exclusion in relation to other children or adults in both settings.

My written reflections also concerned material resources and the children's orientation to their material worlds. The children's play practices involved, for instance, their ways of navigating in the environment in relation both to places and to potential play objects. In the fieldnotes, I thus described environments, the children's use of places and objects, as well as their spatial locations in different places and how adults positioned them in the room. I also wrote notes on the children's embodied expressions, including moods, emotions and affective reactions, tone of voice, bodily postures, sighs, averted gaze, etc. Moreover, I wrote down extracts or notable phrasings from my informal conversations with the children (and adults) in the field, including what the children themselves spontaneously recounted about such interactions.

In my fieldnotes, I included my reflexive analyses of my own field relations and positionings in the field. Moreover, I noted my personal feelings, as I am well aware that my own emotions and affective reactions to events in the field influenced what I wrote down (Emerson et al., 2011; Darling, 2014). This selection was of course also informed by my theoretical perspectives and in line with my ethical and political focus (Emerson et al., 2011) (see also my next chapter on ethics).

The possibility to take notes, and the selection of what to include in them, depended on the context and my ethical considerations. At school, I continuously wrote elaborated fieldnotes during class, which enabled me to still spend as much time as possible with the children during school hours. Brief notes were taken when I spent time with the children outside school or at the asylum centre, and these notes were later developed the same day, at a café or on the bus on my way home. In the families' private rooms, I refrained from taking notes and I was also selective about what I wrote down afterwards.

For instance, I left out sensitive or private matters that were shared with me in confidence, especially in the conversations in the family rooms. The handwritten notes were subsequently transcribed into Word documents.

The fieldnotes were taken in front of the children. I found this more honest, as it would remind them of my role in the field. The fieldnotes, at times, initiated questions from the children about my research project, and this gave me an opportunity to understand what was unclear and to recurrently explain what I was actually doing. For instance, one of the participants jokingly told a new pupil in the middle school introductory class that I was there to write about him to the Migration Agency. Although this was meant as a joke, it gave me the opportunity to clarify my role to the children, ensuring them that I had no such connections.

As the notebook was not hidden from the children, it was often a topic of conversation. The younger children would sometimes want to write or draw something of their own in it. Some of the children were also interested in knowing what names I used for them in the notebook, as I had told them I never used their real names when taking notes. Once, some of the children approached me to complain that it was impossible to read my notes and that their teacher would not approve of such bad handwriting. When other children in school asked what I was writing, Hamid referred to my notebook as a “secret book” only meant for him and his classmates.

Participatory methods

In line with others, who have taken an interest in children’s geographies in their local communities, I have employed several participatory methods through which children could share their experiences of place and time, including *task-based methods* (Punch, 2002a), *mappings* (Ambrose, 2016; Cele, 2006; Gustafson, 2011; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012; van der Burgt, 2008) and *walking tours* (Cele, 2006; Marshall, 2013, 2016; Svensson, 2010).

In this ethnographic study, I thus combined fieldwork observations with a variety of participatory and task-based methods that might increase the chance that the individual child would find some of them suitable and thus be encouraged to be more actively involved in the research process (Due et al., 2014; Punch, 2002b). The children’s engagement in the participatory methods may enable them to articulate themselves more freely in comparison to an unfamiliar interview situation. Samantha Punch (2002b) therefore claims that one of the main advantages of such methods is that the power imbalance between the adult researcher and the child participant might be somewhat lessened. It may thus address some of the ethical issues that emerge in research with asylum-seeking children (Due et al., 2014; White & Bushin, 2011).

The children in this study engaged in different participatory methods through which they could share their experiences, using smileys, drawings or by writing in a language of their choosing. This meant that the data were collected through a range of different methods depending on the children's preferences, which together served to deepen my understanding of the children's lived worlds. In the field, several participatory methods were thus tried out together with the children, and I learned from them what methods they preferred (cf. White & Bushin, 2011). Although I tried to give the participating children as much influence as possible over the methods, it was of course ultimately, I, the adult researcher, who chose what methods to introduce to the children. In many ways, the deployment of various methods was fruitful, but I also realized that some of these methods (e.g., diary method) were time consuming for the children and they therefore chose not to deploy them. Thus, when engaging in what is perceived as participatory methods with children, the researcher might in fact instead limit or regulate children's participation (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Kallio, 2012).

These task-based participatory methods were mostly offered at school, sometimes individually, but mostly in pairs or groups, my goal being to minimize the power asymmetries between the children and me. In this sense, the data can be understood as co-constructed not just in terms of how I influenced the data, but also through how the children influenced each other. The children were, however, reminded that there were no right or wrong answers to the tasks, as I was interested in their own thoughts and as children might otherwise construe such tasks as school work (Due et al., 2014; Lundy & McEvoy, 2011; Punch, 2002b). The themes that were identified in conversations, observations and in the initial methods with the children were used as important points of departure in the development of new themes to explore with the children. Below, I present my chosen methods, starting with three visual methods (on visual methods see e.g., Pimlott-Wilson, 2012).

The sun and the flower diagrams

I initially deployed a "sun diagram" with the children, that is, a sheet with a happy sun with eight rays that were fillable fields, on which the children were presented a broad question, thus allowing them to identify, using keywords or drawings, matters that, as they saw it, were important to their wellbeing. The themes (places, activities and objects) that the children identified made me aware of what was important to them and also guided my subsequent research focus. It was through this method that the children identified house/home, play (including objects for play) and school as important themes. This was a way for the children to influence the research focus. The same method was used in the "flower diagram", where the children could write names on the leaves of a happy or a sad flower to identify how persons, mostly adults, in their

everyday spaces treated them and made them feel. Through this method, the children's teachers, but also an individual volunteer and one of the staff members, emerged as important to the children.

Smileys and drawings

Smileys were initially used as a facilitator to help me get an overview of the participating children's experiences and to enable the children to connect a specific feeling with a place or a theme (cf. Due et al., 2014). Initially, due to the language barriers, I would, for instance, use short terms such as "school" or "Hotel", and the children could choose a smiley corresponding to the feeling they connected to these places. Smileys, and other visual methods, proved to be useful in facilitating the children's participation despite varying levels of literacy (Due et al., 2014) and despite language barriers. Smileys were therefore also used in the questionnaires to enable the younger children to answer the questions. Instead of writing their answer to a particular question, they could answer by colouring one of five smiley faces, ranging from a sad smiley to a happy smiley.

The children were also asked to draw their family rooms at the asylum centre, but they generally had little interest in drawing, especially the older ones, although, some children responded on the sun diagram by drawing and some also illustrated their ideal homes by drawing. The drawings were then used as a starting point for conversations with the children (cf. Cele, 2006; Due et al., 2014). Children's engagement in drawings, or colourings, while we were talking, also gave them room for pauses and moments of quietness to develop their answers.

Mappings

Mappings were used to explore the children's experiences of places in their local community (cf. Ambrose, 2016; Cele, 2006; Gustafson, 2011; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012; van der Burgt, 2008). The children were handed a printed A3 aerial photo of their local community (cf. van der Burgt, 2006), together with separate A4 close-up aerial photos of their school and the asylum centre. The school and the asylum centre were also marked out, so as to help the children navigate on the big map. This might of course have influenced the children's mappings, but on the other hand, they were already well aware that these were the main places under study.

The children were then asked to indicate, on the maps, the places where they felt safe/unsafe; their favourite places; places where they went during their free time; where their friends lived and any no-go places using the placement of smiley stickers with different colours, shapes and facial

expressions (cf. Gustafsson, 2011). The children were also asked to, in their own words, share their experiences of a particular place and, for instance, explain why a certain place felt safe/unsafe. Finally, in the last question, the children could write more freely about their experiences of places that were not on the maps.

Most children mapped the school as a positive place, but the children's private family room and the football pitch at the asylum centre also emerged as favourite places. Places that were mapped as unsafe included the asylum centre, but also the lake and the forest near the asylum centre.

The use of mappings was a fruitful method that furthered my overall understanding of the children's experiences of different places in their local environment and what feelings they attached to these places of belonging or non-belonging (cf. Gustafsson, 2011; van der Burgt, 2008). This method, however, made evident the discrepancy between my research focus on asylum-seeking children's mappings of their everyday places in Sweden, as some of the children chose to share their experiences of violence in their country of origin or during their flight to Sweden (cf. Mitchell & Elwood, 2012).

Worksheets

The children's written material was collected using different kinds of worksheets (see Punch, 2002b). These included questionnaire worksheets with open-ended questions, inspired by the children's previous accounts and my participant observations. The questionnaires enabled me to ask more detailed questions concerning the themes that had previously been identified as important in the children's lives. Every questionnaire ended with an open slot to enable the children to write more freely about what they saw as matters of importance. The older children often preferred sharing their experiences through writing in the questionnaires, rather than talking or drawing. The questionnaires, on the other hand, were dependent on the children's level of literacy. To allow inclusion of all of the children, the questionnaires were therefore adapted. For instance, I initiated questionnaires with open-ended sentence starters that were to be completed, such as "I feel good when...." Later, I also used questionnaires where the youngest children could answer the questions by colouring smileys. Indeed, the worksheet method helped overcome language barriers.

Diaries

The children were also asked to write diaries, accompanied by brief instructions and were given a pencil and notebook to enable them to write more freely about their experiences. As one of the children commented, the diary could be used by them in the same way as my field notebook. Diaries, it has been argued, can provide insights into children's everyday lives when the ethnographer is not present (Bolger et al., 2003; Punch, 2002b). But the diaries did not turn out to be very useful as a method, even if the children appreciated the notebook and, perhaps, used it for other purposes. One child told me he had given the notebook to his dad to use while studying Swedish. Two girls, who did share their diary notes with me and were close friends, had written about their friendship and used the notebook for drawing.

Ethnography as a tool for analysing children's lived rights

My participation in the field – through *playing, walking, talking and feeling with the children* in their everyday spaces – primarily enabled me to observe the everyday practices of the children and the adults around them within the two main settings: the housing and the school. My fieldwork *with* children also allowed me to gain a deepened understanding of asylum-seeking children's everyday politics during a specific period of time and at a specific asylum centre and school. Ethnography entails an ongoing process of analysis while being in the field (Emerson et al., 2011) and when combined, these diverse ethnographic methods provided the data that form the basis of my analysis of children's everyday politics. In the three studies, the data have been analysed in relation to the main themes that emerged as being important to the children themselves, namely home, school and play. In my analyses, the children's representations of their perspectives have been foregrounded as my primary focus. However, in the end, it is the researcher who makes the selection of data and who interprets it in order to arrive at a more abstract analysis (Emerson et al., 2011). In this more abstract analytical work, I have analysed the children's articulations and embodied expressions and practices in relation to how I understand the power relations in their everyday spaces, taking into consideration how asylum-seeking children are positioned in systems of power embedded in asylum politics. In the next chapter I will present my take on research ethics with asylum-seeking children before I, in the chapter on the summaries of my three studies, present my analysis of children's everyday politics and lived rights.

7 Research ethics *with* asylum-seeking children

This research project was approved by the Ethical Review Board of Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden (2015/1402-31/5) (SFS 2003:460) and was carried out in line with established formal ethical research guidelines concerning information, consent and anonymity in research with children (The Swedish Research Council, 2017). However, my take on research ethics is that ethical considerations constitute an ongoing process that permeates the choices that are made throughout the entire research project.

Ethically informed methodology

In my work I have adopted ethnography *with* children as an ethically informed methodology, where ethical considerations are understood as a constant relational process informing the fieldwork practices, relations, analyses, interpretations, as well as dissemination of data (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Christensen & James, 2000). Above all, this study adheres to an ethically informed research approach, based on a strong commitment to the participating children and their perspectives.

Ethical considerations have permeated both my conversations and my participation *with* the children (e.g., playing *with*, walking with, talking *with* them). Adult-child fieldwork relations are closely intertwined with the ethnographer's ethical and political research choices and the positions ascribed to the participating children (Christensen & Prout, 2002). Therefore, it has been argued, and I agree, that there are politics involved in ethnographic fieldwork with children (Mitchell & Elwood, 2012) that necessitate a critical and reflexive analysis of the field practices. My reflections involved an ongoing process during the entire research project, as I have analysed how my actions have affected what kind of material I was given access to, as well as how the children were able to influence their participation in the research process.

