



JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY
School of Health and Welfare

Licentiate Thesis

From a place without speech: negotiations of othering among unaccompanied female minors in Sweden

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Licentiate thesis in Welfare and Social Sciences

From a place without speech: negotiations of othering
among unaccompanied female minors in Sweden
Dissertation Series No. 101

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Published by
School of Health and Welfare, Jönköping University
P.O. Box 1026
SE-551 11 Jönköping
Tel. +46 36 10 10 00
www.ju.se

Printed by BrandFactory AB 2019

ISSN 1654-3602
ISBN 978-91-88669-00-1

Acknowledgements

There have been several people whose efforts and presence have meant a lot for this study and to me personally during the work on this thesis. I will take the opportunity here to express my gratitude for their contributions and support.

First and foremost, I send my thanks to the girls who participated in this study. Without your participation this thesis would not have been written. You generously shared your stories and your thoughts with me. Thank you for your confidence, courage and inspiration.

I would also like to thank Jönköping municipality for taking the chance of financing a licentiate project without really knowing what the final product would be like. Thank you, Stefan for the trust and the opportunity. This thesis has also been finalised with funds from 'Stiftelsen Solstickan', to which I also extend my thanks.

A warm thank you to all the people working within the social services who have assisted me in recruiting the research participants and who have contributed with their knowledge as well as thought-provoking questions and discussions. Thank you for taking time from your important work to support this project. An especially warm thank you to Åsa, Marie, Ann-Charlotte, Sandra, Mia, Camilla, Mario, Samir and Louise for your commitment and support.

To my supervisors Pia, Ulrika and Ann-Christine; thank you for sharing your knowledge with me, for supporting me through my academic struggles, and for always cheering me on. To my main supervisor Monika, thank you for your diligent guidance and amazing quotes of wisdom (I will pass them on to future generations) and for always keeping an open door.

In Jönköping I would like to thank my colleagues at the research school for health and welfare, for sharing struggles and coffee breaks; it's been a pleasure! Thank you, Frida, Louise, and Magdalena for life-saving talks, dinners and wine.

Thank you to Marlene for introducing me to Jönköping University and to so many exciting people. Ann-Britt, thank you for being a mentor, introducing me to Jönköping, and for everything you taught me.

Friends and colleagues at NTNU Samfunnsforskning. Veronika, thank you for reading and commenting on my work, giving me valuable advice and helping me look at my research from new angles. Berit, Stina and again Veronika, I'm so happy I went to Metropolis with you and thank you for welcoming me to Trondheim for three great weeks of research (and marvellous views of Norwegian mountains). Those three weeks were the most peaceful and productive time I had during the writing of this thesis 'Takk!'

To my colleagues at Cirrus in Malmö, thank you for creating a great workspace where achievements are always duly celebrated. Thank you, Julia, for always putting up with my questions, on everything in general and lived religion in particular.

To my big family; my parents, my brothers and sister and all my nieces and nephews, a big thank you for easing my mind with love and laughter. To my friends (I cannot possibly mention all of you here) thank you for your patient support and for putting up with my lack of social life over the past two years.

Markus, thank you for being the constant source of calm in the sometimes very stormy project of writing a thesis. Thank you for taking notes of my thoughts in the middle of the night and for driving me back and forth between Malmö and Jönköping. You've helped me keep my focus on my work without losing sight of my world.

Elin Ekström
Malmö, July 2019

Abstract

The study presented in this thesis focuses on unaccompanied female minors and their experiences as newly arrived migrants in Sweden. As a group, unaccompanied female minors have until recently been rather invisible in both academic research and media. However, according to previous research on migration and integration, they risk being constructed as ‘others’ both due to their status as unaccompanied minors, being female and in relation to general perceptions of what it means to be Swedish.

This study is based on qualitative interviews with 11 girls, 13 to 18 years old, who arrived in Sweden as unaccompanied minors in the period between 2014 and 2017. The interviews were conducted in two phases, with nine months to one year between the first and second phases. Whereas the focus in the first phase was on getting to know the participants, the second phase provided an opportunity to delve deeper into discussions on recurring themes from the first phase. The interviews were transcribed using a denaturalised approach and thematically analysed through an abductive process.

The thesis explores the girls’ narratives of everyday experiences and interprets them through a theoretical framework of othering. Without losing sight of the social structures that situates the girls’ experiences, othering is approached as a reciprocal, three-dimensional relationship, focusing on knowledge, values and conduct towards the other.

The findings indicate that the girls participating in this study were often seen through the normative perception of an already othered context, and as a consequence, their own voices and agency were disregarded. They were, metaphorically, put in places without speech. However, by engaging a critical perspective on their everyday interactions, the girls were also able to recognise and resist othering by keeping true to their own experiences. The thesis concludes that by exploring the margins between their comfort zones and new contexts the girls engage in an epistemic merging of different horizons, which can be understood as a slow but insistent process of moving out from the place without speech.

Original papers

Paper 1

"I don't think you will understand me because really, I believe" - unaccompanied female minors re-negotiating religion.

Ekström E, Bülow P, Wilinska M

Qualitative Social Work, accepted.

Paper 2

"Call me and ask if you want more information. I've got many stories you know" –inhabited silence among unaccompanied female minors.

Ekström E, Andersson A, Börjesson U

Submitted

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Introduction

“Among the most radical, surest, and best hidden censorships are those which exclude certain individuals from communication (e.g. by not inviting them to places where people speak with authority, or by putting them in places without speech).” (Bourdieu, 1977: p. 649)

This quote is taken from Bourdieu’s article *The economics of linguistic exchanges* (Bourdieu, 1977). In my interpretation, being in a place without speech not only refers to a physical presence, it is also about being seen as an individual, a person and not a representative of one’s sex, ethnicity, status or religion, to be *someone* and not just a conditional representation of “the other” (Beauvoir, 1949). Bourdieu argues that successful communication, i.e. to get one’s meaning across, to be heard, has little to do with grammar and pronunciation and more to do with symbolic capital, which is inseparable from the speaker’s social position. Relations of communications are also relations of power (Bourdieu, 1977). To be excluded from communication does not necessarily mean that people are not communicating; it can also mean that the recipients are unable, or chose not, to listen. Reminiscent of Spivak’s question ‘Can the Subaltern speak?’ (Spivak, 1988), another way of putting it is perhaps; to what extent can those who occupy a privileged, yet often invisible, normative position listen?

The study presented in this thesis focuses on unaccompanied female minors and their experiences as newly arrived migrants in Sweden. As a group, unaccompanied female minors are quite invisible in both media and academic research. Previous research on unaccompanied minors has mostly focused on boys and young men while research on female migrants, for the most part, has paid attention to adult women. While research still struggles to see migrant women as more than just separate identity constructions based on sex and ethnicity (De los Reyes et al., 2006), the refugee girls risk falling in between legal and social institutional frameworks as “marginalized within the category of children as female, and within the category of women as minors” (Taefi, 2009: p. 347).

Female unaccompanied minors' voices are further distorted by a general Swedish discourse, on migration and integration, where 'the refugee girl' is positioned as caught in-between cultures, where her past is perceived as a weakness and the ability to adapt to Swedish norms is perceived as a strength. This perspective echoes a style of thought and an idea of a Swedish identity that permeates both political and media discourse, as well as everyday situations and interactions; a style of thought conceptualising these girls, with different backgrounds and experiences, as a vague, and narrow identity, constructing them as 'the other'. In this thesis I will argue for the importance of understanding othering as a relational process. Though permeated by social structures, there is room for negotiation and agency. By focusing on 'the other's' experiences, it is possible to explore these relations from a bottom-up perspective, and to see the resistances and negotiations within them.

Aim and research questions

This thesis will focus on othering relationships, from the point of view of 11 unaccompanied female minors, by analysing their experiences and perceptions of everyday interactions, within a Swedish context. Furthermore, I will explore how unaccompanied female minors relate to and negotiate their positioning in othering relationships. Thus, the aims of this study are to reveal how unaccompanied female minors experience othering, and to explore how they negotiate othering and how this relates to their own understandings of identity. In this endeavour, and based on the narratives of the girls, I will seek to answer the following research questions:

- In what ways do unaccompanied female minors experience othering?
- What are the implications of an othered relationship?
- How are their positions as the other constructed and negotiated?

The aim and research questions were developed following the abductive process of interacting with the empirical material. Therefore, before moving on to the chapter on previous research I will shortly describe how this study came to be and what led up to the focus on othering experiences of unaccompanied female minors.

Background

In 2016, I worked as a consultant to the new, Social Service sub-department for unaccompanied minors. At first I was mainly working with management and residential care unit staff, and what surprised me was how the minors were constantly referred to as “the boys”. In everyday speech, the gender-neutral word, children had been switched out for *boys* (pojkar) or sometimes *lads* (grabbar/killar). This prompted the question; What about the girls? Had the municipality not received any female minors or were they somehow not a visible part of the department?

In Sweden, approximately 20 percent of the unaccompanied minors who apply for asylum yearly are female (Socialstyrelsen, 2017), a number that decreased to eight percent in 2015 when there was an increase in applications from male minors¹. Following from this, a report from the Swedish National Board for Health and Welfare concluded that the reception system for unaccompanied minors in Sweden is adapted for boys and young men, who constitute the majority of unaccompanied minors (Socialstyrelsen, 2017).

As it turned out, several social workers expressed concerns about having little perception of how female minors fared after being placed in family care homes. With a heavy work load in the aftermath of the increased migration in 2015, the following up on minors in family care homes was not always done according to procedure (Socialstyrelsen, 2017). With the reception of unaccompanied minors adapted to boys and young men, and bearing in mind my own question (what about the girls?) and the deliberate concern from the social services, my intent when I started this research project was to get an overall picture of how female minors experienced the reception system in Sweden. More precisely, my focus was on how the organised reception system

¹In 2015, 35369 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum, compared to 7049 in 2014 Migrationsverket. (2018).

in a municipality affected the dispositions of unaccompanied female minors in relation to their integration.

However, when I began interviewing the girls participating in this study, issues of organised reception, for the most part, fell into the background as the girls themselves steered the conversations towards other, everyday life occurrences. It became clear that there were other layers in the girls' relation to both integration in general and the reception system that could not be captured with my focus on how a system affected the individual. Furthermore, my initial focus started to emerge as a top-down and issue-based approach. So, if I wanted to be sensitive to the girls' individual experiences and perspectives, I had to adjust my focus to make space for them to tell their stories, and discuss the issues, problems and successes they had experienced when arriving and living in a new society.

'Othering' emerged as a theme and a concept of interest since many of the girls expressed feelings that could be compared to what Collins describes as being the outsider within (Collins, 2000): living and interacting in a society where they are in a way standing outside, legally (awaiting residence permits), and socially (lacking language and cultural understanding of the society, as well as experiencing feelings of not being understood). In trying to pinpoint the source of those feelings, certain stories and situations emerged as significant in creating a distance between the girls and the context they interacted with. Furthermore, in discussing these stories with the girls, 'the other' sometimes also became a term for people they perceived as Swedish, which encouraged me to start looking at othering as a relationship.

Previous research

In this chapter, I will discuss how previous research, though not always using those words, shows how the participants in this study risked being constructed as others; as immigrants, as unaccompanied minors, and as refugee girls. Since othering (discussed in more depth in the theory section), is always context-based it is important to understand how, in an overarching Swedish context, there is an idea of a Swedish national identity that relates to foreign others.

To begin with then, I will briefly show how such a Swedish national identity has emerged in relation to images of others, in particular migrants. I will then move on to demonstrate how previous research has problematised the concept of unaccompanied minors. Finally, I would like to emphasise an intersectional approach, adding previous research about refugee girls to show how both gender and age affect how the participants in this study are constructed as the other.

A Swedish identity and ‘immigrant others’

In line with other Nordic states, Sweden has constructed itself as an anti-racist and feminist society where gender equality, openness and tolerance are often perceived as core values, and linked to a Swedish identity (Koobak and Thapar-Björkert, 2012; Keskinen, 2016). Globally, Sweden has also positioned itself as a nation of equality, launching the world’s first feminist government, and emphasising its role in diplomacy and development aid. Recent research argues that this position is made possible because Sweden has positioned itself as an outsider to Europe’s colonial history. As a consequence, however, Sweden never went through a period of introspective, colonial critique that has contributed to general and academic debates on racism in other Western societies (Mulinari et al., 2016; Palmberg, 2016).

Yet ‘other races’ have still been part of the Swedish nation-building process, as a way to construct and define a superior national identity. A study by Kjellman (2013) illustrates how conceptions of the supremacy of the ‘Nordic’ (white) race were rooted in Swedish modern history through the institutionalised work of The Swedish State Institute for Race Biology.

Between the 1920s and 1950s, the institute classified and ranked Swedish citizens according to 'race' by systematically, yet subjectively, linking physical traits such as skin and eye colour to abilities and inner qualities (Kjellman, 2013). Such blatant expressions of racism in public discourse decreased in the aftermath of World War Two, as racism became discredited (Palmberg, 2016). However, notions of race, or ethnicity, have been continuously present in the Swedish identity-building process, linking whiteness to perceived superior qualities such as modernity, progressiveness and equality (Koobak and Thapar-Björkert, 2012). For example, a study by Brune (2006) on media discourse in Sweden from the 1970s to the 1990s reveals how constructs of immigrant others are made through discursive juxtapositions of visual attributes such as dark hair and culturally based inner characteristics (Brune, 2006). She also notes how, immigrant women are described through what they are not (active, modern, emancipated), and how this construct served as a stepping stone in constructing a condensed identity of the native Swedish woman as likewise reduced to a utopian image of modernity, equality and freedom. During the time scope of Brune's study, such constructing narratives of immigrants as others become more and more subtle, but they still persist.

One example of this is how the Swedish publicity and debate regarding 'honour killings' in the early 2000s contributed to a nation-building rhetoric that explained violence against women as something from other cultures, brought to Sweden by migrants, while simultaneously enforcing an image of Sweden as place of equality and freedom from oppression (Keskinen, 2016; Carbin, 2010). The attention around honour-based violence, in particular the murder of a known activist in 2002, coincided with growing tensions in global politics after the 9/11 terror attack of 2001, (followed by the bombings in Madrid 2004 and London 2005), which might have contributed to the impact that the publicity around the murder had (Keskinen, 2016). This debate caused a discursive disruption in Swedish political integration discourse (Carbin, 2010). Ideals of multiculturalism and tolerance that had previously characterised parliamentary discourse, gave way to a discourse of value-conflict, framing immigrants (in particular men), as having fundamentally different values than the majority society. While this perception enforced an image of immigrant men as oppressive and traditional, immigrant women and

girls were depicted as the vulnerable victims in relation to their own family, especially their fathers and brothers (Brune, 2006; Carbin, 2010).

While political and media discourses depicted the family as a threat to the migrant girl's integration and emancipation, studies by Sixtensson (2009) and (Skowronski, 2013) shows how female migrants, especially veiled girls and women, in Sweden are exposed to different forms of everyday violence in public spaces (violence understood in a broader sense, ranging from hostile looks, verbal harassment, the anticipation of violence and actual physical abuse). In her thesis, Skowronski draws attention to how racialised sexual harassment among newly arrived migrants in Swedish schools builds on a construct linking girls from certain cultures or ethnicities to prostitution. Additionally, Sixtensson's study illustrates how immobility became a consequence for women wearing a veil, as they adjusted their movement in the city, avoiding "Swedish" areas, to minimise exposure to violence. The study also demonstrates how the veil becomes a symbol for otherness that provokes both questions and violence, regardless of its purpose or meaning for the individual wearing it (Sixtensson, 2009). Both Sixtensson and Skowronski further reveal the emotional work (see Hochschild, 2003; Lindqvist, 2013) of having to negotiate feelings such as anger and shame, from having to face harassment and discrimination, and the effort of balancing one's outward expressions and behaviour, between taking the initiative (in order to contradict an image of the oppressed woman), and not being too forward, in order to avoid unwanted attention (Sixtensson, 2009; Skowronski, 2013).

This dichotomy, between what is constructed as Swedish and foreign, shows how the idea of Sweden as a good nation seems to cause a cognitive and discursive pitfall, obscuring critical self-reflection, thereby making some of the everyday violence against immigrant women invisible. Ålund and Alinia (2011) argue that this has also been the case in previous academic research. Due to the prevailing discourse of a feminist and anti-racist Swedish society, Swedish research has had to struggle to move beyond cultural stereotypes. They further argue that, since a general and also academic debate has failed to apply an intersectional perspective on gender and ethnicity, it has enforced rather than problematised a discourse of the immigrant other (see also De los Reyes et al., 2006).

Unaccompanied minors - a narrow concept, complex identities

Following the last decade's increased migration, research on unaccompanied minors has increased, both in Scandinavia and generally in Europe (SBU, 2018). The research has covered a broad field encompassing both pre-flight experiences, problematising stereotypical conceptions of why young people choose to migrate (e.g. Thomas et al., 2004; Lalander and Herz, 2018; Hopkins and Hill, 2008) and experiences related to arrival and integration in their new countries (e.g. Wimelius et al., 2017; Herz and Lalander, 2017; Söderqvist, 2017; Ni Raghallaigh, 2007; De Graeve and Bex, 2017; Herz and Lalander, 2019).

Within the last category, a common conclusion is that the complex identities of the children categorised as unaccompanied minors are often reduced to simplified categories in order to fit the standardised bureaucracy and praxis of migration and welfare authorities (e.g. Kohli, 2006; Arnold et al., 2014; Söderqvist, 2017; Crawley, 2010; Engebrigtsen, 2003; De Graeve and Bex, 2017; Kaukko and Wernesjö, 2017). This institutionalised simplification risks reinforcing a sense of othering both among the minors and the institutions working with them. Engebrigtsen (2003), for example, describes how unaccompanied minors, through the asylum application process in Norway, are reduced from individuals to depersonalised legal objects. Similarly De Graeve and Bex (2017) argue, based on a Belgian study, that the intersectional positioning of unaccompanied minors fails to translate into a rigid welfare apparatus that struggles to encompass children's needs from an universalised, equal rights perspective.

Furthermore, state and welfare organisations tend to operate through understandings of key concepts, such as 'childhood' and 'home', that might differ from the individuals' understanding of the same concepts. Crawley (2010) for example, points to how migration authorities in the UK conduct interviews in a way that conceptualises children's identities and stories, based on narrow understandings of 'childhood', that do not account for the voices of the children themselves. Another example is given by Söderqvist et al. (2016) in a Swedish study of unaccompanied minor living in group homes. The study illustrates how the minors' own understanding of the concept of 'home'

extends beyond how the concept is understood and used within the social services. This affects the children's sense of belonging (Söderqvist, 2017). Additionally, previous research also problematises how the labelling of children as unaccompanied² translates into a narrow cultural understanding of their background and childhood that obscures the children's own experiences and affects their chances of asylum and/or family reunion (see Herz and Lalander, 2017; Hessle, 2009; Engebrigtsen, 2003). Furthermore, Kohli (2006) points at how this also affects how unaccompanied minors talk about themselves. He uses the concepts "thick" and "thin" stories, to explain how unaccompanied minors choose to conform to simplified categorisations within an institutional framework, by only telling parts of their stories in order to fit into a narrow system, thereby reinforcing stereotypical constructs (Kohli, 2006).

Such constructs, as mentioned above, risk reinforcing a process of othering, as both the minors and the welfare system create simplified stories. Comparatively, Lalander and Herz (2018) write about the othering of the so-called anchor-children, i.e. unaccompanied minors sent by their parents to seek resident permits in order for their families to later join them in the new country (Lalander and Herz, 2018). The study finds that the concept of anchor-children is used in the process of othering as it stands against a normative perception of the Western nuclear family. The study concludes that, the stories of unaccompanied minors are far more complex than can be perceived from the stereotype and their reasons for migration are interchangeable. As 'the other', however, the motives of the anchor-child can be questioned, and their multifaceted reasons for migration be made into simple explanations (Lalander and Herz, 2018).

In short, previous research shows that even with the intention to work for equal rights, state organisations still struggle to adapt to the different needs and understandings of the unaccompanied minors they are tasked with caring for.

² In Swedish the term used for unaccompanied is 'ensamkommande', which translates to 'arriving alone'.

Subsequently, as the minors' own experiences are disregarded, their rights and needs risk being disregarded as well.