In my view, doing ethical research *with* children entails being perceptive and responsive to the children's wishes regarding *when, where, how* and *with whom* they want to share their experiences. This means being responsive to children's influence over the methods used, developed or abandoned in relation to their different preferences (see Punch, 2002b; White & Bushin, 2011). This study, thus, involved a participatory approach to ethnography *with* children that acknowledges children as actors who are actively involved in the

research process (Christensen, 2004; Christensen & James, 2000; Christensen & Prout, 2002; James, 2007). I am also informed by a rights-based approach to research with children that views children as rights subjects and has a commitment to their participatory rights in research (Beazley et al., 2009; Bessell, 2017). “Rights-based research with children acknowledges their agency, not as the outcome of academic theory but rather as recognition that they are subjects of rights” (Beazley et al., 2009, p. 369).

Formal ethical guidelines have been criticized for adultism and for compromising the recognition of children as rights subjects in research (Skelton, 2008). Therefore, I understand ethically informed research with children to be a highly political project that involves “a doing” of children’s rights relationally, thereby informing my daily interactions with the children. This ethical stance, thus, meant being politically committed to the participating children and their own concerns throughout the research process (cf. Mackenzie et al., 2007). Moreover, an important starting point in this study has been to determinedly explore the perspectives and experiences of the participating children.

In line with childhood sociologists, I would claim that “taking children seriously as people leads to shifts in thinking” (Mayall, 2000, p. 248). This, then, means taking a *child standpoint* seriously by listening to and analysing children’s voices (cf. Mayall, 2000; 2015). I argue that the documentation and analysis of asylum-seeking children’s representations of their experiences – their *articulated standpoints* – may provide important critical insights into how they are socially and politically situated in their everyday spaces and the particular systems of power in which they are positioned as children *and* as asylum-seekers. Moreover, paying attention to asylum-seeking children’s *articulated emotions* might provide important insights into representations of children’s felt experiences. This standpoint approach is hence a political project that aims to generate “situated knowledge”, taking as its starting point arriving at an understanding of how the social order is experienced by a specific marginalized group (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004). This approach is especially appropriate in ethnography with asylum-seeking children, whose voices are often marginalized.

At the same time, my representations of the children’s standpoints should of course be read as my analytical interpretations (cf. Spyrou, 2011). In my dissemination of data, I have chosen to present, to the greatest extent possible, the children’s own words accurately, especially when these words have been expressed in beginner Swedish. But in excerpts that have been translated from Arabic, I am aware that the translation process can cause shifts in meaning. Moreover, I have of course both influenced the data and chosen what data to present and how to interpret it. Naturally, I do not claim that any quotes should be read as representations of *the authentic* or true voices of individual asylum-seeking children. Spyrou (2011), among others, has criticized adult researchers’, at times overly simplistic, claims to “give children a voice”.

Children obviously already have a voice, long before they meet a researcher, and I agree that it is crucial to ethically reflect on not only the power relations involved in such a claim, but also the specific ways in which children's "voices" are represented (James, 2007; Spyrou, 2011; Åkerlund & Gottzén, 2017). As regards taking into consideration the politics of representation in research with children (Åkerlund & Gottzén, 2017), the ethnographer must also take into consideration how children are entangled in power relations both in their everyday spaces and in the research process itself. Research with asylum-seeking children entails specific ethical aspects both in the representation and dissemination of data and the conduct of research, so as to avoid adding to already vulnerable positions (Düvell et al., 2010). In my presentation of the data, I have tried to present the children respectfully and to reveal both their vulnerability in relation to their political context *and* their agency and different ways of coping with restricting conditions. In my presentation of data, I have chosen the term "asylum-seeking children" to enable an analyse of how they are positioned differently from children in general. This is of course a highly political and quite problematic term that was never used in the field, but that has rather been used as an analytical term. I will now present the fieldwork practices applied to enter the field and the process of information and consent.

Entering the field: Meeting the children in school

In the midst of the school's process of receiving new pupils from the asylum centre, and the many impromptu decisions that often inform asylum reception, the teacher's possibility to inform me about the setting beforehand was limited. Instead, I was finally invited to the school on the same day that most of the participating children arrived at school and was therefore introduced to the school facilities, the rules and routines along with the new pupils. On this first day at school, I also introduced myself to the children in the introductory class, telling them that I was writing a book and was interested in learning about how children experienced being new in Sweden.

Information

Initially, my research project was met with some hesitation due to the workload at the school. The principal explained in an email that the school was about to receive a number of newly arrived children. After a phone conversation, I was nonetheless invited to an information meeting that the school had arranged with the parents at the asylum centre the following week. The information about my research project was then emailed to the head

teacher of the introductory class and, at the meeting, the two teachers welcomed me to conduct my study in their class.

The children, and their parents, were informed about the research project at school. The information letters, with one version addressed directly to the children, were first translated to Arabic and, after becoming acquainted with the children, they were also translated into Sorani, Mongolian, Russian and later Farsi. The letters to the parents were handed out to them when they came to school to leave or pick up their children. This also offered me an opportunity to introduce myself. I managed to introduce myself briefly in Arabic, but the rest of the conversation was interpreted with the help of two Arabic-speaking teachers/pedagogues. I communicated in Swedish with the Mongolian-speaking parents, who had been in Sweden for a while.

The children were informed about my research project in their classrooms with the help of their Arabic-speaking teachers. The procedure of parental consent and the fact that participation was voluntary were emphasized. I wanted the children to know why I was talking to their parents and that their parents had a say in this, as many of the children immediately and happily responded "Yes you can talk to me!". Some of the children, however, questioned why I had to ask their parents for permission when they themselves had already agreed to participate. These children, thus, called into question the formal ethical guidelines and that they could not participate without me first asking their parents for permission (see Skelton, 2008).

The Arabic-speaking children subsequently received their information letters and, in order to include those who could not read, one of the children read it to the others. Two of the Mongolian children, who knew Swedish, helped a younger child read the information. However, one child protested about not receiving a letter in Mongolian and criticized me when the translation process took too long. In this way, she claimed her right to be informed properly in her first language.

The parents were later presented with more information and the possibility to ask questions about the research project during two parent meetings, organized by the teachers. Moreover, the children were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research project with the interpreter present in the initial arranged meetings at school.

Consent

The parents' consent forms were handed out to all parents in the introductory classes. Thereafter, the children were able to give their written consent by writing their names and by marking "yes" or "no" or by circling around a happy or a sad smiley on a sheet of paper with a short question "Do you want to participate in the book?" The importance of this initial phase of informed consent has been underlined in research with children and research in asylum

contexts (Mackenzie et al., 2007). Therefore, I wanted to make sure the children were able to give their own consent and that they understood that participation was voluntary, even if their parents had consented. In addition to the written consent form, consent was also re-negotiated relationally with the children, who continuously confirmed, or denied, when and how they were to participate (cf. Darling, 2014; Mackenzie et al., 2007). However, some of the children seemed to think that I was too anxious. When initiating one of the methods, Enya protested against my overload of information and interrupted me: “We’ve got it! This is the third time you tell us about your book!” In this way, she called into question my presumption that they had not understood and that she wanted to participate.

In comparison to formal consent, negotiated consent is intimately related to respecting the integrity of the children. This requires attentiveness and responsiveness to children’s non-verbal as well as verbal communication, and this guided me during the research process, for instance, when reading the children’s body language or facial expression. At times, this meant choosing not to intrude if a child did not greet me when they passed me or if a group of children stood with their backs turned to me in the corridor. At one point, Yassin even ran away when I approached him and clearly showed that he did not want to talk to me.

The formal consent from the parents consisted of their signature on the consent form. The ethnocentric formal research ethics assumption of universal adult literacy can nonetheless make the demand for written consent ethically problematic (Mackenzie et al., 2007; Skelton, 2008). This became clear in this study, as some of the parents did not know how to read and write, and at one point I realized my mistaken assumption when presenting the information letter to one of the parents. Another dilemma occurred when one child was very eager to participate while his father did not consent to his participation. This young child protested when he was excluded from engaging in some of the task-based methods together with the other children. This dilemma became especially evident one day when a group of children sat with me at a table outside the school, drawing and writing. In this situation, I decided to let the boy join in on what to him seemed like a fun activity and later explained the situation to his father. This highlights a few dilemmas intrinsic to the research process regarding our obligations to follow so-called adultist formal ethical guidelines, while ethically and politically wanting to respect children as subjects who have rights (see Skelton, 2008). In the field, the children recurrently questioned me when I followed these guidelines or when I made other mistakes. Thereby, in a sense they claimed their participatory rights in the research process.

Access

The children's school and the asylum centre were important settings, and formal access was therefore secured both from the school principle and teachers and from the asylum centre director. Because formal access to the school and the classroom was given by the teachers, it might of course have affected the children's perception of having to accept me (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011). In the field, however, my ambition was to give the children influence over when, where and how they wanted to interact with me. Therefore, I always asked the children for permission before joining in on activities or entering rooms, outside the classroom or the school canteen. The fact that the children could choose to talk to each other in another language when I was around also increased their possibility to choose in which conversations I was to be included, even if I was in the room.

Negotiating with the participating children over access to activities and places was thus an ongoing process, even after formal access had been granted. This would sometimes clash with the way in which the teachers had almost instructed the children to follow me to participate in different research methods. I always tried to make sure that the children were asked first and had given their verbal consent before engaging in these methods. On another note, I noticed that some children preferred to come with me as a way of skipping class, and thus participation in the research might have interfered with their education.

As can be seen, I constantly negotiated access relationally with the participating children, and to some extent with their parents. For instance, because I did not want to request full access at the outset of the study, more intrusive forms of access were negotiated when field relationships had been established. The initial time I spent in school gave the children the opportunity to get to know me and to successively decide how much they wanted to share with me about their everyday lives outside school. The process of getting access to the asylum centre was therefore completely dependent on whether or not the children wanted to invite me to see where they lived. Hence, I wanted any visit at the asylum centre to be on the participating children's terms. After having spent a few weeks in the field, the children were asked whether they wanted to show me any places outside the school, for example, where they lived. This was met with an instant invitation from several of the children, and during the rest of the fieldwork, I followed the children to the asylum centre after school several days a week. The children often asked if I would come with them after school and showed their disappointment when I was not able to. In my visits at the asylum centre, I was also often invited by their parent/s to the family rooms.

Leaving the field

The process of leaving the field is generally discussed in relation to how the ethnographer leaves the fieldwork setting. In my fieldwork, however, for the most part, it was the participants who left the settings, and the fieldwork was eventually phased out when almost all of the participating children had moved out of the asylum centre. The children moved from the asylum centre if they received a residence permit and settled in other housing arrangements in another municipality, but in some cases, children suddenly moved away from the field without notice (perhaps because of a rejected asylum application). The temporal horizons of entering, being in and leaving the field were uncertain and ambiguous, reflecting the myriad impromptu decisions affecting the everyday lives of children in the asylum context. This meant that, in some cases, there was no time to say goodbye, or share contact information, before families moved to other municipalities or cities or, in the worst case, were deported (Darling, 2014).

When phasing out my fieldwork (October 2016), I sporadically visited the school, but by this time there were only a handful of children left. At this point, the children were placed in regular classes, had made more friends, and were in a more inclusive school context than before the summer. For me, the feeling of having a responsibility to stay in the field with the children was eased by this fact and, after the summer break, I did not find any natural context for me in the school and mostly felt superfluous in the schoolyard. This made it easier for me to leave the field. My contact with some of the children, however, continued over the phone, and a few of the families invited me to visit them even after they had moved to other housing arrangements. Nonetheless, the last, and prolonged, stage of the process of leaving the field involved a distancing from the impressions collected during fieldwork. Going through the fieldnotes and reading the empirical material and what the participant children had shared with me was indeed an emotional work (cf. Griffiths, 2013). In the sections below, I will discuss the power asymmetries and ethical dilemmas in the field.