The particular vulnerability of being a child separated from their parents has often been a defining backdrop to both research and media discourse around unaccompanied minors (Herz and Lalander, 2017; Hessle, 2009). This notion of loneliness has been problematised by Hessle (2009), and more recently, Söderqvist et al. (2016) and Herz and Lalander (2017). Illuminating the role of transnational networks, they challenge the image of the lonely child while also highlighting the children's strengths and agency in the face of adversity. For example, Hessle argues that the experience of creating and maintaining transnational networks has helped unaccompanied minors to create and sustain new relationships after migration. In the study by Herz and Lalander (2017), loneliness is found, in particular, in the relationship between the minors and professionals in the welfare system. They explain the minors' feelings of loneliness as a consequence of not having their expectations of certain relationships met, rather than as derived from a lack of friends or social networks, thus once again framing how institutional approaches and conduct fail to account for the complex identities and needs of the minors (Herz and Lalander, 2017; Herz and Lalander, 2019).

Again, recognising the often traumatic or harsh circumstances under which unaccompanied minors have migrated, as well as their resilience and capacity to 'bounce back' from past experiences, previous research has recognised both strength or agency as well as vulnerabilities, (Thomas et al., 2004; Kaukko, 2015; Wernesjö, 2014). Still, Kaukko (2015) points out that, while navigating between strengths and vulnerabilities, there is a risk of overlooking the complex and ambiguous nature of the minors' experiences (Kaukko, 2015). She stresses the importance of an intersectional perspective where the positions and perspectives of unaccompanied minors are understood as influenced by varying and flexible factors, due to both their background and current situation. One way of broadening the perspective may be to look beyond the institutional frameworks that often situate the studies in relation to welfare practices. Ní Raghallaigh for example, illuminates an often-overlooked dimension on unaccompanied minors by including and highlighting the role of religion in the lives of unaccompanied minors. Her study on unaccompanied refugee minors in Ireland found religion to be a

compelling coping mechanism, and a source of strength, that nevertheless is often disregarded within official welfare practice (Ní Raghallaigh, 2007; Ní Raghallaigh, 2011).

In this thesis I attempt to continue to further broaden the understanding of unaccompanied minors as a heterogenous group by looking at how the girls in this study use different strategies to negotiate othering relationships in their day-to-day interactions.

“The refugee girl”

Despite recognising and problematising the complexities subsumed in the categorisation of unaccompanied minors, previous research has also struggled with encompassing and illuminating an intersectional perspective of unaccompanied minors. Even though female minors figure as interviewees in some studies (see Herz and Lander, 2017; Wernesjö, 2014; Kaukko and Wernesjö, 2017; Ní Raghallaigh, 2011; Lander and Herz, 2018; Herz and Lander, 2019), previous research has predominantly focused on the perspectives of boys and young men (who make up the majority of the group). As a result, recent overviews from Sweden and Norway have called for more research broadening the image and perspectives of unaccompanied minors, for example with regard to gender, sexual orientation and disability (SBU, 2018; Svendsen et al., 2018). Kaukko makes an exception in her thesis on participation among unaccompanied female minors in Finland, since her study solely focuses on girls’ experiences (Kaukko, 2015). In her study, she demonstrates how girls have to continuously negotiate their presence in a shared living space and relate to their male peers within the institutional setting of a group home where young masculinity is the norm (Kaukko, 2015; see also Kaukko and Wernesjö, 2017).

Taking a wider view, there is a scope of research on female refugees and migrant women in general, both in Sweden and internationally. However, according to Lutz (2010), the literature on female migration has had little impact on policy-making and the mass media representation of female migrants, showing there is still a need to emphasise a gender perspective in migration research. Furthermore, Lutz suggests four categories of further research regarding migration where gender aspects should be further taken

into account. However, for the most part these categories (labour markets, care practices and discourses and practices on gender in both receiving and sending countries) focus on adult women (Lutz, 2010). Thus, Taefi makes an important point when she insists that there is a need to shed further light on the particular situation of refugee *girls*, emphasising age as an important variable in an intersectional perspective (Taefi, 2009).

Recent research regarding female migrants has strived to move away from a westernised viewpoint that reduces individual stories to stereotypical explanations of other cultures (Knocke, 1991; Abu-Lughod, 2002; Ålund, 1988; Boutwell, 2015; Mohanty, 1984; Minh-ha, 1986). For example, Taefi (2009) argues that gender perspective in the discourse of human rights and refugees tend to focus on ‘non-Western’, gender-specific, harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation or forced marriages, rather than everyday discriminating structures. In concordance with, Mohanty (1984), she urges researchers and professionals to look beyond this issue-based approach to avoid research adding to the othering, and instead focus on the complex and intersectional marginalisation of girls’ experiences. Similarly, in analysing the othered construct of the refugee girl, Boutwell (2015) builds her argumentation on a critique of a Western hegemonic discourses on global development and the perception of Islam as an oppressive and patriarchal religion (for an in-depth discussion on religion and secularism as regards gender equality see Scott, 2009). In her research, she calls attention to the complex mix of discourses, as well as the narrow focus on trauma and re-settlement challenges, that frame young female migrants as victimised and stereotyped others. She further demonstrates how the refugee girl is seen as a person trapped by her origin and religion, helpless to progress without the liberating aid provided by the Western society (Boutwell, 2015).

This image of a Western saviour is very much in line with the construction of a Swedish national identity, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Following this perception and the failure to apply a political, intersectional perspective on female migrants’ situation(s) has made “the migrant girl” into an unsolved problem within Swedish political integration politics. Thus the refugee (or migrant) girl has come to represent a failure of what is seen as essentially Swedish values of both tolerance and gender equality (Carbin, 2010).

To conclude, as, immigrants, unaccompanied minors and refugee girls, the participants in this study are easily perceived through narrow concepts obscuring their intersectional and complex identities. Together these othered identity constructs are formed in relation to a normative society, inhabited by normative (Swedish) subjects. In line with, among others, Keskinen, Boutwell and Mohanty, this thesis will argue that a westernised viewpoint, imbued in a constructed Swedish identity, contributes to an othering of unaccompanied female minors that obscures their own experiences and therefore also their everyday struggles against discriminating practices, racism and Islamophobia. Following Kaukko, to present this argument I will attempt to avoid the dichotomy of strength and vulnerability by instead focusing on othering as a multifaceted relationship between the girls and the people they interact with.

Theoretical framework

In this study I have approached othering as a reciprocal and reflexive relationship. This is to emphasise that both parties engage in the othered relationship and that both are active subjects within it. Furthermore I would also like to keep to the perspective that the girls exist in different relationships and not all of them are othered (Krumer-Nevo, 2002).

In order to analyse and understand the othered relationship I have chosen to use Todorov's (1982) three-dimensional typology as an analytical tool. Within this typology, the knowledge and perception we have of each other, as the self and the other (or "us" and "them"), influences social interaction and negotiates the othered relationship. Furthermore, this reveals the capacity for change within the relationship as knowledge, practices and values might change. Todorov's typology will be described in greater detail later in this chapter. I will first introduce othering as a concept and then discuss the social structures that influence how certain individuals are seen and approached as the other in general discourses (and the power dynamic that this implies) while others are not. I will centre this discussion around Sweden because Sweden or the Swedish identity, in the context of this study, is the norm against which the girls in this study are perceived as the other.

The concept of othering

As a sociological concept, 'othering' has been widely used to describe processes of differentiation, often negatively coded as marginalisation and exclusion. In general, othering can be summarised as a process of creating a social, emotional and psychological distance between the self and those constructed and perceived as the other (Beauvoir, 1949; Said, 1978; Butler, 2009; Collins, 2000; Hooks, 1989; Minh-ha, 1986; Riggins, 1997; Kristeva, 1988; Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012). From a psychoanalytical perspective, Kristeva (1988) describes the other as a projection of that which is seen as undesirable in the self. By attaching moral codes to certain characteristics, the other becomes a negative reflection of the self which defines the self as morally good (Kristeva, 1988). The notion of otherness can then negate moral rules for what is perceived as acceptable conduct towards equals, subsequently

legitimising unequal treatment, to the extent of atrocities, of people considered to be different (Beauvoir, 1949; Said, 1978; Butler, 2009; Todorov, 1982). Butler, for example, describes othering as step towards dehumanisation; as the other becomes “un-grievable”, their fate becomes irrelevant (Butler, 2009). Part of the construction of the other is the reduction of the complexities we find within a certain group into simplified stereotypical identities, e.g. “the third world woman” (Mohanty, 1984; Minh-ha, 1986). These collective identities can also, as described above, serve to mask undesired qualities within the own group.

Othered contexts

Global power relations affect the relationships of individuals as well as groups and communities (Boutwell, 2015; Mohanty, 1984; Said, 1978), and global power relations are mirrored in how othering is performed in individual interactions within societies. Therefore, in the context of this study it is important to reflect on Sweden as an agent that creates and defines itself through and against its others.

It could be argued that the othering of immigrants, particularly non-Western immigrants, in Sweden is partly constructed by the impact of Swedish colonial complicity on the Swedish national identity (Mulinari et al., 2016). The discursive divide between immigrant and Swede (see Carbin, 2010; Brune, 2006) in a way, rests upon the conception of othered contexts, physical places or social structures/institutions, perceived as fixed sceneries, in relation to the dynamic, interchanging and evolving Swedish society (Brune, 2006). Othered contexts are places without speech (Bourdieu, 1977) where the inhabitants are not seen as individual subjects but rather parts of the scenery (Palmberg, 2016). Said (1978) describes this as a *style of thought*, based on an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘us’ and ‘them’, that has long permeated social and political institutions. European (Western) culture gained strength and identity by setting itself off against an image, created by and for Europeans, of its other(s). Thus, the Orient (Said, 1978) as well as ‘Africa’ (Palmberg, 2016) helped defined Europe by being seen as contrasting images to what was perceived as European. Sweden, in representing itself as a nation and a society, has adopted the same discourse and ascribes itself to the same (European) identity, against the same other(s) (Mulinari et al., 2016).

However, Sweden played a comparatively marginal role in European colonial history and thus never observed the same “colonial hangover” (Palmberg, 2016) of dealing with cultural, economic and political oppression. As a consequence, prejudices against other(s) are not as clearly perceived as structural oppression, and discussions on racism (including Sweden’s own history of racial oppression (see Kjellman, 2013; and Fur, 2006) have been subdued on account of Sweden’s presumed innocence in regard to colonial oppression abroad (Palmberg, 2016; Koobak and Thapar-Björkert, 2012). Simultaneously, the modern image of Sweden, as part of the ‘good’ West, was necessarily formed in contrast to those perceived as Sweden’s others’, both former colonial powers and colonies. This image of Sweden enabled a high moral stance, which now influences how Sweden conducts itself as superior in relation to its post-colonial others, both on an individual level within the Swedish society and in relations abroad (Palmberg, 2016; Mulinari et al., 2016; Koobak and Thapar-Björkert, 2012).