“Friend, grandma, teacher or bookseller?”: Researcher positions in adult-child fieldwork relations

Ethical considerations regarding adult-child field relations have often revolved around aspects of age and other adult-associated features, such as the size of the researcher (for a discussion on researcher positions in the field, see Agar, 1996; Fine & Sandstrom, 1988). The fieldworker’s awareness of the uneven power asymmetries between researcher and participant, as well as between adult and child, is of course crucial (Christensen, 2004; Mitchell &

Elwood, 2012). The researcher's goal to deconstruct or at least downplay hierarchical adult-child relations becomes even more crucial in research conducted in institutional settings (Holt, 2004), such as schools and asylum centres. Ethnography with asylum-seeking children also means considering the children's marginalized position in the host society and how they are entangled in the systems of power embedded in asylum politics. The research process and field relations cannot be understood as being outside such power matrices (Mackenzie et al., 2007; White & Bushin, 2011). As pointed out by Bushin and White (2010), white, adult researchers, who engage in research with asylum-seeking children, have to consider a number of different positions of power in relation to the participating children.

To minimize the power asymmetries in the field, I often consciously reflected on my tone of voice and the placement of my body in a room in relation to the children. This meant that, when interacting with the children, I strived to place myself on the same level as them, sitting on the floor in the corridors with the younger children and at the children's tables in the classroom. In the field, I avoided roles and spaces that would associate me with the teachers at school or staff at the asylum centre. In the classroom, however, I was sometimes asked to assist the children with their schoolwork and, when this was initiated by the children themselves, I chose to help them. Nonetheless, the fact that the children also tried to teach me Arabic meant that the teaching went both ways. The children gradually seemed to position me as "another kind of adult" and, after a few months in the field, Mohamed openly expressed his opinion that I was not really like the teachers.

Nevertheless, it was sometimes hard for the children to conceptualize who I was and what I was actually doing, even though I continuously reminded them that I was a researcher writing a book. For instance, after having spent almost a year in the field, Amina said to me "you are the best teacher!". I then reminded her that I was not a teacher, but that I was writing a book, to which she responded, "oh yes, you are a bookseller!" The children, and their parents, initially associated me with the school, where they met me, and sometimes referred to me as a (substitute) teacher. However, Amel insinuated that I was not a very "good teacher", because then I should have been in school every day, thus reacting to the discontinuity and unpredictability of my presence in the field. Consequently, I introduced a calendar in the classroom so that the children could see on which days I was going to be at school. The children gradually seemed to grasp that I did not work at the school, and I also continuously explained that there was no formal association between me and the school or any other institution, such as the asylum centre or any authority, like the Migration Agency

In the field, I tried to participate in the children's activities, and I was often treated as a friend (cf. Corsaro, 1979). For instance, Jasmine, one day happily expressed "This is my big friend!" while grabbing my arm. This role can, of course, be problematic, as it is a temporary and conditional friendship (cf. Due

et al., 2014). Thus, there were ethical dilemmas involved in being positioned as a friend of the children or their families. The parents at times invited me for something to eat and drink in the family rooms and, at first, I felt this might be too intrusive (cf. Darling, 2014) but realised it would be rude not to accept their invitations of hospitality. In the field, I became an important adult for the children and was one of the few “Swedish” people the families could turn to for questions when navigating in their new society. The ethical dilemmas of being a researcher and a friend also entailed my decision to answer the children’s questions about me (cf. Darling, 2014), while avoiding being too personal with adults in the field.

The children also often included me in their play and invited me to join in on their activities both at school and after. However, when I was invited to hang out after school, at the asylum centre, Rashid wanted to make sure I would first ask my mother for permission. The children also tried to include me as a pupil, and during class, Jasmine even asked the teacher why I was not given a maths book. I also joined in on the children’s “pretend school” at the asylum centre, where Amel, as the teacher, invited me to play the whispering game in Arabic. This was a game that was often used in school to practice their skills in Swedish, and it was first now that I realized how hard it was to play this game in a completely new language. The children often also reminded me to follow the rules set up for the children at the asylum centre. In the field, I was thus positioned as a child to some extent, and my age generally did not seem to be much of a problem. However, some of the children gave me the epithet “mormor” (grandma) when they discovered my actual age. Furthermore, the children sometimes also realized the benefits of positioning me as an adult ally and found several ways of turning my presence in the field to their advantage (see Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). For instance, hanging out with me increased their access to play in the asylum centre in zones that the children were not allowed to visit on their own. It also increased their possibility to get away with breaking the rules at school, including throwing away food they did not like. In turn, I of course benefited from their acceptance of me in terms ethnographic data (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008)

The children’s positioning of me did not only concern age, but also issues of “Swedishness” or “whiteness”. The children would often ask me about my last name, if I was born in Sweden and if both my parents were Swedish to check the level of my “Swedishness”. I was also positioned as non-Muslim as opposed to the children, who at times used their Muslim identity to create in-groupings. This became evident when a group of children had gathered in the corridor and Ahmed, jokingly, pointed at me and announced “we are Muslim, but you are not Muslim!” When the boys positioned me, they were sometimes also drawing on normative gender categories, as it was frowned upon if I laughed too loud or if I was, for instance, too engaged when playing football. The children themselves, hence, positioned me in different ways in the field and the power asymmetries in adult-child interactions were not static, as the

children sometimes, momentarily, overturned the power relations in particular situations. For instance, when Amel ran off and yelled at me “I will not talk to you anymore!” she in a way changed the power relations, as I was highly dependent on her, and the other children, to conduct my research (cf. Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). The children could also switch to another language to exclude me from conversations. However, being the only person in the room who did not understand the language spoken gave me an idea of how some of the children felt in situations where only Swedish was spoken.

“Oh, that’s just Sandra, she won’t say anything!”: Reflexions on trust-building in field relations with asylum-seeking children

The critical analysis of adult-child field relations is closely connected to the ethical process of ensuring confidentiality and building relations of trust. As asylum-seeking children are enmeshed in multi-layered power relations (individual, institutional and societal), the negotiating of trust is a complex, but central, issue in research with asylum-seeking children, regarding both field relations and research practices (Darling, 2014; Düvell et al., 2010; Griffiths, 2013; Mackenzie et al., 2007; White & Bushin, 2011). Building trust in adult-child field relations is also pivotal in attempts to create a space where children feel safe to articulate their everyday politics in conversations with the researcher (Mitchell & Elwood, 2012; Wahlström Smith, 2021; White & Bushin, 2011).

In this study, I wanted to let the children get to know me in their own time and to build trust on their terms. Initially, I deliberately assumed a more distant position in relation to the children to let them initiate contact. Nonetheless, I learnt that, with some of the children, this would be a challenge, because on my first day in school one child ran to me in the school corridor and spontaneously gave me a hug. Even so, the children often tested me in different ways during the first period of the fieldwork to see what kind of adult I was and determine whether I could be trusted; some children even tried to pick a fight with me. The children seemed to gradually accept me, and this was crucial to my possibility to spend time with them and, thereby, learn from their everyday lives. The fact that I refrained from correcting them and from reporting their minor transgressions of institutional rules was crucial in building trust. The fact that I tried to speak Arabic with the children, and their parents, also became a tool for enhancing our fieldwork relations.

The children’s trust in me increased over time, and overall, most children seemed to feel comfortable talking to me. The level of trust that was built in the field was shown when some of the children felt they could share their “secrets” with me and, despite their high-stakes situation, the children at times made revelations about breaking institutional rules. In these cases, I ethically scrutinized what was too sensitive or personal to include in the fieldnotes. I

also asked the children whether I was allowed write about any such “secrets” and the children’s acts of rule-breaking. Being aware that children in this asylum context might be afraid to raise their concerns, and acknowledging the ethical issues involved in publishing such research findings (Pittaway et al., 2010), such data were not disseminated until the children had moved out of the asylum centre, and any details about the children have deliberately been left out in presentations of my work. Moreover, pseudonyms have been used from the very start in my fieldnotes, and naturally I never talked to other adults, including the parents, about what the children shared with me. In order not to be intrusive and to avoid harm, I never asked the children about their experiences in their country of origin, their journeys to Sweden or their asylum cases, although the children themselves sometimes spontaneously shared such experiences with me. On another note, I sometimes realized – when the children turned silent – that my questions had nevertheless been perceived as too intrusive.

The complex issue of trust in research with asylum-seeking children became especially evident at the asylum centre. For instance, at one point one of the children hushed her sister for telling me that they were going to move out of the asylum centre, hesitating about how much they could actually reveal to me about moving out without giving notice to the authorities. The issue of trust also became evident, on another occasion, when I entered a room at the asylum centre and some children, who did not know me, instantly became silent, thinking that I would report them to the Reception. Amina, then, reassured them that they didn’t have to worry about me: “Oh that’s just Sandra. She won’t say anything”.

The children’s trust for me was also connected to my commitment to taking the children seriously and making sure I kept my promises to them. Moreover, it involved my deliberate decision to *take sides with the children* in their everyday struggles. Ethically informed interventions (Dennis, 2009) guided by this commitment to the participants can be crucial in situations, or in fields, where it is not appropriate to be neutral (see, e.g., Gruber & Lundberg, 2020).

In school, I chose to intervene and to defend the children when they were wrongfully accused of doing something wrong, and at the asylum centre, I at times helped the children hide their transgressions of institutional rules. Moreover, I intervened when the children were subjected to racist or generally degrading remarks in school and, at one point, reported to the head teacher of the introductory class, a substitute teacher who openly shared anti-immigration views (cf. Dennis, 2009). I believe that, had I taken a neutral position and not intervened, it would have been unethical and negatively affected the children’s trust in me. I also decided to help the parents when they asked me for help with formal contacts and documents, although I had made it clear that I would not be able to change the overall situation the families found themselves in. I understand these kinds of benefits, or ways of giving

back to the families, as an ethical consideration (cf. Mackenzie et al., 2007; Pittaway et al., 2010) that also helped build trust with the parents.

My ethical stance in the field was inevitably influenced by my own political convictions in relation to the politicized issues in which the children and their families were entangled. In line with other researchers, I believe that it is not possible to take a neutral stance when conducting research with asylum-seeking children (e.g., Lind, 2020; Wahlström Smith, 2021).

“This is how we do things here in Sweden!”: Participating in asylum-seeking children’s practices in institutional settings

In the field, I was ascribed but also assumed different positions in different contexts and, to a great extent, these positions were shaped by the ethical dilemmas involved when participating in asylum-seeking children’s activities in institutional settings. For instance, I deliberately assumed a somewhat more anonymous position at the high-stakes asylum centre than in the school, and in this setting, I did not interact as much with the staff as I did with the schoolteachers.

At the asylum centre, I was primarily positioned as a visitor, something that also became visible through the *visitor’s badge* carried around my neck and the presentation of my ID card at the reception desk. However, I avoided using my privilege as a visitor when I participated in the children’s activities. In this visitor position, I was often mistaken for a volunteer, which enabled me to freely engage in the children’s activities without getting too much attention from other adults at the asylum centre and when the children told me to, I hid my notebook when representatives of the asylum centre passed us.

It is perhaps somewhat surprising that, I found the time I spent with the children in the school the most challenging, as I was expected to take more “adult responsibility” in this setting. For instance, the adults at school reacted to the position I took in the participant observations with the children, especially when the children broke the school rules. Hence, my attempts to avoid hierarchical adult-child field relations were seen to challenge the institutional expectations placed on me as an adult (see Valentine, 1999). I was even called to a meeting with one of the teachers, who criticized me for not making sure the children complied with the school rules.

The teachers also positioned me in various ways when they invited me to interact during class. Sometimes I was positioned as a pupil and sometimes as a teacher’s assistant. The teachers’ positionings of me in their classroom gave me some insights into the positions ascribed to the children at school. Through comments like “this is how we do things here in Sweden, right Sandra?” I was recurrently positioned as a representative of “Swedishness” in front of and in relation to the children, who were simultaneously positioned as the Others. Hence, the power asymmetries in this field became complex not only due to

issues of age, but also due to the fact that I, as a white, Swedish resident in the host society, was conducting research with children in the asylum process. “Swedishness” is closely linked to cultural and racial norms and, in my field, I observed several occasions when the children in school were positioned as Others through the use of such norms. The children themselves did not discuss these issues with me, perhaps because these experiences were difficult to grasp or put into words, but it is of course also possible that they did not feel comfortable sharing such concerns with a white, non-Muslim researcher.

I believe that my position as an adult was easier to manoeuvre during the time I spent with the children outside the institutional settings, without other adults present. However, there were also ethical dilemmas in sometimes being the only adult around, and at times I found myself in situations where I could not refrain from interfering and from assuming a more “adult role”. In school, I would for instance intervene when children were fighting, and once I also followed a young child who ran away from school. On the other hand, one child also criticized me for not intervening more in conflicts at school.