An illustrative example of othering in general discourse is found in Brune’s (2007) analysis of representations of immigrants in Swedish media from the 1970s through to the 1990s. Her analysis covers how immigrants are associated with an othered context by description of their physical attributes, (e.g. dark hair, wearing clothes with long sleeves) and characteristics such as “uneducated” and “traditional”, as opposed to having a white complexion and an enlightened, developed and modern character. Illustrating how media established a set of gendered, stereotypical images of “the immigrant” by emphasising certain traits and disregarding others, the word itself became associated with attributes that go far beyond the literal meaning (i.e. a person who has immigrated).

Furthermore, to revisit Kristeva’s conceptualisation, Brune points out how the image of the immigrant other(s), in the 1970s, also served as a beacon for Swedes who needed to conform to a national identity that was created partly as an antithesis of the immigrant other(s). In emphasising the dichotomy between Swedes and others, othering also become a process of self-representation *through* the other, an idea of what ‘we’ are *not* (Beauvoir, 1949; Brune, 2006; Kristeva, 1988; Said, 1978). Since it lies in the interest of the privileged to see and interpret others in order to uphold social hierarchies, and distance one’s own identity from questioning, the social gaze learns to look

for differences (Hooks, 2010; Walker, 1993). By recognising the characteristics ascribed to the other, 'we' also learn to step inside the margins of inclusion and thereby reinforce dichotomies such as immigrant-Swedish.

Another way in which othering reinforces moral and social hierarchies is through the notion of superiority/inferiority in the constructs of saviour and victim (the capable and the incapable). For example, Boutwell (2015), describes how moral codes attached to a Muslim identity and an African origin, help develop a 'Western success story' around the construct of the refugee girl, which promotes a (good) Western saviour identity. According to Carbin (2010), this also occurred through the political discourse around honour violence in Sweden (see chapter 2), which corroborated a self-aggrandising identity of Sweden as the free and modern saviour. On another level, Lalander and Herz (2018) discuss how the moral codes attached to "anchor-children" in Sweden, is part of an othering and stereotyping of refugees performed in relation to the notion of a (good)'Western' nuclear family and perceptions of good parenting. Implicitly then, by defining the other and separating it from the self, 'we' shape our own moral identity.

Othering as a reciprocal relationship

While, and because, global structures affect othering in interactions on an individual level, attention to circumstances and context is a prerequisite for deconstructing images of the other. Being the other can never be a constant position as the other is a relational construct. No-one is locked in their othered position; rather, as power symmetries shift depending on context, so do the margins for what count as normative (Orupabo, 2014). Therefore, understanding othering necessitates applying an intersectional perspective.

Crenshaw defines an intersectional perspective as understanding a person's experiences as shaped by more than one dimension of their identity. She emphasises how various social structures interact to shape multiple dimensions of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991). This study approaches intersectionality from a post-structural perspective, meaning that power is understood as fluent and power relations as context-based (Orupabo, 2014).

Intersectionality also reveals the complexities of layered othering - being the other among the others (Minh-ha, 1986). While the othered position also might empower the radical subject through its visibility as the other, othering has its own margins (Walker, 1993) and an intersectional perspective shed light on the position of those who are poised on the peripheries between visible identities.

Krumer-Nevo (2002) criticises previous research on othering for failing to step out of a Western imagery and recognise non-Western perspectives and agency. She describes othering as a reciprocal process, situated in what she calls the 'arena of othering'. In a critique of the Eurocentric, colonialist and patriarchal viewpoint in discourses about othering, she questions the one-way view of the construction of the other. The arena of othering, she argues, is the context in which different agents, of different social positions, contest for the prerogative to define, rather than being defined. Her analysis shows the othered position to be neither fixed nor passive but contested and flexible (Krumer-Nevo, 2002). This brings to mind Hooks (2010) concept of the oppositional gaze (see Paper 1) as a tool of resistance. Krumer-Nevo concludes however, that the outcome of the contest is always tipped in favour of those who already inhabit the higher social position and thus social structures are reflected in individual interactions that reinforce hegemonic perceptions of/in othering. In comparison, Spivak poses the questions of what the subalterns, those whose narratives are already colonised or marginalised, must do to define themselves in the eyes of *their* other (Spivak, 1988). Otherness might render an image of vocal absence as the contextual (or group) narrative takes prominence over the individual narrative. Understanding othering as a reciprocal relationship however can assist in shedding light on what is *said* and what is *heard* (see Paper 2).

Othering as a three-dimensional relationship, Todorov's typology

In theorising othering, Todorov (1982) described a three-dimensional relationship between the self and the other. I have found his topology to be useful as it provides a clarifying framework for understanding othering in relation to the stories of unaccompanied female minors. The typology maps out values, knowledge and conduct between the self and the other, and can

serve as springboard for discussions about hegemonic ontological and epistemological perspectives on otherness. The typology itself is, in a sense, devoid of a power perspective. Though Todorov's theory is formed around the history of Europeans colonising America, thus being exemplified by power inequality in the extreme, the three-dimensional relationship he describes also accounts for a sense of equality or inferiority towards the other (Todorov, 1982). Consequently, the typology can be used to analyse relationships in the reciprocal sense, as discussed by Krumer-Nevo.

To begin with, Todorov describes an *axiological dimension*, a value-judgement concerning whether the other is perceived as good or bad, or seen as an equal or as an inferior. Again, Brune (2006) provides an example in how Swedish media attached different values depending on gender and age in depictions of immigrants. Girls were described as aspiring but subjugated (good and weak/vulnerable) while boys were described as potential troublemakers. As parents, adult migrants were described as controlling towards their children (bad), and traditional or uneducated (inferior), contrasting with the aspirational sentiments that were attached to young migrants.

The second dimension that Todorov speaks of is the *praxiological dimension*. It captures how we act in relation to the other, whether the other is met with reconciliation or distance, if the other's values are respected or if we impose our own views and customs on the other. I would argue that the praxiological dimensions thus refer to the mechanisms of othering. Naturally, these mechanisms also change over time. During later years, as official discourses change and discriminatory expressions are banned from public spaces (see chapter 2), the mechanisms of othering in the praxiological dimension are mitigated and become more sophisticated and obscured (Riggins, 1997). Examples of this are illustrated in Creese (2010) and Siziba (2014), who show how linguistic capital is used to create a distance to the other and to demarcate 'us' from 'them' (see Paper 1). Another example is given by Rahmath et al. (2016), in describing how Muslim women in Canada are asked to unveil in public institutions (see Paper 2).

The third dimension is the *epistemic dimension* and concerns the knowledge we have of the other, if such knowledge exists. Additionally, Krumer-Nevo

and Sidi (2012), make a point about how othering is reinforced through the decontextualised and de-historised retelling of narratives of, or about, the other, in research. Thus, othering is not only about not knowing but also about how knowledge is passed on. Mohanty (1984) describes it as “colonising” stories. By decontextualising and de-historising complex individual narratives, the (sometimes lacking) knowledge of the other creates simplified and value-laden stereotypes. In the same way, the relationship between the self and the other depends on how the historical and contemporary contexts of both the other and the self are considered and (re)produced (Said, 1978; Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012). Bearing in mind Said’s description of how the other is constructed and not discovered, the epistemic dimension can be used to understand and problematise knowledge in the othered relationship. It also frames how the process of othering groups together individuals with diverse attributes and capacities into a homogenous identity, erasing differences and individuality within the group (Mohanty, 1984; Riggins, 1997).

Todorov (1982) emphasises the graduality of all three dimensions. Picturing the dimensions as three axes, the othered relation might be situated anywhere on this three-dimensional scale. We might know little of the other but have a strong axiological perception and forcefully act upon that, or we might have extended knowledge but feel morally indifferent towards the other, or we might treat the other with indifference (Todorov, 1982).

Said argues that the other is not discovered but constructed. Thus, othering should be understood as a process involving reflecting subjects; subjects that are also part of the othering relationship, and a process that could be reversed or change direction. Todorov’s typology could be seen as a bridge between understanding that something is a construction and the process of deconstruction. It is an analytical tool for taking apart that which has been merged together by looking at different aspects (dimensions) of the whole. Othering in itself is a hierarchical concept based on the dichotomy between a normative, primary position and the othered, secondary position (Beauvoir, 1949). When looking from a normative perspective, which is often the case in academic research, the focus easily falls on the othered position (Haraway, 1988), thereby aligning the analytical gaze *down* on the other. Here Todorov’s typology, in being itself devoid of a power perspective, can open up for a more horizontal analysis of how *each* subject in an othered relationship relates to

the others, through knowledge, values and conduct. For this reason, it cannot stand alone, but it can be used as a complement to a theoretical framework that explains the othering in relation to social structures and power relations.

Methodological approach

In this chapter I will outline and discuss some of the methodological choices made in the process of this study. I will begin by introducing the participants in general terms and describing the steps in setting up and conducting the interviews. Some special attention will be given to my thoughts on working with gatekeepers and interpreters. Thereafter I will turn to the analytical process and discuss this in relation to my epistemological approach, and I will then finish this chapter with a discussion on ethical considerations.

Interviewing the girls

This study is based on qualitative interviews with 11 young women, from three different midsized Swedish municipalities, who arrived in Sweden as unaccompanied minors. Under this section I will discuss the interview situations and my choice of approach e.g. the interview guide. I will also outline the process of contacting the girls for the interviews and discuss some issues around working with gatekeepers. To begin with, though, I will provide an overarching introduction to the girls who participated in the study.

The girls

The girls participating in this study had arrived in Sweden as unaccompanied minors in the period between 2014 and 2017. At the time of their first interview they were between 13 and 18 years old and had been in Sweden for between a few months up to two and a half years. Together they made up a heterogeneous group of people with different personalities, characteristics and approaches to life.