“Am I Google translate or what?”: Children’s language brokering

In the everyday conversations with the children in the field, language barriers were overcome with the help of some multilingual children’s language brokering. This enabled the children to communicate with me, without the co-presence of an adult interpreter. Most children also preferred it when their multilingual peers helped with translations during the participatory methods. The multilingual children’s engagement in this role turned them into a kind of co-researcher, a role that they seemed to take pride in. However, it was of course crucial that they volunteered, and I became aware that perhaps this role was not always appreciated and that it interfered with their play when Ahmed, who was often asked to translate, once in the schoolyard jokingly answered, “Am I Google translate or what?”

In the initial phase of the fieldwork, a professional Arabic-speaking interpreter facilitated my communication with the children and was present when a few of the methods were deployed. But the presence of another adult during my meetings with the children created a more formal atmosphere and changed the power relations in the room. Because of the children’s reactions to the presence of an interpreter, I decided to mainly use interpreter assistance for translations of written material. The use of various written and visual methods increased the children’s possibility ability to communicate without having the interpreter present.

Children's political agency in the research process

In this chapter, I have discussed the ethical process in the fieldwork relations, and as can be seen, children's political agency can also appear in relation to the adult researcher and adult research practices in the form of their challenges to or contestations of the chosen methods or questions (cf. Due et al., 2014; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012). In my study, the children constantly expressed their own ideas about their preferred methods, interrogated me about the questions asked and corrected me if I had misunderstood something (cf. Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). The politics of children's agency in the research process is perhaps especially important to acknowledge in relation to their participatory rights. In the field, the children recurrently exercised political agency and claimed their right to information and participation on their own terms. Researchers who engage in participatory methods with children sometimes fail to acknowledge children's participation when it is not performed as the researcher intended using the methods introduced (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Kallio, 2012; for a critical discussion on children's participation see also Skelton, 2007).

8 Summaries of studies

This thesis involves three empirical studies that together contribute to a more multi-faceted ethnographic understanding of the participating children's everyday politics and lived rights. The studies (three articles published in journals linked to childhood studies and children's geographies) were initially guided by the arenas that emerged as important to the children themselves, namely their housing, school and play arenas. The first article concerns the children's housing and includes children's articulated standpoints on their notions of house and home as well as their articulations on their living conditions at the asylum centre. The second article builds on the first and focuses on children's play as politics and resistance in the strongly regulated time-space at the asylum centre. The third article explores the politics of emotions and illuminates children's felt experience and how they were affected by exclusion in relation to their local school and more broadly by their experienced belonging in Sweden. This article also situates the children's sense of belonging in relation to the temporal and spatial aspects of the politics of belonging embedded in asylum lives. These three empirical studies serve to illuminate how asylum politics, through its local, relational and spatial enactment, is constantly present in asylum-seeking children's everyday lives. More importantly, these studies should be read as explorations of how and when children's agency in their everyday actions can be understood as political and how children's everyday politics might, in turn, reveal important aspects of children's lived rights. Below, I will present the studies, after first locating them in relation to prior research on children in asylum contexts. Finally, I will present an overall discussion of how these studies document children's everyday politics and lived rights in the different arenas.

Study I: "You said 'home' but we don't have a house": Children's lived rights and politics in an asylum centre in Sweden

Children living in asylum centres with their families are recurrently placed in housing conditions that are inconsistent with their rights (Fanning & Veale, 2004; Seeberg et al., 2009) and deemed unacceptable within the field of welfare, but that are construed as unavoidable in the asylum context (Seeberg

et al., 2009). It has been argued that asylum policies exclude asylum-seekers from having access to a home place, as asylum centres are not afforded home-like conditions. Instead, institutional asylum centres are described as deliberately “unhomely”, discouraging conditions corresponding to a home (Fox O’Mahoney & Sweeney, 2010; van der Horst, 2004). It is argued that the political interests of migration control prevent asylum-seekers from establishing home, family life and private life (Fox O’Mahoney & Sweeney, 2010; Vitus, 2011). Institutional asylum centres have also been described as semi-public housing facilities that have been compared to so-called total institutions (Goffman, 1961), that is, highly regulated time-spaces that limit participants’ autonomy and freedom (van der Horst, 2004). This points to the politics of belonging involved in asylum-seeking children’s experiences of home and their possibilities for home-making (Boccagni, 2017). In their everyday lives, children in asylum centres must handle both a highly regulated everyday life and the uncertainty of life as asylum-seekers (Vitus, 2010, 2011).

It is within such an asylum context that this study explores children’s articulated standpoints on their notions of home underpinned by their lived experiences of living at an asylum centre in Sweden. Children’s everyday politics is here explored in the field of tension between asylum politics and the children’s critical articulations as it unfolded in their asylum housing and in revealing what I have called children’s *lived rights*.

The ethnographic data for this study consist of informal conversations and observations, as well as a range of data from participatory task-based methods *with* the children. To include as many children as possible, taking into consideration their different levels of literacy and preferred ways of sharing their standpoints, the material in this article was built around both very brief and some lengthier quotes from the children.

In their articulations – their verbalized standpoints – the children revealed that they connected wellbeing to the spatial and social conditions of house and home. The children’s expectations of a home place included provision of adequate space and privacy, such as a bed of one’s own, a closet of one’s own, some desired play objects (e.g., a teddy bear). Moreover, they invoked desirable household and food practices (for instance, possibilities for the family to cook and chose when, where, what and with whom to eat) and the possibility to lead a “normal” social and family life. The children also connected home to having spaces for play. Hence, the articulated standpoints of these young asylum-seeking children shed light on their own understandings of what a home constitutes to them in the form of various spatial, material and social conditions for children’s wellbeing.

The children’s own articulations of their experiences at the asylum centre showed that, in their actual housing with highly restricted mealtimes, they had neither the spatial dimensions of house (e.g., a bed or a room of their own or a privileged space for private possessions) nor the social dimensions of home,

such as the possibility for the family to cook and choose food. These articulations thus pointed toward a discrepancy between their expectations and their lived reality, and this discrepancy underpinned the children's articulated critique of the asylum centre. These articulations revealed how they identified and, implicitly or explicitly, criticized conditions, practices and relational aspects of what they felt restricted their wellbeing at the asylum centre.

The children's experience of their housing as "unhomely" was highly influenced by the strong temporal and spatial institutional regulations at the asylum centre. The regulated and controlled time-space structured the children's everyday routines through fixed mealtimes and restricted influence over food choice and other practices, directly linked to reduced autonomy (see Kohli et al., 2010; van der Horst, 2004). Moreover, the children's mobility was restricted, something that became especially evident in their critique of not being able to wander in the corridors and being denied access to play spaces. It has been argued that children's experiences of being denied spaces for play might create and reinforce experiences of exclusion in their everyday lives (Spicer, 2008).

The children also experienced, what I call, *lived fears* in relation to reported threats from some staff members and security guards at the asylum centre, who were described as "very aggressive" or "very scary" and who made the children feel unsafe and scared. Several of the children reported threats of repercussions for minor offenses. Some children mentioned that if they did not follow the rules of the institution, the "Reception" "will throw away our clothes" and "we will not be allowed to be here". Children were afraid of the "Police" or "Security" and "Reception" as they experienced threats of them and their family members being sent away or relocated to "the North" (northern Sweden), which had been described in some threats as "a very cold and dark place" or as an isolated "very far away place". The fact that some children did disappear at times with very short notice (when their families were not granted asylum) increased the children's lived fears. The reported threats did not merely concern the child him-/herself, but the entire family would be at risk. One child also reported fears of being separated from her mother.

These experiences undoubtedly reinforced the children's feelings of lacking a secure, safe and stable home place and strengthened their aspirations for a private and safe place to call home, which would allow them to escape the harsh treatment that they experienced in the semi-public spaces of the asylum centre (cf. hooks, 1991). Thus, this study reveals the importance of considering both relational and spatial aspects of children's politics if we wish to understand asylum-seeking children's experiences and articulations of house and home. The findings underscore the importance of understanding the politics involved in children's lived experiences in relation to asylum politics concerning housing arrangements for asylum-seekers. Therefore, I argue that

the children's contestations of their housing conditions and their longing and wishes for more home-like conditions were indeed political.

Moreover, I claim that the children's hidden critique revealed their implicit demands for better conditions based on their notions of rights, that is, what the children themselves meant they needed and *should* have access to. In this study, the children's articulations indirectly illuminate the restrictions of their right to important conditions for wellbeing – conditions that they are formally entitled to – including the right to adequate and safe housing where they can live with dignity (CESCR, 1991). I argue that their implicit demands for these conditions can be interpreted as rights claims. Hence, this study sheds light on children's lived rights, that is, how rights are experienced and how children's articulations may actually, implicitly or explicitly, identify how their rights are restricted or denied and demand their rights without necessarily referring to formal rights.

The findings show that the children implicitly identified how their right to adequate, safe and dignified housing was denied at the centre when they articulated demands for conditions that coincided with their rights, such as privacy by having a place of their own, some space for play and a home-like home, without fear of aggressive staff members carrying out what the children experienced as threats of deportation to worse housing in “the North” or even to their countries of origin. In this context, the children's lived fears of repercussions or at worst deportation made any demand for better housing conditions into high-stakes politics (see Marshall, 2016). This is shown in a quote from Aliyah: ‘I want to switch places, but I’m afraid they’ll send me to a worse place’. The children therefore chose to articulate their misgivings as hidden critique, behind the back of the representatives of the asylum centre (cf. Scott, 1992).

Study II “Do you know what we do when we want to play?”: Children's hidden politics of resistance and struggle for play in a Swedish asylum centre

There are power relations embedded in the provision of play and the ways in which children's play is regulated and controlled (Skelton, 2009). Children often have to struggle to be able to play in an adult-controlled time-space (Lester, 2013; Lester & Russell, 2014; Skelton, 2009). Children's experiences of access to independent use of spaces for play can indeed be useful for exploring their experience of place (Spicer, 2008). In turn, such explorations can reveal the politics involved in how children are socially and spatially positioned in institutional contexts (Holloway, 2014). At the same time, children may challenge and resist controlled and regulated time and space

through inventive ways of finding time and space for play (Lester, 2013; Lester & Russell, 2014; Punch, 2000). Thereby, children's play in contexts where their access to play is prevented may reveal children's politics (Lester, 2013; Marshall, 2016). In asylum centres, children's everyday lives are characterized by temporal and spatial boundaries that regulate their play, and children therefore engage in constant negotiations over these boundaries to create spaces for play (Ficthner & Trần, 2020; White, 2012; Seeberg et al., 2009; Scott & Trang Le, 2019).

This study primarily builds on walking tours *with* the children as guides. These walks took place between the school and the asylum centre as well as inside the centre's premises, where the children shared their experiences with me in various verbal and non-verbal ways. These *walking tours* resulted in many fruitful conversation. The walks inside the asylum centre premises in particular allowed the children to show and explain to me how the centre's regulations worked and these tours allowed me to be there to actually observe the children's *play tactics*. Moreover, these walking tours enabled me to understand the institutional regulations on a deeper level, through the children's embodied and affective reactions, which revealed how their lived fear was embodied.

The children would, for instance, freeze or become silent when, in the corridors, we passed some staff members from the "Reception", the "Police" or "Security" (using the children's own terms). The children constantly reminded me to follow the rules of the institution, to read the prohibition signs, not to sit on the radiators or the window frame and to hide my notebook if the "Boss" was on the premises. In addition to the children's articulated critique of being subjected to a regulation that prohibited their play, these walks gave me insights into the children's experiences of living at an asylum centre. These walking tours were performed with the children who wandered around in the corridors, despite the restrictive regulation and the prohibition on wandering around. As depicted in my fieldnotes, the children's struggle to find spaces for play in the shared premises, while trying to avoid the control and surveillance of the institution, emerged as a central theme. However, I also observed that most of the participating children escaped the shared premises, remaining all the time in their cramped family rooms and, thus, avoiding being subjected to the institutional regulations.

In the shared premises of the asylum centre, the children experienced strong institutional regulation, with surveillance and control. Their critique of the asylum centre, largely revolved around not having access to spaces and objects for play and being subjected to institutional regulations that prohibited play in the shared premises. The children said that the Reception had rescinded their prior possibilities to borrow games and toys, and they showed me that a previous playroom had been evacuated. The overcrowded family rooms (meant for the sleep, resting, study, work, tv, socializing of up to seven family members) did not offer sufficient space for children's play other than using

the TV or iPads, and the children described the time spent in their rooms as being in a state of boredom. The family room and a fenced football pitch outside were the children's only formal access to spaces for play. Moreover, the asylum centre was located in an industrial area, surrounded by a big parking lot and road that left little room for children's play.

This study shows how the children were prevented from having access to spaces for play, as a result of the institutional regulation through which control and surveillance of the children's use of space increased over time. The walking tour findings reveal that the children's use of space was controlled through prohibition signs that visually reminded the children of the regulations. These signs included signs with footballs or kick bikes crossed over in red as well as red warning triangles saying 'NO CHILD ALONE ZONE' over a picture of an adult holding a child by the hand.

The children experienced that the control of their use of space was reinforced by the security guards who patrolled the shared premises. Moreover, as one child noticed, and informed the others, the shared premises were monitored by the staff through surveillance cameras. The no-go regulations were moreover strengthened by the children's lived fears related to their experiences of threats of repercussions from the "Reception", "Security" or the "Boss" if the children were caught playing in the corridors or just wandering around without a parent or older sibling. Moreover, one of the children identified the Migration Agency as the main the actor with overall control over children's scope of action in asylum centres, including the regulations of the "Police", "Security" and "Reception" who controlled the children's space and infringed on their agency while living at the asylum centre.

Against this backdrop, this study has explored the children's *navigation* in the institutional regulation at the asylum centre, connecting to de Certeau's (1984) theorization on *strategies* and *tactics* with a view to understanding the politics involved in how the children's tactics were used to identify and handle the centre's control and surveillance. Children's tactics in relation to institutional regulation may indeed further our understanding of their everyday politics and help us illuminate *how* and *when* children's agency is political in specific contexts (Kallio, 2007, 2008; Kallio & Häkli, 2011b).

This study shows that the children's *tactical awareness* of the regulations was crucial for their development of tactics used to handle and navigate these regulations. It shows that the children used different forms of *hiding tactics* and *escape tactics* to avoid or bypass the institutional regulations and that the children, in different ways, withdrew to spaces where they were not subjected to control and surveillance. At the asylum centre, this meant that most of the children stayed in their family rooms during much of their free time. However, the children also successively tried to find spaces for play and independent use of space, outside the asylum centre. This became evident in their frequent

use of the spaces at school outside formal school hours, even though they did not have access to the after-school recreation centre.

This study specifically focuses on some of the children who, despite the strict institutional regulation, used several *play tactics* in the shared premises. The children's *innovation tactics* showed their use of momentarily available space and objects to create opportunities for play. However, the children were constantly aware of the regulations, and if caught playing, they developed other tactics to avoid repercussions. These included *hiding tactics*, hiding the playing act itself or the objects used for play, as the children knew that the representatives of the institutions could take these away. The children also used *caution tactics* to warn and remind each other of the regulations, here too to avoid repercussions. Moreover, the children engaged in *tricking tactics*, which included tricking the Boss by presenting what the institution would consider a valid reason for being in the corridors without their parent/s. Finally, the *alliance tactics* or *negotiation tactics* were used by one of the children who openly tried to build rapport and negotiate with one of the security guards to try to get permission to use the entrance space of the asylum centre to do a summersault.

This study concludes that the children's tactics, in this highly regulated time-space, reveal their *everyday politics* and, in particular, their *politics of play* (cf. Marshall, 2016) through their struggle for play, despite institutional regulations prohibiting them to play, both in the no-go zones of the corridors and the reception area or other halls and in the outdoor parking areas (which were only accessible in the company of adults). The children's ways of struggling for and defending play – despite the high-risk context of the local regulations and amid their lived fears of repercussions and the constant threat of deportation – render play in this context a high-stakes politics (see Marshall, 2016). In conclusion, I argue that this sheds light on children's lived rights, that is, how children experience and handle an institutional context where their right to play is highly restricted, and especially on how the children, despite this regulation, spatially claim their right to play.

Study III “They cry, cry, they want to go to school”: The micro-politics of asylum-Seeking children's articulated emotions and belonging in relation to the Swedish school

The politics of belonging refers to how political boundaries of belonging position people differently in overall power structures and relations in institutions and society at large (Yuval-Davis, 2006). There is thus politics involved in being positioned as an asylum-seeking child in a local school or in a new host society. These boundaries, in turn, affect people's sense of

belonging, that is, their personal and emotional experience of belonging. However, the politics of belonging also involves different political actors' contestations of and challenges to boundaries (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

This study is situated in a field of tension in the politics of asylum-seeking children's belonging and their sense of belonging in relation to school and Sweden on the whole. It explores, in particular, the emotional and affective dimensions of belonging amid experiences of exclusion. It also documents children's lived rights in relation to school, approached as an everyday setting where rights are lived in children's relations, that is, rights *in* education, but it also considers the right *to* education as regards access to school (Quennerstedt, 2015). In this study, the politics involved in asylum-seeking children's lived rights and sense of belonging is explored through the children's *articulated emotions* and more specifically how they engaged in affective and emotional responses to practices of exclusion in their everyday lives.

Emotions are understood here as relational and embedded in power relations, and articulations of emotions are understood as a response to experiences, that is, they are based on how people are affected by that experience (Ahmed, 2014). Emotions thus involve affects, and to be happy (or sad or angry) is to be affected by something (Ahmed, 2010a) that, in turn, can evoke action. Emotions, Ahmed argues, indicate how we feel about our life situation and the naming of emotions reveals our attitudes and feelings about our experiences (Ahmed, 2010b). Ahmed (2010a) argues that the gap between our expectations (ascribed affective values) concerning an object (in this case the children's school) and our experiences often results in feelings of disappointment. Negative emotions can thus be evoked by experiences of denied expected conditions. However, manifestations of emotions, or emotional managements, may differ depending on the child's social position in a specific context (see, e.g., Wahlström Smith, 2018). Children's emotions can also reveal the politics involved in belonging as they can reveal how children are affected by exclusion (Zembylas, 2011).

In this study, children's articulated emotions have been used to further the theorization of children's political agency (Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Kallio & Häkli, 2011b; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012; Skelton, 2010). The ethnographic data for the present study emerged through informal conversations with the children, and the data the children produced in participatory methods were complemented with fieldnotes from observations. The data primarily concern the children's experiences of school as shown in their *articulated emotions* – that is, their verbalized emotions, such as fear, sadness, joy – or their affective reactions, revealed through bodily postures, gestures, momentarily freezing, facial expressions and tone of voice. Their articulations responded to their experience of practices of exclusion, non-access to places or relational misrecognition and were therefore theoretically connected to the concept of belonging in their lived experiences.

This study also documents how the children responded positively, with love and happiness, or negatively, with anger, fear or sadness, depending on how practices and relations affected their sense of belonging in school and in Sweden in general. It also shows that the children had high expectations regarding school and how it would provide a sense of belonging. Children, for instance, described the waiting time spent at the asylum centre before starting school as “sad” and “lonely”, and while waiting some children would even “cry, cry”, while most of the children ascribed positive emotions such as “joy”, “love” and “happiness” to finally starting school and being at school. However, their sense of belonging should also be understood in relation to their situated experiences of formal, institutional and relational boundaries of belonging as well as imposed subject positions and Othering that rendered their sense of belonging uncertain.

The formal boundaries included a prolonged waiting time to start school and interruptions in the children’s access to the local school. The institutional boundaries at school involved being placed in separate classes, without any formal links to their future “regular” classes, and having to learn the language to be accepted as a member of the “Swedish” school context. The relational boundaries within the school, in turn, concerned how they were recurrently both spatially and relationally positioned and treated as asylum-seekers, as the Others. Regarding the school context, it is also important to emphasize how asylum-seeking children’s belonging was affected by the formal boundaries of belonging in the society at large. After receiving a residence permit, Amina’s articulated emotion of happiness showed how crucial a residence permit was and what it meant in terms of recognition of her formal belonging. The emotional meaning of this formal belonging, though, is perhaps shown even more clearly in how she expressed no longer being “sad” or “angry” or even “afraid”, revealing her previous fear of deportation. However, the children’s entanglement in asylum politics also meant that being granted a residence permit meant that they faced a formal boundary within the asylum reception system, including temporary housing, which again interrupted their access to school. The children’s articulated emotions revealed how they were moved by their situated experiences and how these experiences affected their sense of belonging in relation to school. The politics of belonging is thus shown through the children’s articulated emotions and affective responses to practices and relations that exclude them.

This article concludes that the micro-politics of children’s articulated emotions show how they recurrently contested boundaries that restricted their sense of belonging. Moreover, their articulations showed how they were affected when their belonging was denied or restricted. The participating children’s micro-political contestations can be seen as an underlying critique of the local asylum politics.

In my analyses, *emotions* are understood in terms of how they are articulated through the naming of feelings, such as “happiness”, “sadness”,

“anger” and “fear”. I argue that *articulated emotions* tell us something about how children are emotionally affected by experiences of exclusion and non-belonging, but they also reveal that the children’s affective responses constitute resistance to being positioned as “excludable” or “deportable”.

I argue that their high expectations regarding school as well as their contestations of conditions that denied them a sense of belonging were evoked as a response to the asylum politics that permeated their everyday lives. These articulated emotions also shed light on children’s lived rights in relation to school, that is, how children are emotionally affected when their right to access to school is restricted or denied and how they are affected when they are relationally and spatially excluded from or within the school.

Analysing children’s everyday politics and lived rights in the three studies

In my work on children’s everyday politics, I have analysed how the children responded to particular issues in their everyday lives both through their *tactics* and their *articulations*. In this way, my analysis involved the children’s *articulated standpoints*, that is, their verbal representations of their situated experiences. I have also explored children’s *articulated emotions*, both through their verbal representations and through their embodied expressions, revealing their emotional and affective experiences. On another level of interpretation, the children’s *navigation* in their everyday spaces is seen to reflect the politics that surround them as children and as asylum-seekers.

In my analyses of the children’s ways of navigating in their everyday spaces. I argue that the children identified some of the spatial and relational conditions in their lives. For instance, the children identified, implicitly or explicitly, the regulations that restricted, or even prohibited, play at the asylum centre as well as some of the practices of exclusion that affected their sense of belonging in school and in Sweden on the whole. Through their ways of navigating in their everyday spaces, the children also identified some of the power relations in which they were enmeshed and the subject positions that were imposed on them both as children *and* as asylum-seekers. Thereby, the children articulated some of the spatial and relational politics embedded in their everyday spaces (e.g., Study I). The children’s mappings deepened my insights into their attachments to places in their everyday lives and to their emotional and lived experiences of places and objects. The walking tours and my participation in the children’s play also gave me the opportunity to observe the children’s play tactics. The children’s play tactics also revealed the spatial dimension of their politics of play (see, Study II). The walking tours with the children inside the asylum centre enabled me to observe, firsthand, their affective and embodied reactions in encounters with adults who represented

the asylum centre and upheld the politics of the asylum system. Their affective reactions also revealed how they were emotionally affected by restraining conditions and exclusionary practices (see Study II, III).

I argue that the children's everyday politics also indirectly reveal the spatial and relational dimension of their *lived rights*. The children's articulations revealed to me what conditions they expected to have access to as children, as well as the discrepancies between their expectations and their actual conditions. These discrepancies provoked some of their critical standpoints, which identified conditions that did not coincide with their own notions of their rights or of their formal rights (see, e.g., Study I). The children's articulated emotions helped me understand the children's feelings in relation to their conditions, also revealing how they were emotionally affected when their notions of rights were restrained or denied in their lived worlds (see Study III). In turn, their tactics revealed how they in some ways tried to close the gap between their expectations and their actual conditions. In this thesis, the children's attempts to close this gap have been analysed as rights claims in their lived form, and therefore their play tactics have been interpreted as their spatial claims on their right to play (see Study II).