The girls came from Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Somalia and Syria. They did not necessarily see their identities as coherent with their country of origin. Some of them had not lived there for long before migrating to neighbouring countries, and while most of them were fluent in several languages, some of them defined themselves according to a language or ethnicity rather than

country. Their experiences of migration varied; some of them had arrived in Sweden alone while others had arrived in the company of siblings or relatives or friends of their families. They were not specifically asked to tell stories about migration or explain why they had left their home countries. Some of them however, talked about their experience of migration unprompted, and on other occasions a certain question or train of thought (like talking about school and the differences between the Swedish system and the system in their homeland) led them to talk about why they had migrated. One unifying trait among the girls was that they did not make the decision to leave their countries themselves. It was also clear that in most cases, except, perhaps, for the war in Syria, there was not just one reason for migration. A general state of poverty, political instability and oppression often coincided with specific occurrences (for example forced marriage, forced conscription of siblings, or targeted prosecution of family members) that tipped the scale towards the decision to migrate.

The girls had all been interviewed before, notably by the social services and the migration board, which I believed influenced their expectations of our meetings in that they seemed to, at first, be prepared to give informative answers rather than reflect upon my questions. However, their diverse backgrounds and experiences affected how they partook in, and shaped, the interviews. While some were very outspoken and eager to discuss, others were more restrictive. In general, the younger girls (13-15 years) seemed more relaxed in their approach to the interview situation. Most of them lived, or were in close contact, with elder siblings, some of whom I spoke to when scheduling the interviews. It could be that a sense of presence and support from family members made them feel more secure in talking to me. Conversely, the older girls (16-18), seemed more preoccupied with managing the transition into early adulthood (e.g. finishing school and finding employment or thinking about higher education) and working to get their families to Sweden. With some exceptions they also gave the impression of being more alone, not necessarily because they were newly arrived in Sweden but as regards their decisions and responsibilities. It was also clear that the girls' lives before migration impacted on their perceptions and expectations of the Swedish society. Some of the girls who came from larger cities described Sweden as quiet, sometimes boring, and less vibrant than they were

used to, while girls who grew up in rural areas commented on what they saw as the faster pace and strictness of Swedish everyday life.

In order to safeguard the anonymity of the girls they have been given pseudonyms in all publications that are based on this study. In order not to erase too much of their character, the pseudonyms have been chosen to reflect their origin and religious adherence, according to how they introduced themselves. However, to obscure their identities, the pseudonyms have been changed for each publication to make it more difficult to piece together the history of one specific individual.

The interviews

The interviews were done in two phases during 2017 and 2018, with nine months to one year between the first and second phases. The purpose of this design was, first, to get to know the participants and get a feel for their dispositions and perspectives and then, in the second phase, be able to delve deeper into discussions on more specific issues. In conducting a second round of interviews the girls also got an opportunity to reflect on preliminary findings from the first phase.

The interviews were scheduled for one to one and a half hours. The time I spent with each participant varied between the first and second phases of the interviews, depending on the depending on whether or not an interpreter was present and the participants' own schedules. In the end the shortest interview was 40 minutes and the longest interview was two and a half hours. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. We discussed the location of the interviews beforehand. Most of the girls preferred meeting in the city and in order to get a location that was both relaxed and secluded the library or the library garden were the most common choices. One participant chose to be interviewed at her home and one was interviewed through a video call. After each interview I took note of my own impressions of the conversation; the atmosphere, the interaction with the interpreter and what we spoke about before and after the recording.

In order to stay close to the participants' lived experiences I used semi-structured, deliberately open interview guides in both the first and second

phases. For the first phase, the interview guide was loosely structured around different themes connected to the participants' everyday lives, such as their living conditions, school and leisure time, relationships with friends and family and the social services. The purpose was to get to know the participants' everyday life, get a feel for what kind of discussions they themselves were interested in having, what made them want to engage and what issues were important to them. For the second phase I wanted to further explore some of the themes that had been discussed during the first phase, using the narratives from the interviews I had already done as a basis for an adjusted interview guide. Consequently, the second phase of interviews, besides serving as a way of looking back on the time that had passed since the previous occasion, focused on some specific new themes, such as religion and feelings of loneliness, and refocused on some of the themes from the previous phase, such as leisure time activities and living conditions.

My idea for both the first and second phases was to give the participants subjects to talk about without guiding their thoughts too much by asking specific questions (Lavery, 2003; Braun and Clarke, 2006). This approach worked well in the second round of interviews, but not so well in the first phase. To begin with, nerves (mine and the participants') affected the interview situations. While the participants were carefully moderate in giving information, I found myself wanting to fill in the silence by asking further questions. The presence of the interpreters in most of the interviews in the first phase also affected the conversational flow and content, which I will discuss further on in this chapter.

Gaining access and working with gatekeepers and interpreters

Working with the social services

The first contact with the research participants was made through the social services in three municipalities in Sweden. I assumed that it would be easier and feel more comfortable for the participants to receive the invitation from a known source before I introduced myself. The social workers were provided with a letter of consent in Swedish and the preferred language of the participants as well as details of the information I would need in order to proceed with scheduling the interviews. The social workers also contacted the participants' legal guardian to inform them of the study and get their approval

for girls who were under the age of 18. If the participants agreed to be contacted by me, I would then call them (sometimes with an interpreter) to give further information and schedule the interview.

In the case of two participants who lived at a residential care unit I was invited to a “house meeting” to introduce myself and my research to the participants. Later they were asked individually by the staff if they wanted to participate.

In total, 15 young women agreed to be contacted by me. Of these, three did not respond when I contacted them. In the end, 12 girls were scheduled for interviews and after one of them chose to decline due to illness, 11 girls were interviewed in the first phase. All of them then agreed to be contacted for a second interview but when contacted again one of them declined and three did not respond to the invitation.

Cooperating with the social services helped me in many ways during the course of this study. The staff provided me with insight into a field I was not very familiar with, and since they had more or less regular contact with unaccompanied minors in general, and female minors in particular, they were valuable sources of information when I began my study. They also inhabited the position of gatekeepers when it came to gaining access to research participants.

Gatekeepers are persons in a position to help or hinder the research process by enabling or disabling access to the field, or in various ways influencing the connection between the researcher and research participants (Reeves, 2010; Edwards, 2013). For the purpose of this study I had to negotiate access through different levels of gatekeepers, both formal (head of department) and informal (residential care unit staff and social workers) (Reeves, 2010) and the procedure for this varied between the three municipalities. In municipality 1, the research project was endorsed from the very start while in municipality 2, I had to send in a short research plan, including the letter of consent, to the Social Welfare Committee before I could get access to the department for unaccompanied children, and in municipality 3, I was invited to a staff meeting after a brief phone call with the head of department who then made requests to the director of the social services on my behalf.

Generally, at management level I experienced great commitment and interest in the study. Despite the formal gatekeepers' approval however, gaining access to potential research participants proved to be somewhat difficult. In each of the three municipalities I was assigned a contact person who would be the link between me and other members of the staff (the informal gatekeepers) who I was dependant on to make contact with the participants. While there were no obvious discrepancies in the interaction on this level, I still got a slight feeling of friction in gaining access to participants.

Being researched, even indirectly, can be worrisome (this also applies to interpreters and will be discussed later in this chapter). This sentiment of wariness was illustrated by one manager, who in the car on our way to a staff meeting after my first phase of interviews, said "*Give me the worst*". Meaning I should soften the blow by telling the person beforehand about my most negative findings concerning the department. The comment made me wary about how I had approached the gatekeepers in the first place. While preparing myself for the meeting with the research participants perhaps I had forgotten that the gatekeepers would indirectly also be part of the field and develop their own relation to my research. Edwards (2013) argues that trust is not a thing but a process of leaping across the gap of doubt. The gap is wider, and thus the leap has to be larger, where the persons involved are unknown to each other, as was the case between me and the informal gatekeepers. As this gap can be bridged by friendship or a demonstration of professional expertise I can, in hindsight, see the value of reflecting more on how to ensure a trustful relationship with both formal and informal gatekeepers.

Working with interpreters

For the purpose of the interviews I sometimes had to work with interpreters, a group who are often positioned in research as (informal) gatekeepers (Edwards, 2013). Understanding a language is more than just understanding the words; it is about linguistic capital, the capacity to invoke reception as discussed in Paper 2, about having a cultural understanding of the meaning behind the words (see Berg, 2011). Consequently, the interpreter controls access to the field in a practical as well as epistemological sense. Moreover, during the interviews the interpreters sometimes had to assist in resolving misunderstandings, between the girls and myself, by explaining the context in which the questions were asked or received. For example, following a

comment from the one of the girls, indicating she had not fully understood the meaning of secrecy in the context of the interview, the interpreter demanded a break to further explain the concept and make sure the girl had given informed consent.

Working with interpreters in research can be tricky, however. Edwards (2013) argues that there is a tendency among researchers to view the interpreter as a representative of his or her imagined community, emphasising their cultural competence and assumed access, whereas the researcher might be viewed with suspicion, as an outsider. At the same time, an interpreter is expected to be a neutral instrument for communication. In reality, the alignment of an interpreter depends on power and trust in the relations among all parties involved, the researcher, the researched and the interpreter (Edwards, 2013; Ingvarsdotter et al., 2012). Depending on the context of the communication the interpreter can position himself or herself in relation to other agents in the interaction, emphasising different characteristics or utilising different forms of capital to (inadvertently) alter the conversation (Edwards, 2013; Ingvarsdotter et al., 2012). The interpreter might also have other interests in how a specific group or community is perceived through research, being, as discussed above, indirectly researched themselves (Edwards, 2013). For example, in the case of this study, questions about religion could perhaps cause an interpreter to be wary of adding to Islamophobic discourses. Again, I believe there is a need to reflect on how the gap of doubt can be bridged in order to create a trustful relationship with gatekeepers - including interpreters.

The choice of whether to use an interpreter or not was left to the girls and for all but three of the interviews in the first phase an interpreter was present either in the room or on the phone. For some of the girls, having an interpreter present seemed to create a sense of security. Some of them explained that while they could understand my questions as they were posed in Swedish, they preferred formulating their answers in their native language. Despite the interpreter being key to the interview partners understanding each other in the first interviews I also found that working with a third voice in the conversation caused other problems (Kvale et al., 2009; Wadensjö, 1992; Ingvarsdotter et al., 2012). The variations in interpretation, from 'best practice' of first person speech (see Edwards, 2013) to recounting narratives, also affected the conversational flow, and while it was a prerequisite for the interviews in some

cases, not using an interpreter opened up other conversational paths. In the interviews conducted without an interpreter, language apps, online dictionaries, pictures et cetera guided the conversation through a broader spectrum of thought than perhaps a clear-cut translation would have done. At first glance the lack of a common vocabulary could be problematic; however, discussing the meaning of a word like “rwh alhaya” (life spirit) also prompted a deeper discussion on religion. In that way, not understanding led to understanding more. Taking the interpreter out of the picture in the second phase also seemed to enable the girls to express themselves more freely as the hierarchy of linguistic capital became disrupted (Edwards, 2013; Ekström et al., forthcoming). Another issue was the shortage of interpreters speaking the correct language. The interpreters were all contacted through the municipality’s centre for interpretation and translation and were the same interpreters used by, organisations such as the social services. Still, there were instances where the interpreter and the participant did not fully understand each other. Even though care was taken to meet the participants’ requests for particular dialects (e.g. Dari from Afghanistan, Kurmanji or Arabic from Syria) we could not always accommodate them. Besides, some interpreters were not as fluent in Swedish as could have been desired. The participants’ own knowledge of Swedish however, also served as a link as they could sometimes chime in when they felt they had not been interpreted correctly.

To conclude, working with interpreters is sometimes necessary in order not to exclude certain peoples’ narratives. It can also be helpful in broadening understanding of culture-specific expressions or practices, thus facilitating interpretation and analysis of the interviews. However, it presents some tricky challenges as well, and I believe some of them could be avoided by recognising interpreters as gatekeepers and working to establish a trustful relationship. For my own part, since I got the opportunity to do a second interview in Swedish with most of the participants, I could also revisit some of the topics we discussed in the first interview, which gave me the opportunity to verify the information I had received in the first phase.

Analysis

The process of analysis in a research project is sometimes hard to completely frame. Even though much time was spent reading, listening to and coding the

data, the analysis was an ongoing, parallel process from the beginning of the study. In this section I will first discuss my approach to transcription, seen as an early part of the analysis. Then I will move on to outline the process of coding, and will thematically categorise the data into themes relatable to a theoretical framework.

The interviews were recorded, with the permission of the participants, and transcribed into Swedish with phrases or words spoken in English transcribed in English. Passages spoken in other languages between the participants and the interpreters were not translated but noted. In transcribing the interviews, I mostly used a denaturalised approach, i.e. I have strived to capture the meaning *within* the speech rather than copying it verbatim (Oliver et al., 2005). Nevertheless, I've kept the transcription as close to the speech as possible without losing the meaning behind the words, including involuntary or nonverbal vocalisations (e.g. laughter, sighing, gestures) and response tokens (e.g. *mhm*, *mm*, *ah*, *uh*) (Oliver et al., 2005). Translating from oral language with its own set of rules, to written language with another set of rules, is itself an analytical, interpretative process involving judgement and decisions (Oliver et al., 2005; Davidson, 2009; Kvale, 1996: 165). A word can have a different meaning depending on the context, the speaker's social position or linguistic capital, and it may be received differently depending on who is the recipient (Bourdieu, 1977). Even in verbatim transcription the researcher's analytical and/or political bias might influence the narrative of the interviewee (Davidson, 2009). Understanding speech also involves understanding the meaning behind a tone of voice, stuttering, emphasis, accompanying body language et cetera, thus transcription is always analytical and always susceptible to bias (Oliver et al., 2005).

The choice of a denaturalised approach is partly based on the linguistic context of the interviews as the parties communicating were fluent to a different extent in different languages. Even though the participants in this study could communicate well enough in Swedish to make themselves understood, they sometimes mixed up words or had trouble with pronunciation. Accents, dialects or broken language can be considered value-added markers of cultural capital that might influence how the researcher or the reader thinks about the speaker (Ekström et al., forthcoming; Oliver et al., 2005; Siziba, 2014; Creese, 2010). As broken language is not significant as regards the thoughts and

reasoning behind the words, interpreting speech verbatim could be to misconstrue its meaning. On the other hand, making too many adjustments during the transcription process might result in white-washing the data or erasing the voice of the participant (Oliver et al., 2005). As discussed in Paper 2, understanding is a mutual process which demands an effort on behalf of the listener as well as the speaker. Therefore, I have chosen to correct some grammatical and vocabulary mistakes based on my analysis of other variables such as the sentence as a whole, the context in which the words are spoken and the atmosphere during the conversation. For the purpose of publication in English, quotes from the interviews have been translated by me, and here, as in the transcription process, my aim has been to keep the essence of the quote while keeping it as close to the original speech as possible. The multiple languages involved in this research process clearly limited my interpretation. However, I believe that by being part of the whole process of interviewing and transcribing, I also had the opportunity to acquire a broader understanding of the girls' narratives.

When the data from the first phase of interviews was gathered and transcribed, I began a thematic analysis using NVivo (Braun and Clarke, 2006), inspired by some elements of systematic text condensation (Malterud, 2012). The term 'thematic analysis' has been criticised for being too vague or encouraging an "anything goes" attitude towards analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I believe however, that if applied with thoughtfulness and care, thematic analysis can be a valuable tool in exploring empirical material (Braun and Clarke, 2006). My choice of conducting a thematic analysis was mainly due to the complicated composition of the material from the first phase of interviews. As discussed earlier, the use of interpreters had some effects on the flow of the conversations, and the atmosphere during the first interviews was less relaxed than the interviews conducted in the second phase. Consequently, I viewed other ideas for analysis, for example discourse analysis, as difficult as the spoken language itself was 'compromised'. It is easy to consider the material from the second phase richer as the participants were more comfortable with the language and about sharing their stories. In hindsight however, I believe that richness in parts depended on a methodological viewpoint. The material from the second phase indeed gave more opportunities to choose and combine different kinds of analysis while the material from the first phase presented more of a challenge. In future engagement with the material I can see the

benefit of broadening the analytical approach -especially if the speech in the participants' native languages were translated.

In conducting the analysis I began by noting down general impressions after each interview as well as immediate thoughts and interesting themes or stories. Before I started transcribing I also listened to the interviews to get a more distanced, overall impression i.e. a bird's-eye view, of the atmosphere, including tone of voice, my own participation, the rhythm of our interaction et cetera (Malterud, 2012; Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). When I began transcribing, I kept notes on thoughts and ideas, along the way, that sometimes later served as a basis for coding. The basic coding was done using NVivo but during my work on the transcribed interviews I alternated between manual coding (with pen and paper) and coding in NVivo. My coding developed as it progressed, encompassing both semantic and latent themes, sometimes recurring throughout the research material, but I also took note of particularly interesting or important content (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Malterud, 2012). After gathering codes into themes that were then explored separately, focusing on the narrative within the themes, I sometimes returned to the birds' eye perspective by re-listening to the interviews (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). The process was reminiscent of the hermeneutic circle in moving back and forth between detailed attention to certain paragraphs or expressions, and the repeated listening to the interviews as a whole.

The whole analytical process could be seen as abductive, described by Timmermans and Tavory as being "informed theoretical agnostic" (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012: 169). That is, though I was indeed influenced by my own social positioning and research background I did not set out to explore a ready-formed research question. Instead, I worked using a continual, reflexive familiarisation of both theories and data, a process that situates the analysis between what is observed and existing theories, with and openness towards new theoretical conceptions (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). In this way I could be open towards themes that might enter the interview in a seemingly arbitrary way (not meaning they were in fact arbitrary) even if they were not linked to the questions asked in the interviews.

The interpretation of the girls' experiences should be recognised as a cooperative process, as the stories relayed to me had already been interpreted

by the girls themselves. Arendt (1958) claimed that understanding, and thus interpreting, is part of the human condition (Borren, 2013; Arendt, 1958). Likewise, Gadamer argued that it is almost impossible to step out of the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 1960/1975); we are constantly interpreting our experiences and the world around us. It is inevitable then, that my analytical process partly rests on interpretations made by the girls. Furthermore, because the interviews were conducted in two phases, we could together revisit their interpretations. In an abridged manner, the interview process can be summarised as alternating between their interpretations of lived experiences, my interpretations of their stories and (during the second interviews), our shared discussions on my interpretations of their experiences, together with their elaborations. The final steps of the analysis were taken by me during my own process of working with the research material. From the point of view of exploring my research questions, the girls provided parts of a whole they had not themselves been able to completely overlook since they were individuals with different experiences. Nevertheless, in our discussions during the second phase they got to comment on my interpretation of the whole as we returned to themes of interest from the body of empirical material. With my own background of growing up in the society they had recently entered, the process could also be described as in terms of attempting to merge different horizons (Gadamer, 1960/1975). In the interviews we instantly became part of our respective interpretations as, again, interpreting experiences is part of the human condition.

Ethical considerations

The formal ethical requirements for this study have been approved by the ethical board at Linköping University. During the research process only personal information that was relevant to the study or necessary to contact the participants was gathered. Care was taken to protect the identity of the participants by replacing their names with numbers in the transcriptions, and with pseudonyms in published material. The code key for identification of the participants has been kept in password protected storage only accessible by myself. The interview recordings have likewise been kept in password protected storage after being erased from any portable devices.

Moving further from formal requirements, however, ethical practice in research is something ongoing and flexible. It is about trustworthiness and interpersonal validity as much as moral principles concerning respect for persons, beneficence and justice (Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Bhattacharya, 2007). In this section I will discuss and reflect upon some of the ethical quandaries that were came up when doing this study. I begin by outlining some ethical concerns related to the girls' intersectional positions as minors and refugees and the possibility of free and informed consent. Then I move on to my own position as a researcher, and finish with a short note on my approach to other stake holders.

Researching “vulnerable and incompetent” subjects

The heterogeneity within the group of unaccompanied female minors who participated in this study has been discussed in a previous chapter. However, recognising the diversity within the group could also be considered both a question of ethical positioning (how do we categorise individuals in a group and by what means (Crenshaw, 1991; Mohanty, 1984) as well as an ethical technicality (do they require different procedures in order to, give informed consent).

One trait that all the girls had in common was their legal status as minors. In the terminology of the European Commission they were therefore “vulnerable” research subjects (European_Comission, 2010). The concept itself should be problematised as being in a vulnerable situation is not the same as being vulnerable. Their position as minors and migrants, being in the process of applying or waiting for residence permits, however, clearly put them in a vulnerable position. They had an ambiguous legal status which consequently put them in an unequal power relation with several authorities in Sweden. Given their various backgrounds and my own lack of similar experience, I found it difficult to anticipate how the interviews would affect the girls. When I got started though, my impression was that the girls were good at steering the conversations towards subjects they themselves thought were agreeable or interesting to talk about (and the scope of these subjects noticeably broadened during the second phase of interviews). Nevertheless, I still felt that there was risk of emotional stress from talking about sensitive topics. This was something that I discussed with the social services before the

interviews and the social workers were considered as a support back-up. Before the interviews I also considered the risk of igniting false hope if the girls did not fully understand that participating in the study would not change their situation in regard to the Swedish authorities. However, my experience from the interviews was that the girls were well informed about how different authorities were responsible for different aspects of their situation as asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors.