In sum, the fieldwork methods revealed some of the relational, spatial and emotional politics in the children's everyday lives. When combined with observations of the children's ways of navigating in their everyday spaces (asylum centre and school), these methods underpinned my understandings of the children's orientation to relational, institutional and societal power relations, that is, their ways of navigating within and contesting the local enactment of the asylum politics of the asylum reception, thereby enabling me to document and analyse their lived rights. My view of asylum-seeking children as (political) actors and rights subjects, then, must be understood in relation to the conditions that affect their scope of action.

9 Concluding discussion

This thesis offers a unique ethnography of the everyday lives of young children placed in the Swedish asylum reception system with their families. It started out as fieldwork in two settings, the school and the Hotel (the asylum centre), that is, the children's main everyday places, but expanded into a multisite exploration when the children also invited me into a third type of setting, their play arenas, settings that could be located on the way from school or in hidden corridors of the Hotel, beyond the no-go areas of their housing or the after-school centre. It contributes to work on asylum-seeking children's perspectives through insights gained by closely following the children in these diverse settings, by playing, walking and talking *with* the children and by employing other participatory methods in the field. In this thesis, children's perspectives are understood through both children's verbal actions, by listening to what children say verbally, and what they conveyed through their embodied expressions, such as their silences, their body language, tone of voice and facial expressions. This thesis contributes to children's geographies through its focus on asylum-seeking children's everyday practices and ways of *navigating* in the school and the asylum centre. It shows asylum-seeking children's perspectives through their ways of commenting on and orienting towards events, objects, places and people in their everyday lives. In particular, it offers insights into asylum-seeking children's lived experiences in their actual housing and school, but also demonstrates the importance of considering their expectations regarding the spatial and relational dimensions of home and school to efforts to gain a deeper understanding of their lived worlds. My work builds on what individual asylum-seeking children shared with and, as can be seen in my three studies, they voiced their concerns and showed their agency in somewhat different ways, but at the same time they shared many experiences of what it meant to be a child placed in the Swedish asylum reception system with their families in 2015 and 2016. Below, I will discuss some of my research contributions in terms of four overarching themes, and then I will briefly comment on how these themes can be discussed in relation to the children's lived rights.

Children's everyday politics in a high-stakes context

Through its focus on everyday politics, this thesis connects, in particular, to *children's political geographies* in a specific asylum context. It constitutes an empirical contribution to asylum-seeking children's hidden politics and James Scott's (1992) theorization on the hidden resistance of marginalized groups. Thereby, it contributes to an understanding not only of children's engagement in everyday politics from their marginal social positions (Kallio & Häkli, 2010; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012), but also of the everyday politics of asylum-seekers (Kallio et al., 2020). More importantly, it contributes to a deepened understanding of the political agency of asylum-seeking children who are dually marginalized. In this thesis, the political agency of the participating children is therefore discussed in relation to not only their social position as children, but also to their legal position as asylum-seekers, making the political issues of deportation highly relevant to their belonging and rights (see Bhabha, 2009; Seeberg, 2016).

In a broader perspective, my discussion concerns asylum-seeking children's political agency in relation to the asylum politics that has apparently trickled down into the children's everyday lives and that was at times explicitly identified by the children, as here, by Amina:

"If someone lives at [an asylum centre] (...) it is the Reception and the Migration Agency who decide and it is not, I mean, they [the children and their parents] who decide where they should live and what they should do and such."

This thesis connects to previous studies that have explicitly discussed how asylum politics permeate the lives of children living in asylum centres (e.g., Fichtner & Trần, 2020; Seeberg et al., 2009; Vitus, 2010; 2011; White, 2012). I argue that the local enactment of this asylum politics permeated the spatial politics at the asylum centre, including the control and surveillance of the children's and their families' semi-public housing. In this housing, the threat of being reported to the Migration Agency for any rule transgressions was very real and highly visible through notes posted on the bulletin board in the reception area. In addition, the Migration Agency installed a local office at the asylum centre, and authoritative representatives of asylum politics were therefore highly visible in the children's housing (cf. van der Horst, 2004).

Although I never talked to the representatives at the asylum centre to hear their explanation for their actions, many of the children experienced the asylum centre regulation as a local enactment of an asylum politics aimed at controlling them through patrolling security guards Hamid, for instance, recounted: "the Reception engages the police if a child plays in the corridors". Some of the children also spontaneously reported that some staff and security

guards were aggressive and that they threatened the children with relocation to “the North” (northern Sweden) for only minor transgressions (see Study I).

In this thesis, I have deliberately tried to primarily reconstruct the children’s perspectives and given my commitment to understanding the children’s lived worlds, without including the perspectives of the adults, it is possible that guards and others at times have at times been represented in an overly simplistic way. Nonetheless, the children’s lived experiences of threats must be taken seriously, and their consequent lived fears of these threats were very real for the children and affected them deeply.

Within such an asylum context, the children’s politics was hidden or disguised, and it should be noted that the children’s politics was not a confrontational politics, neither at school nor in the presence of the adult representatives at the asylum centre. But I argue that the children’s critique of their conditions and their implicit demands for better housing conditions or spaces for play were highly political in this high-stakes context. The children’s engagement in politics from their highly uncertain position, and amid their lived fear of threats of relocation or deportation, could thus be seen to involve *high-stakes politics* (cf. Marshall, 2016).

In my work, I have explored how asylum-seeking children’s political agency was enacted in relation to the asylum politics that permeated the local spatial and relational politics of both the school and the asylum centre. I have thus discussed a number of ways in which asylum-seeking children’s agency can be understood as political, offering an empirical contribution both to the politics of children’s articulations (Mitchell & Elwood, 2012) and to the politics of children’s practices (Kallio & Häkli, 2011b) as well as the political aspects of children’s emotions (Zembylas, 2007; 2011; 2015). My three studies can be read as three complementary contributions that in different ways show *how* and *when* asylum-seeking children’s agency can be understood as political.

Politics of home and belonging

This thesis discusses and extends prior work on the politics of home and belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005) in the asylum context. In my work, I have explored asylum-seeking children’s own notions of home and their experiences of living in an “unhomely” asylum housing facility, which, to a great extent, was experienced as unwelcoming and unsafe housing that lacked both the spatial and social dimensions of home. When I used the term “home” when referring to the asylum centre in a conversation with Amel, she instantly protested: “You said ‘home’, but we don’t have a house!” In this context, I have interpreted the children’s articulations as aspirations for a house, something that was necessary to achieving an idealized

house-as-home. Several of the children's aspirations for a future home place were linked to their longing for belonging in a new homeland, when there was in several cases no house left in their previous homeland.

On another note, Amel was also one of the children who claimed the family room as a space for potential home-making: "the room is so good so I can sleep in it, I can eat in it, I can play in it". In the cramped room, however, the children had little space for play, especially with their friends, and therefore the family room solely or primarily allowed solitary play, such as watching TV or using iPads, which was described as boring. Thus, for many of the children, the longing for play particularly concerned their longing for playing with friends.

In my work, I also bring forward the children's articulated standpoints as a hidden contestation of their housing conditions at the asylum centre (Study I). This thesis thus contributes to research on children's notions of home in the asylum context (Archambault, 2012; McDonell, 2021; Spicer, 2008). It also makes an empirical contribution to previous discussions on the politics of home involved in asylum-seekers' exclusion from having a home place (Boggani, 2017; Fox & O'Mahoney, 2010). It is with regard to asylum-seeking children's political exclusion from having a home place that I argue that the children's articulated critique and implicit demands for better housing conditions are political.

My work can be read as an empirical contribution to asylum-seeking children's belonging both in terms of their possibilities of feeling at home in a home place *and* the abstract feeling of being safe at home in a new homeland (Ahmed, 1999; Boccagni, 2017; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). The children's aspirations for a home place and their claims for spaces for play as well as their expectations concerning school can be read as their aspirations for creating spaces of belonging (Study I, II and III) for themselves and their families. This thesis thus contributes to work on asylum-seeking children's own claims for belonging through their space-making in the form of establishing friendships as well as engaging in play in places like asylum centres (Fichtner & Trần, 2020; White, 2012).

The empirical findings also show that, in relation to their housing situation, the children had high expectations for their school, which was imagined as a place for belonging, both regarding meeting and playing *with* friends (some children explicitly wished to meet "Swedish" friends) in a more welcoming environment than the asylum centre and regarding their future belonging in Sweden by acquiring the Swedish language and getting an education in general. The importance of school was mainly revealed in the children's articulated emotions of "loneliness" and "sadness" when talking about waiting for school and of "happiness" and "love" when talking about school. This finding, thus, confirms that the school is an important social space for young asylum-seeking children (e.g., Candappa, 2000; 2001; Candappa & Ignibie, 2003; Ottosson et al., 2017; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013; Spicer, 2008).

The discussion on social space also relates to prior discussions on how the politics of belonging affects asylum-seeking children's access *to* and experiences *in* school (Pinson & Arnot, 2007, 2010). I have discussed the children's feelings of non-belonging in school in relation to how their emotions of "sadness" or "anger" revealed their disappointments and unmet expectations caused by experiences of exclusion in school (Study III). This thesis thus provides an empirical understanding of the politics involved in the emotional and affective dimension of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006). It also extends previous work on how children's emotions reveal how they are affected by experiences of exclusion in school (Zembylas, 2011). In particular, it discusses how the children were relationally and spatially positioned as Others – as not really belonging (cf. Candappa, 2016; Devine, 2009; 2013). It shows that the children were spatially separated from both the "Swedish" classes (to use the children's terms) and the overall school community – during school hours, breaks and after-school activities – and that they were also relationally categorized as asylum-seekers when they were measured using the norms of "Swedishness". Enya experienced this kind of Othering based on linguistic norms of "Swedishness" when she first met her classmates in a regular class and retold her experience with an angry tone of voice:

"It was so bad. When I came there, they didn't think I could speak Swedish (...) because when I came in they said 'Oh no she doesn't know Swedish' (...) they didn't think I could speak Swedish but I COULD! But then, some children started being mean to me every day."

In sum, the children's lives were marked by different types of longing: longing for a place of their own (a bed, a room, a house), longing to start school, longing to start a "Swedish" class, longing for a residence permit and longing to be relationally recognized as persons who belong. These longings involved different ways of understanding asylum-seeking children's belonging in novel ways in relation to their highly uncertain belonging while living in temporary housing and facing threats of relocation from and ruptures from local attachments (e.g., friends, teachers, school) as well as their prevailing fear of deportation.

Politicized emotions

My work in many ways contributes to *children's emotional geographies*, as it discusses affective and emotional aspects of belonging revealed through asylum-seeking children's articulated emotions. An important aspect of children's emotions is what I have called children's *lived fears*, that is, their embodied fears both in relation to disciplinary threats of repercussions from

adult professionals in their everyday spaces, particularly their fear of being relocated to worse housing in the North of Sweden, and in relation to their fear of the looming threat of deportation. In many ways, the children's feelings of fear affected their everyday lives as well as their scope of action. In some ways, the children's lived fear also involved threats in public spaces outside the asylum centre, as some children mentioned being afraid of kidnappings. The fact that the asylum centre was exposed to racist attacks inevitably contributed to a hostile environment. This thesis thus extends previous work on how children's fear delineates certain places of exclusion (Spicer, 2008; Zembylas, 2011); it also connects to work highlighting how deportability (de Genova, 2002) may create conditions of fear among children threatened by deportation (Lind, 2020; Lundberg & Spång, 2016; Wahlström Smith, 2018). For instance, this was shown in the way that Amina talked about *not* being afraid anymore after receiving a residence permit.

“So now I'm not angry or sad about anything. Even if something happens like really...like...I mean...I'm really happy now so therefore I'm not afraid anymore.”

Amina's novel formal position of belonging through a residence permit changed her ways of coping with her situation. For instance, shortly after receiving her residence permit, she confidently approached one of the security guards at the asylum centre to negotiate with him permission to express her happiness by doing a summersault in the reception area. In her narration above, she reveals that she has been angry and sad about her situation, but after she received the residence permit, she told me that she was no longer sad about living at the asylum centre. When Amina knew that she would soon move out, and when the waiting no longer seemed endless, she could cope with her situation, suggesting how uncertainty had affected her. These findings thus extend prior work on temporalities affect children and adults in asylum contexts (e.g., Brekke, 2010; Vitus, 2010; Griffiths, 2014). I argue that the children's experience of threats and their consequent lived fear are pivotal for understanding how asylum-seeking children, in their everyday lives, are affected by the conditions that render them vulnerable amid local and national enactment of asylum politics.