Their varying understanding of Swedish and English, as well as their varying understanding of research practices (e.g. the role of the researcher and the impartiality of the university as an institution, customs of ethical conduct et cetera) one could argue, also made them into “non-competent” research subjects (again the terminology of the European Commission could be questioned) (European_Comission, 2010). The point here is that due to their varying linguistic and cultural understanding the girls who took part in this study were entitled to a more comprehensive introduction to the purpose of the study and their rights as research participants.

Following the categorisation of the research participants under the dubious, yet useful labels of ‘vulnerable’ and ‘non-competent’, I believe it is important to problematise the concept of informed consent. One can argue that informed consent is a culturally-biased practice and, at least originally, a Western practice based on Western principles and assumptions of individualism and free will (Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Bhattacharya, 2007). There is always the possibility that a person may feel compelled to consent based on expectations (justified or not) of benefits or repercussions following the decision. To demand a signature from a participant might make the researcher feel secure but the implications of signing a written document depend on trust in the ritual of putting one’s name on a paper and in the trustworthiness of those who receive the signature (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017; Bhattacharya, 2007; Marshall and Rossman, 2011). Furthermore, a written letter of consent also assumes literacy in the language of the document and full understanding of the terminology used to describe the principles of consent. For this study I assumed that the participants could either read themselves or that they were in contact with a person (either their legal guardian or their social worker) who could read for them, either in their native language or in Swedish, and who could explain the content of the consent letter. Wary of their possible lack of

understanding of the written consent letter I also took care to explain the content of the letter myself both when calling to schedule the interviews and in person. Still, I was made aware that perhaps my efforts had not been enough. I will illustrate this with two examples from the interviews.

At the beginning of every interview I discussed with the participant whether she had read the consent letter and if she had any questions. Usually the answers were 'yes' and then 'no'.

I was then a little shocked when, quite far into the conversation during one of my interviews, the girl I was talking to asked me who I was and what the purpose of the interview was. I had as usual asked her, at the beginning, whether she had understood the consent letter and if she had any further questions and she had given the usual 'yes' and then 'no' answers. When she asked, I explained again. She then asked some more questions and became rather excited when she learned about my work. Her questions got me thinking about why she would not ask these questions at the beginning of the interview. I asked her why she agreed to participate when she did not know me or the purpose of the study. She answered that her social worker had told her that it could be a good idea. Another participant who I had, in my own opinion, very good conversations with told me in the second interview that during her first year in Sweden she believed that sooner or later, she would have to pay for everything she received from the Swedish state. She felt obliged to agree whenever she was asked to do something because she felt both gratitude and a pressure to give something back.

I believe both these examples are good examples of the complexity involved in dealing with free and informed consent (European_Commission, 2010). While the first example shows a not unproblematic trust in both me and the girl's social worker, the girl reacted for some reason in the middle of our conversation and wanted to verify what she had consented to. The second example shows how consent might be compelled by a feeling of obligation or a fear of repercussions. The two examples also illustrate the process of overbridging the trust gap during the interview (Edwards, 2013). As we got to know each other, these girls came to trust me enough to ask the questions and share their perspectives. I think it is important to discuss the expectations and the impressions of the researcher as an intermediary regarding issues of

consent. What we say and what questions we ask will have a greater effect on the participants than a written letter of consent (Bhattacharya, 2007).

The position of the researcher and other interests

As the one who designs and conducts the research the researcher decides, in a way, what is deemed noteworthy and whose voice should be heard. Together with funders and institutions, researchers can decide what questions should be asked, what issues should be investigated and what groups of individuals will be visible (Harding, 1986). Researchers use their own experiences when interpreting findings in order to comprehend what we cannot see. We also decide how results should be interpreted (Moses and Knutsen, 2007).

One of the first question I had to ask myself was: Whose experiences am I looking at? Throughout this study I have myself been balancing on the verge of creating or reinforcing a stereotypical other (Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012). As my starting point was an assumption that a lack of a female perspective severely undermines the understanding of how unaccompanied minors experience the Swedish reception system, I demarcated the focus of my study by grouping together individuals with different backgrounds, on the basis of age, migrant status and sex. This category of unaccompanied female minors is somewhat problematic as there are many diverging factors (e.g. education, socio-economic background, religion) to consider when it comes to unaccompanied minors as individuals, factors that could be relevant to how they approach the new context of the Swedish society. Doing research in the arena of othering (Krumer-Nevo, 2002; Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012), with me being the other to them (Swedish, adult, white, researcher), there are pitfalls to avoid along the way. There is, for example, a risk of appropriating and “colonising” the complexities and conflicts of these girls’ experiences by grouping them together under a common label (Mohanty, 1984). Categorising in research is necessary as part of understanding and deconstructing normative social structures (Orupabo, 2014) but without a reflexive approach to how these groups are constructed, there is a risk of excluding the individuals from the narrative and making them invisible in their own stories (Mohanty, 1984). Therefore, my aim in this study has been to highlight *their* stories of agency and resistance, focusing both on differences within the group as well as common traits and experiences that can indicate more general findings.

I believe it is also worth mentioning other stakeholders in this study. The study has been designed and conducted by me without direct influence from other stakeholders. However, as I have been working on a research project funded by a Swedish municipality I have (just like some of my research participants) felt obliged to give something back – a feeling that I believe is both morally right and ethically problematic. On one hand it has been a drive for me, and I am convinced that it is important as a researcher to give something back to society, and to the people we involve in research, in my case, unaccompanied minors. At the same time, I value my independence as a researcher, and I have struggled with balancing that independence with providing the municipality with useful results. This study, however, has rendered a broader scope of findings and insights than can be presented in one thesis. This had led my research to sometimes separate into parallel processes where my main focus has been this thesis (which I hope will be a valuable contribution to the practical field as well) and as a second track I have tried to present findings more in line with the particular interests of the social services in other fora. To conclude, this thesis is the result of my own academic curiosity developed in interaction with the girls who participated in the study.

Summary of studies

Paper 1

"I don't think you will understand me because really, I believe"— unaccompanied female minors re-negotiating religion

The purpose of this study was to explore how unaccompanied girls negotiate religion in a new context after migrating to the highly secular context of Sweden from countries where religion plays an integral part in everyday life. What strategies and resources do they use when their religion suddenly becomes something that has to be legitimised and explained?

Religion has been a contested subject in previous research on migration, being seen as both a bridge and a barrier to integration. Religion has also proven to be a compelling coping strategy, serving as both a link to the past and a source of strength and hope for the future, for unaccompanied minors who find themselves in a new country without the support structure of their closest family.

The paper applies a perspective of lived religion as an analytical frame. The concept of lived religion transcends hegemonic definitions of what religion is and sheds light on the perspectives and practices of marginalised groups. Lived religion is defined as the individual perspectives and embodied practices of religiosity in everyday life. Thus, religion and religious practices in this paper are defined by how the girls themselves talk about religion.

In order to understand how religion became a source of friction between the girls and the Swedish majority society, Foucault's concept of gaze was used as an analytical tool, in combination with Hooks theory of oppositional gaze. Gaze is understood as an invisible tool of power in the form of surveillance and instigation of self-regulation. Oppositional gaze is the action of looking back and situating the invisible gaze, thereby deconstructing subjective perspectives masked as objective truths.

The findings showed religion to be an integral part of the girls' lives as well as an important coping mechanism. However, several of the girls also experienced that religion became something they needed to define, explain

and legitimise in their new context. The narratives of the girls illustrate how their religious identities and practices marked them as the other, and sometimes as the other among the others as their religious practices changed over time and became foreign even to their old communities. In negotiating their lived religion, the girls in the study maintained their integrity and developed an oppositional gaze, critically looking back at those who questioned their religious adherence or embodied practices. They found strategies for keeping their own identities and being themselves, while both resisting and adapting to change.

Paper 2

“Call me and ask if you want more information. I’ve got many stories you know” –inhabited silence among unaccompanied female minors.

This paper focuses on inhabited silence among unaccompanied female minors. Inhabited silence, or poetic silence is a term used by Mazzei (2003) to describe that which is untold or unspoken. As opposed to the absence of communication inhabited silence holds a communicative meaning. In previous research, silence among unaccompanied minors has often been attributed to their experiences as refugees; seen as an effect of either past trauma or continued mistrust, or it has been explained as a way of adapting their stories to narrow migration policies.

The paper analyses narratives of inhibited silence from the point of view of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1977). It follows previous research on the embodiment of language (Siziba, 2014; Creese, 2010) and the discourse of the Swedish language as a marker for inclusion and a “key” to integration.

The study demonstrates how the girls’ linguistic capital was affected by how the Swedish language is reciprocally tied to a normative Swedish identity. As young refugees they were positioned as non-Swedish, which hampered their linguistic capital. Even though they could speak Swedish they were perceived, and perceived themselves as non-fluent, which affected their communicative relationship to both peers and the authorities. However, the study also shows how the girls employed other strategies to control their narratives and tell their stories. Silence was used both as a way to control conversation and to resist complying with stereotypical descriptions of themselves. Silence could also be seen as a way of safeguarding their integrity and identity. The findings also

suggest that as refugees the girls were seen through a group habitus rather than as individuals in communication. For some this had a silencing effect while for others it gave them a position to speak from.

Discussion

Previous research on the Swedish discourse around immigrant women and girls outlines a linear narrative around the relationship between Sweden and those perceived as the other (Carbin, 2010; Brune, 2006; Knocke, 1991; Ålund and Alinia, 2011). The narrative revolves around the assumption that, to become integrated, the other must move away from her troublesome past and (unquestioningly) embrace the characteristics of a Swedish identity, e.g. learn the Swedish language and adapt and conform to Swedish norms. Furthermore, it suggests that to fully become part of the Swedish society they must renounce their background (their history and the scenery they came from), in other words, part of their identity. The narrative is about liberation as a prerequisite for inclusion, yet it leaves little room for questioning within and against the narrative itself, as questioning is understood as submission to one's past rather than agency and reflection.