My work shows that the children's articulated emotions – as well as their affective reactions – reveal how they were affected emotionally by their experiences in this asylum context. In my view, asylum-seeking children's affective reactions, and emotional responses to their experiences, can also be understood as contestations. For instance, when Mohamed said: “I am sad. I do not accept this”, he not only revealed how his experience of exclusion was affecting him emotionally, but he also contested being treated in this way. Children's emotional responses can thus be read as implicit contestations of

the positions that are available to them and that render them “excludable”, “deportable” or even “rightless”.

The empirical contribution of this thesis thus extends prior work on how emotions arise in power relations, but also how emotions might challenge these power relations (Ahmed, 2014; Lorde, 1984), and more importantly, how children’s emotions are politicized and entangled in large-scale migration politics (Zembylas, 2007; 2011; 2012). In my view, the discrepancy between the children’s expectations and their actual lived conditions affected them strongly, but I also argue that the children’s affective reactions to these discrepancies at times evoked their political agency. Children’s affects and emotions can thus be understood as an integral part of their political agency, and my work therefore constitutes an empirical contribution to, as well as an extension of, prior theorizations on children’s everyday politics.

Politics of play

This thesis highlights children’s *politics of play* through its analyses of the *tactics* that some of the children used for claiming spaces for play, despite the asylum centre’s highly regulated time-space, one that denied them access to play. It thus connects to prior research on children’s play in asylum centres (Fichtner & Trần, 2020; Seeberg et al., 2009; Scott & Trang Le, 2019). In my work, however, I have primarily analysed play as an aspect of children’s everyday politics. To understand children’s play as political, it is pivotal to understand the context in which the playing takes place and what is at stake in making demands for play (cf. Marshall, 2016). Children’s play should be seen as political in relation to the conditions that denied them play in this particular asylum context. In my work, these conditions for play are mainly understood through what was revealed to me in the children’s critical articulations concerning the relational and spatial politics that regulated their time-space (e.g., prohibitions, patrolling security guards, surveillance cameras, aggressive treatment, threats of relocation). In addition to the children’s articulated critique, I have analysed their embodied emotional experience (e.g., freezing, lowering voices, hiding) as responses to these regulations. My combined analysis of the power relations at play in this context and what the children articulated about their experiences at this asylum-centre contributed to my understanding of children’s *lived fears* as an embodied fear and their play despite this fear adds a political dimension to play.

Despite the regulations and the children’s fear of repercussions, the children deployed what I have called *play tactics* to gain access to play spaces, while staying out of the visual fields of the representatives of the asylum centre through innovation, caution, and hiding tactics as well as avoiding repercussions through tricking, negotiation, or alliance tactics. Ahmed, in

particular, showed me how he navigated in the asylum centre to claim spaces for play: “We cannot play, but on floor 6 and 7, the police will not come”.

My work, thus, extends prior work on de Certeau’s (1984) concept of tactics and, in particular, contemporary explorations of children’s tactics as everyday politics (e.g., Kallio, 2007, 2008; Kallio & Häkli, 2011b). It can be noted that the children’s tactics constituted a way of hiding their play, and their politics of play was thus at large a disguised or hidden politics. The high-stakes context of their situation at the asylum centre meant that most of the children engaged in escape tactics to avoid institutional control and surveillance, mainly by staying at their family rooms, but also by finding and claiming other spaces that enabled them to stay away from the asylum centre. Most of the children thus claimed spaces at the school as spaces for play, but, again, the children were denied play at the school’s no-go zones as the children were denied access to the after-school recreation centre.

Children’s lived rights

In the introduction, this thesis was presented against the historical background of the so-called “refugee crisis” of 2015-2016, which inevitably affected the conditions for asylum-seeking children’s rights. In line with Seeberg and her colleagues (2009) I argue that asylum politics create childhood conditions that clash with a child rights perspective. When combining the findings, they should be contextualized in relation to this political context for my ethnographic exploration of what I have called children’s *lived rights*. I understand children’s lived rights as children’s experiences of how their rights are realized or denied in their everyday lives and how rights feel when children are emotionally affected by these conditions. My work also entails how lived rights are revealed when children address personal matters of importance in relation to the power relations that they are entangled in. It also concerns how children’s notions of rights can be understood through their ways of commenting on or orienting towards events, objects, places and people in their everyday lives. Moreover, my work involves an exploration of how children may claim their rights relationally and spatially using their everyday political agency. It is thus an approach to children’s rights that takes into consideration how rights may be enacted relationally and spatially through children’s political agency in their everyday lives. In my understanding children’s lived rights necessarily entails a multi-layered analysis of power relations.

I have explored children’s lived rights in asylum contexts by carrying out an ethnographic exploration of asylum-seeking children’s everyday politics. My ambition has been to try to understand how the children experienced that their rights were denied or fulfilled in their lived realities, but also how they handled these conditions. I argue that the children’s political actions

responded to the discrepancies between their expectations, which rested to some extent on their own notions of rights, and the actual conditions for rights in their everyday spaces. Indeed, the children's social position as children as well as their legal position as asylum-seekers made it difficult for them to position themselves as rights subjects or to articulate their rights claims in open confrontation with the adult representatives of the institutions that regulated their everyday lives. It is from a dually marginalized position that their hidden critique and subtle demands for better conditions have been analysed as implicit rights claims. More importantly, it is from this position that their critical articulations must be understood in relation to how what I have called their lived fears weakened their position as rights subjects, and how this made them afraid to openly demand better conditions. Aliyah, for instance, in her stated desire for better housing, simultaneously expressed her fear that any demands for better conditions would instead make her situation even worse: "I want to switch places, but I'm afraid they will send me to a worse place".

My work extends prior research on how asylum-seeking children, in deportability, may not be in a position to claim their rights (Lind 2020; Lundberg & Spång, 2016). Moreover, these findings connect to Bhabha's (2009) discussion on how Arendt's children's possibilities to make rights claims are hindered by their fear of deportation or other threats from migration authorities. Despite their lived fears, I argue that the children nonetheless showed political agency when revealing how they implicitly strived to be recognized as rights subjects. The children's articulations revealed their expectations for conditions they deemed necessary for their wellbeing, while contesting conditions that impeded their wellbeing. My interpretation is that the children's articulated critique of their conditions implicitly identified how their rights were denied and that their articulated demands for better conditions, in turn, can be interpreted as subtle rights claims in their lived form. I thus understand and analyse children's rights claims as relational and spatial from a marginal position in everydayness.

I moreover argue that the children's affective reactions and articulated emotions reveal how they were affected when their rights were restricted or denied. I have thus analysed how children's lived rights *feel* and how the children were emotionally affected by relations and practices that they did not find acceptable and that made them feel disappointed or even sad, angry or afraid. In one respect, I wish to rephrase Sara Ahmed (2010b, p. 216) and argue that feelings might show how *rights* get under our skin.

At times, the children verbally criticized the relational conditions that denied them dignified and respectful treatment and that, thereby, denied them their personhood in adult-child relations. When Mohamed explicitly criticized the fact that his expectations had not been met in terms of the realization of his rights, he also revealed that personhood is denied when asylum-seeking

children are talked about as numbers – that is, being “too many” – instead of as persons:

“I have been here one year and, so far, I’ve not gotten the rights I should have. The answer is always that we are too many. I thought I would have more rights in a land of freedom.”

In addition to the children’s contestations of relational and spatial conditions that denied them rights, some of the children also tried to close the gap between their expectations and their actual conditions using what I have analysed as a spatial claim to their right to play.

In relation to their resistance to the spatial regulations and local politics at the asylum centre children’s play tactics might also be analysed as a struggle for participation (cf. Lester, 2013; Scott & Trang Le, 2019) and a subtle struggle for personhood from an asylum-seeker position (cf. Kallio et al., 2020). But the asylum centre responded to their play with increased regulations rather than meeting their demands for play spaces.

In sum, I argue that the children implicitly identified and contested the relations and practices that constrained their rights and that this finding extends prior work on how asylum-seeking children’s right to school and adequate housing, including their right to play, is infringed (Candappa, 2001; Fanning & Veale, 2004; Seeberg et al., 2009). The children’s articulations concerned conditions that impinged on their formal human rights, including their right to adequate housing, their right to play and their right to education. But children’s notions of rights may indeed not always coincide with their formal rights, and children’s own claims may also go beyond their formal rights. In conclusion, if young children’s rights in their lived forms are to be realized, their voices and agency should be taken seriously. In this thesis, the children’s aspirations did not merely concern having a roof over their heads and adequate housing, but rather a right to have a home and to be able to feel safe at home, that is, a right to belong in Sweden.

Sammanfattning på svenska

Inledning

Den så kallade ”flyktingkrisen” – under hösten 2015 och våren 2016 – kännetecknades i Sverige snarare av en ”solidaritetskris” i form av stärkt migrationskontroll och åtstramade asylpolicys samt ett successivt övergivande av ett människorättsperspektiv (Elsrud et al., 2021; Lundberg, 2018; Schierup et al., 2017) där många asylsökande barn förnekades vissa mänskliga rättigheter (Lundberg, 2018). Detta påverkade livsvillkoren för de barn som anlände i Sverige under denna period (Elsrud et al., 2021). Under 2015 kom ungefär 70 000 barn till Sverige och omkring hälften av dem, omkring 35 000 (de flesta av dem 0–12 år), anlände med sina familjer (Migrationsverket, 2016). Under denna period placerades många barnfamiljer i asylboenden i form av större kollektiva och institutionella boendeformer. Under just denna period har jag inom ramen för ett etnografiskt fältarbete haft en unik tillgång till ett av Sveriges största asylboenden under 2015–2016 för att under ett år följa ett antal barn som bodde där med sina familjer.

Mitt forskningsintresse relaterar på flera sätt till hur asylsökande barn inom nationalstaten positioneras som *out of place* (Malkki, 1995) inom spänningsfältet mellan migrationskontroll och barns rättigheter (Bhabha, 2009; 2019). Denna avhandling förhåller sig även till hur asylsökande barns rättigheter kan förstås i förhållande till den tillhörighetspolitik (*politics of belonging*) (Yuval-Davis, 2006) som påverkar asylsökande barns möjlighet att känna tillhörighet (*belonging*), både i förhållande till hur de positioners relationellt och i förhållande till en asylkontext som präglas av potentiell utvisning (de Genova, 2002; de Genova & Peutz, 2010). Ett övergripande intresse i denna avhandling är att utifrån asylsökande barns erfarenheter och perspektiv undersöka hur asylpolitik påverkar deras vardagsliv och hur detta speglar deras rättigheter och villkor men framförallt undersöker den hur barnen själva navigerar i denna politik.

Asylsökande barns erfarenheter av och perspektiv på de förhållanden som påverkar deras vardagsliv har i stor utsträckning förbisetts i både barndomsstudier och migrationsstudier (Bak & von Brömssen, 2013; Seeberg & Goździak, 2016). Den befintliga forskningen om barn i asylkontexter har dessutom tenderat att fokusera på ensamkommande ungdomar. I denna

avhandling undersöker jag istället yngre asylsökande barns erfarenheter och perspektiv när de befinner sig i det svenska mottagningssystemet med sina familjer.

Avhandlingens syfte och studier

Denna avhandling undersöker asylsökande barns vardagsliv genom ett årslångt etnografiskt fältarbete (hösten 2015–hösten 2016) med 18 yngre barn (6–12 år) i deras skola och på det asylboende där de bodde. Etnografi har valts som metod för att studera hur asylsökande barn påverkas av den asylpolitik som omgärdar dem men framförallt för att förstå hur barnen själva navigerar inom de asylpolitiska reglingar som de möter på lokal nivå. Mina analyser spänner över tre studier (Studie I, II och III; publicerade i internationella tidskrifter med inriktning mot barndomssociologi och barndomsgeografi). De belyser olika aspekter av barnens vardag och tillsammans ger de en bredare förståelse för asylsökande barns levda världar.

Avhandlingen bygger på ett etnografiskt utforskande *med* asylsökande barn fokuserat på barnens levda erfarenheter och vardagspraktiker. I denna avhandling utforskas tre empiriska arenor – studier som täcker tre arenor som barnen själva har identifierat som viktiga – deras boende-, lek- och skolarenor. Mer specifikt handlar det om barnens boendesituation på ett asylboende (studie I) deras skola (studie III) och deras lekarenor (studie II). Ett annat syfte är att genom etnografisk metodologi och deltagande metoder dokumentera och analysera vad barn säger och gör när de förhåller sig till frågor som är viktiga för dem själva för att förstå deras vardagliga aktörskap som politisk och för att också kunna bidra till en diskussion kring vad jag har valt att kalla barns *levda rättigheter* i en asylkontext. Denna avhandling har vägletts av följande forskningsfrågor:

På vilka sätt uppvisar asylsökande barn agens i sina vardagsliv och hur och när kan den förstås som politisk?

Hur uttrycker asylsökande barn sina föreställningar om *hem* och *tillhörighet* (*belonging*)? (Studie I).

Hur kan asylsökande barns vardagsliv förstås genom deras sätt att *navigera* i deras lekarenor? (Studie II)

På vilka sätt kan asylsökande barns *känslouttryck* bidra till insikter om deras erfarenheter i förhållande till skolan? (Studie III)

Teoretisk bakgrund

En underliggande teoretisk fråga i denna avhandling handlar om barns *politik* i deras vardagsliv (om barn och *politisk agens*, se Kallio, 2009; Kallio & Häkli, 2011b; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012). Denna avhandling förstår detta som politik i en bredare mening för att studera barn som potentiella politiska aktörer i sina vardagsliv (Häkli & Kallio, 2018; Kallio & Häkli, 2011b). Detta innebär ett empiriskt utforskande av *hur* och *när* något kan förstås som politiskt i en given situation istället för att på förhand definiera vad politik är (Häkli & Kallio, 2018).

Min avhandling förhåller sig till barn som aktörer inom ramen för ett interdisciplinärt förhållningssätt till barns rättigheter som bygger på barndomsstudier och barndomsgeografi (Aitken, 2015; Kallio & Mills, 2016; Mayall, 2000; 2015). Detta perspektiv tar hänsyn både till det relationella och det spatiala och temporala för att förstå olika aspekter av hur barns rättigheter är levda i vardagslivet.

Inspirerad av ett sådant angreppssätt till vardagslivets politik diskuterar och utvecklar jag i denna avhandling vad jag har kallat barns *levda rättigheter* och hur jag har gått tillväga när jag tagit barns levda erfarenheter av hur deras rättigheter begränsas eller uppfylls som startpunkt för ett utforskande av rättigheter som levda i barns vardagsliv. Det är ett perspektiv som tar i åtanke hur barn genom vardagspolitiska handlingar kan kritisera villkor som begränsar deras rättigheter samt göra anspråk på sina rättigheter i sin vardag. Det innebär även ett perspektiv på hur barns rättigheter kan förstås genom barns artikulerade känslor och affektiva reaktioner och hur de blir känslomässigt påverkade när deras (föreställningar om) rättigheter förverkligas eller förnekas. Asylsökande barns vardagliga agerande i boende- och skolkontexter har sällan studerats och min ambition är därför att bidra med en etnografisk studie av hur och när deras vardagliga agens i en asylkontext kan tolkas som politisk och hur detta kan återspegla deras levda rättigheter.

Etnografi med asylsökande barn

Forskningsprojektet har godkänts av Karolinska Institutets Etikråd (2015/1402–31/5) och har utförts i linje med etablerade forskningsetiska riktlinjer vad gäller forskning med barn. Men mitt förhållningssätt till etik är att det handlar om en ständigt pågående reflexiv process från inledande forskningsfrågor till val av forskningsmetoder och presentation av data. Ett sådant etiskt förhållningssätt innebär också en pågående relationell process under fältarbetet (Christensen & Prout, 2002). Denna studie är framförallt etiskt inriktad genom ett starkt engagemang i de deltagande barnen och deras perspektiv. Etiska reflektioner har därför genomströmat vuxen-barn relationen

under hela fältarbetets gång. Etisk forskning med barn innebär, menar jag, att vara lyhörd för *när, var, hur och med vem* de vill dela sina erfarenheter vilket är starkt kopplat till att läsa in och respektera barns integritet både när det uttrycks genom verbalt och på mer kroppsliga sätt, som barns sätt att navigera, gömma sig, stanna upp.

Mitt etnografiska fältarbete har inneburit deltagande forskning *med* barn i kombination med ett antal *deltagarorienterade* metoder (*participatory methods*; Christensen & James, 2000; Punch, 2002b). I synnerhet har jag utforskat barns perspektiv genom deras sätt att *navigera* i vardagsmiljöer (se också, Mitchell & Elwood, 2012; Wood, 2012), det vill säga hur barn orienterar sig mot olika personer, platser och händelser och vad de gör och säger men även hur de verbaliserar sina erfarenheter. Barns navigering i sina vardagsmiljöer kan göra det möjligt för dem att utveckla kritiska perspektiv som skiljer sig från de vuxnas i samma miljöer (Wood, 2012). Mitt deltagande i barnens navigering i deras vardagsmiljöer möjliggjorde för mig att observera deras artikulerade svar på olika erfarenheter men också att lyssna på deras icke-verbala, förkroppsligade och emotionella sätt att uttrycka sig på. Att leka *med* barnen visade sig vara ett av de viktigaste sätten att förstå barnens levda värld. Genom att delta i barnens lek kunde jag tolka och förstå deras agens och röst genom deras affektiva uttryck som att tystna, stelna, stanna upp, ändra tonläge, ansiktsuttryck eller kroppslig hållning (för ett fokus på barns förkroppsligade sätt att uttrycka sig, se också Kallio, 2007; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989). Att ta barns tystnad på allvar och inte bara deras verbaliseringar kan bidra till förståelsen för deras röster (Spyrou, 2016), och särskilt i asylkontexter (Kohli, 2006). Barns perspektiv förstås härmed inte bara genom barns "röster" (*voices*) utan även genom deras förkroppsligade och emotionella sätt att uttrycka sina erfarenheter och perspektiv. Detta gjorde det viktigt för mig att vara där med barnen och följa dem i deras vardagsmiljöer och delta i deras vardagspraktiker. I denna avhandling innebar det att följa ett antal asylsökande barn genom att *leka med, promenera med och prata med* dem i deras skola och på asylboendet där de bodde, men även på väg mellan dessa platser. I mitt etnografiska arbete har fokus gällt barns levda erfarenheter och hur barn tänker, känner och agerar i förhållandena till dessa erfarenheter.

Min ambition har varit att också ta barns representationer av sina ståndpunkter som utgångspunkter för mitt utforskande av deras situerade erfarenheter (Mayall, 2000; 2015). Barnens egna verbaliseringar utforskades genom informella samtal men även genom de deltagande metoderna genom vilka barnen i projektets första skede kunde uttrycka sina erfarenheter av olika platser i sin omgivning genom olika *uppgiftsbaserade metoder* (Punch, 2002b), *kartövningar* (Ambrose, 2017; Cele, 2006; Gustafson, 2011; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012; van der Burgt, 2008) och *gå-turer* (Cele, 2006; Marshall, 2013, 2016). Samtidigt är det viktigt att understryka att jag på intet sätt gör anspråk på att "ge barnen en röst" genom dessa metoder eller att de data som

dessas metoder genererar visat barnens autentiska röster eftersom det i slutändan är mina analytiska tolkningar av barnens representationer som presenteras (cf. Spyrou, 2011).

Avhandlingens fynd och avslutande diskussion

Denna avhandling bidrar med en unik etnografi över yngre asylsökande barns vardagsliv i det svenska asylmottagningssystemet med sina familjer. I avhandlingen diskuterar jag ett antal sätt på vilka asylsökande barns agens kan förstås som politisk både i form av deras artikuleringar, deras praktiker och deras emotioner. Mina tre studier kan läsas som tre komplementära bidrag som på olika sätt visar *hur* asylsökande barns agens kan förstås som politisk.

Den första studien utforskar särskilt barnens verbalt artikulerade ståndpunkter (*articulated standpoints*) som deras verbaliserade föreställningar om "hem" och hur dessa var underbyggda av deras erfarenheter av att bo på ett institutionellt boende utan mer hemliknande förhållanden. Barnens föreställningar om hem analyseras i denna studie med hjälp av teorier om hus och hem (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Saunders & Williams, 1988) och den emotionella aspekten av känslan av att ha ett hem (Ahmed, 1999). I denna studie analyserar jag barnens implicita anspråk på ett "vanligt" hem som politiska när de står i motsättning till vad som erbjuds i en asylkontext där boendeformerna sällan erbjuder hemliknande förhållanden (Fox O'Mahoney & Sweeney, 2010). Denna studie visar att barnen identifierade de spatiala och sociala villkoren för "hus" och "hem" och att asylboendets reglering av tid och rum hade berövat dem hemliknande matpraktiker, utrymmen för lek, privatliv och familjeliv. Barnens känsla av att bo i ett otryggt boende förstärktes av vad jag har kallat deras *levda rädslor* (*lived fears*) genom erfarenheter av hot om repressalier och ovänligt bemötande från vuxna på asylboendet utöver barnens rädsla för utvisning. Denna studie visar hur barnen implicit identifierade hur deras rätt till välbefinnande i deras boende i många avseenden var begränsad.

I avhandlingens andra studie använder jag mig av de Certeaus (1984) begrepp *taktiker* (*tactics*) för att analysera hur barnen navigerade inom ramen för asylboendets reglering, det vill säga, hur de identifierade och hanterade institutionell reglering såsom förbudsskyltar och no-go zoner men även hot om negativa konsekvenser för överträdelser av dessa regler. Denna studie visar framförallt hur några av barnens, vad jag kallar, *lektaktiker* (*play tactics*) belyser hur deras lek blir en form av politiskt agerande (jmf Marshall, 2016). Denna studie visar i linje med James Scott (1992) att barnen utvecklade ett *dolt motstånd* när de navigerade i asylboendet genom en rad olika taktiker för att hitta hemliga platser för lek och exempelvis utvecklade varningssystem för att stoppa leken om vaktarna var på väg. I den här studien analyseras

särskilt hur barnens lektaktiker kan förstås som *rättighetsanspråk* i en kontext där barnen nekades lekutrymmen på grund av asylboendets reglering i form av regler, förbudsskyltar och hot om negativa konsekvenser för både barnen och deras familjer.

Den tredje studien utforskar den affektiva och emotionella dimensionen av *tillhörighet* och *tillhörighetspolitik* (*politics of belonging*; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Detta belyses här genom barnens artikulerade känslouttryck (*articulated emotions*) som svar på inkludering eller exkludering. Studien visar att barnens svarade med positiva känslor, "kärlek" och "lycka", eller negativa känslor, "arg", "rädd" eller "ledsen" beroende på hur olika praktiker och relationer påverkade deras känsla av tillhörighet i förhållande till skolan men även i Sverige i stort. Denna studie visar att barnen i flera avseenden var spatialt exkluderade i skolan och relationellt positionerade som de Andra. Studien visar även hur barnen påverkades emotionellt när deras rätt till skola, men även deras rättigheter i skolan, begränsades eller förnekades. I den asylkontext som barnen befann sig i var deras politiska agerande ofta dolt, både i skolan och på asylboendet och denna dolda politik måste förstås i förhållande till barnens position som asylsökande i en kontext där mycket var på spel (jfr. Marshall, 2016). I denna avhandling menar jag framförallt att barnens vardagspolitiska agerande måste förstås mot bakgrund av barnens levda rädslor för hot om repressalier från vuxna i deras vardagsmiljöer och det ständigt närvarande hotet om utvisning. Mycket av barnens handlande måste förstås mot en bakgrund av barnens och hela familjens osäkra ställning i en kontext av potentiell utvisning (*deportability*; de Genova, 2002).

Sammanfattningsvis visar denna avhandling hur barnen påverkades av de villkor som är inbäddade i asylpolitiken men även hur deras politiska agens svarade på de förhållanden och den lokala politik som genomsyrade deras vardagsliv. Min analys av barnens politik i vardagen har även öppnat upp för en förståelse för barns levda rättigheter i asylkontexter.

Nyckelord: vardagspolitik; politiska aktörer; navigering; *no-go-zoner*; levda rättigheter; levd rädsla; asylpolitik; asylboende; tillhörighet; hem; emotioner; etnografi; gå-turer; barndomsgeografi

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