Papers 1 and 2 have addressed different aspects of the construction and negotiation of the othered relationship, as well as the strategies employed by the girls in order to negotiate their othered position. In this chapter I will build on those findings and develop the discussion further, aided by the framework of Todorov's typology. The dimensions in Todorov's typology (axiological, praxiological and epistemic) are, as explained in chapter 3, interlinked, and thus the following discussion will be as well. I will begin by discussing the implications of being perceived as the other in the context of this study and from there move on to a discussion on how otherness is negotiated.

Being put in a place without speech

Coming back to the quote by Bourdieu in the introduction of this thesis, I will use this heading as an image for how perceptions of othered contexts metaphorically put individuals in places without speech.

Interpretation through an othered context

Beginning with Todorov's epistemic dimension; the findings presented in Papers 1 and Paper 2 suggest that the girls participating in this study were often seen through the normative perception of an already othered context, for example being interpreted as a Muslim, African or refugee. It is implicit in the othering that the knowledge of that context is influenced by a style of thought that creates the othered context as an opposing image to a perceived self. The epistemological and ontological divide that Said (1978) described, and which has been shown to be present in Swedish media and political discourse (Brune, 2006; Carbin, 2010), is also manifested in the girls' experiences of being under a normative gaze or being questioned (Ekström et al., 2019). Furthermore, in the situations they described, visual attributes linked to an othered context seemed to be understood as artefacts of that context, i.e. as paraphernalia in the scenery. For example, the veil, became an (disposable) attribute of an othered (Muslim) context, rather than an object of transcendent value chosen by the girl wearing it.

The epistemic prevalence of context over the individual perspective affects the axiological and the praxiological dimension. Given the Swedish self-image as a place of modernity and equality in contrast to what is perceived as traditional and more patriarchal other(s), being associated with these othered contexts implicitly contains a *judgement* of the other as inferior. Moreover, in being reduced from a subject to part of a scenery their agency has been *disregarded*. Here I see the interconnectedness of the three dimensions of othering, as discussed by Todorov, as being manifested in the lack of linguistic capital. This is clear in how, when the girls try to correct misconceptions about their choices, their agency has already been disregarded and they speak from a subaltern position. Consequently, the place without speech could just as well be Sweden, as the place without speech emerges when the context is allowed to speak for the individual rather than the other way around.

Developing an understanding of otherness

“You know what? I heard there are places where you... eat people, like drink their blood. I thought, maybe it was here [giggles].” Muna 16, 2nd interview

“I didn’t know anything [about Sweden], I think... I don’t know if my brother knew some stuff. If he googled Sweden or something.” Dunya 16, 2nd interview

These two quotes are taken from the second interviews with Muna and Dunya. In response to a question about what she knew about Sweden and what she thought upon her arrival, Muna lowered her voice and with a hint of embarrassment told me about her fear of cannibals. As a response to a similar question Dunya told me that she had never heard about Sweden before her migration. She had travelled across Europe with her brother with the aim of going away from something rather than moving towards something.

It became clear during the interviews that the girls themselves, in general, knew very little about Sweden before they moved here. They had not actively taken part in the decision to migrate and, for some of them, the final destination on their migration was not planned ahead. Therefore, their preconceptions about Swedish society, prior to their arrival, were rather vague. Even though they were reflecting on what they described as the “kindness” of the Swedish state that allowed them asylum, some of them also criticised what they thought of as unfair migration policies or misconduct of the Swedish authorities (with a slightly more critical attitude in the second interviews). Though grateful for being in a comparatively safe country and for the support they had received, they did not seem to share the Swedish self-image of a good nation promoting equality and freedom, or any notion of Swedish superiority. Instead, in learning more about the Swedish society, they also learned, through remarks and questions, how they themselves deviated from a normative Swedish identity. As discussed in Paper 1, religion became a key attribute in how the girls were perceived as the other in the Swedish context. Here, the Swedish discourse around religion in general, and Islam in particular, overshadowed the girls’ own experiences of lived religion. In Paper 1, this is illustrated in the quote by Najah (p. 9) where she remarks that there are not many Muslims in Sweden, which explains why she received captious questions. Similarly, Ifrah’s quote in Paper 2 (p. 16) and Hibaaq’s quote (p. 15) demonstrate how the girls were aware of how they were perceived through the context of being refugees and therefore amenable to pity, while also expected to be unassuming. This journey, from having no or little knowledge about Sweden and Swedish society to realising how they themselves were being perceived as different was both abrupt, due to their relatively recent migration, and subtle, in for example the way the normative gaze found

expression. Still, the girls showed a critical awareness in how they talked about managing any friction caused by these differences. Coming back to the axiological dimension, the girls showed that they were aware of how their perceived differences were sometimes seen as characteristics of inferiority. However, they did not share that view and they did not want to conform to a constructed Swedish identity by forsaking their own. Instead they chose different means of negotiating their position within the othered relationship.

Negotiating othering

The girls learn, through an oppositional gaze, how an othered context takes prominence over their own stories. In a way, the oppositional gaze makes them aware of being in a place without speech. Though not using this particular metaphor, they explain why others fail to listen or pay attention to them as a consequence of them being too young, being a Muslim, being a refugee, or being non-fluent in Swedish.

Still, by analytically looking back, the girls' own analysis pointed to a lack of knowledge (and understanding) among Swedes as a possible source of xenophobic or Islamophobic behaviour. Furthermore, they were able to extricate their own experiences from the othered relationship and, rather than following the dominant style of thought, they attempted to disassociate themselves from it. Consequently, they resisted othering by keeping true to their own experiences rather than adapting to or internalising a hegemonic discourse. The oppositional gaze is key in that it creates an understanding of subjective constructions as constructions and not objective truths (Hooks, 2010). Developing an oppositional gaze also gives the girls an understanding of the epistemic dimension in their relationship to others that they can act upon.

Coming back to Krumer-Nevo's (2002) concept of 'the arena of othering' and the process of gaining the prerogative to define, rather than being defined, the girls often found themselves losing that contest. The findings illustrated in Paper 2 suggested that the girls' attempts at verbalising their resistance to being interpreted through an othered context, by for example explaining their actions and choices, were not always successful. While the girls initially blamed the failure to communicate upon themselves and explained it by their

lack of fluency in Swedish, they also reflected on how their communication was received. As discussed in Paper 2, assigning blame for failure in communication is a privilege that comes with having the higher linguistic capital. In this case linguistic capital is closely linked to a Swedish identity, through the constructed self-image of Sweden against those perceived as its others. Language itself is understood through the epistemic dimension of the othered relationship, and depending on how the other is perceived, words will have different (or no) meaning.

The reciprocity of linguistic interaction can be understood through the praxiological dimension, to what extent the conduct towards the other is attentive, ignorant or imposing. Here, the lack of linguistic capital makes it difficult for the girls to alter the epistemic dimension that is deeply infused by a style of thought that positions the Swedish identity as superior to those constructed as the other(s); a dimension they do not necessarily agree with, since the same narrative positions them in a metaphorical place without speech. Thus, the girls employed different techniques to oppose or try to change their othered relation(s).

In general, the girls in this study did not present themselves as the kind of radical subjects that find strength in the visibility of being recognised as the other. Instead, they chose to withdraw or distance themselves from relations where they were perceived as the other. One way of not conforming to the unproblematised stereotyping was silence. Being silent can be understood as a refusal to recreate or underpin a predisposed epistemic dimension in relation to others. Silence can also be a way of not accepting a challenge to defend oneself in interactions with others, such as peers. Distance and withdrawal were not permanent solutions however; they did not indicate an unwillingness to be part of the Swedish society, or their local communities. Rather, silence was explained as a sort of regrouping. The notion of “becoming someone” also showed how the girls, rather than accepting what could be perceived as an inferior position in relation to their others, sought strategies to change the narrative, not only around themselves but around people (girls, Muslims, refugees) like them. Most of those strategies, however, involved becoming an adult, moving away from being a minor (including the vulnerability and perceived lack of agency).

Their critical approach to adapting to Swedish norms and customs is also shown in how they explored the margins between their own identity and what they perceived as Swedish. Interpreted through an othered context their actions might look hesitant or shy as the othered relation here presupposes a linear move towards adapting to the Swedish society. However, the process of slowly trying out new things - to willingly step into the position of being the other among the others - takes courage and reflection. Oscillating between comfort zones and new contexts is another way of epistemically merging different horizons and could also be understood as a slow but insistent process of moving out from the place without speech.

Concluding remarks

The aim of this study has been to give emphasis to unaccompanied female minors' experiences of othering, and how they negotiate othered relationships in relation to their own identities. The questions this thesis has explored are: In what ways do unaccompanied female minors experience othering? What are the implications of an othered relationship? And how are their positions as the other constructed and negotiated?

I have used the imagery of a place without speech to demonstrate how the girls, in their everyday interactions, were often seen and interpreted through an othered context, in part constructed as an opposing image of the Swedish society.

To begin with, based on a theoretical understanding of the othering relationship, it is likely to be mutually reinforcing as people conform to different groups as a way of avoiding being othered. What this study shows however, is how the girls choose not to follow a pre-constructed, linear narrative of becoming 'Swedish'. Instead they demonstrate reflexivity and courage, for example by, choosing to step in- between the margins, or go beyond the limits, of different identity constructions, exploring their own identity and its relation to people around them. This underlines the importance of the position of being the other among the others. While a difficult position, being the other among the others opens up the possibility for merging horizons and expanding the margins for inclusion rather than deepening the dichotomy between 'us' and 'them'. It is a step out from the metaphorical place without speech.

Secondly, recognising each subject in the othered relationship, it also becomes clear that, to avoid creating a place without speech, communication requires reciprocity. Consequently, understanding the dimensions of the othered relationship is also about critical self-reflection and bearing in mind that what is perceived as common knowledge might just be the result of having the prerogative to define rather than being defined. Listening to the stories of the girls who participated in this study, and recognising their experiences, offers an opportunity to see a reflection of the Swedish society through their eyes.

This should also be an opportunity for revealing perceptions and practices that have been relocated to other contexts through othering.

There are also a few implications from this study for the welfare system and social service practice. In a system that grants support to people depending on how they are categorised and measured in relation to an expected, normative standard, it might be easy to fall into constructs of the other. Bearing in mind that structural othering rests on a transcendent style of thought, it is nevertheless possible to avoid constructing a place without speech by being aware of how knowledge, practices and values affect and reproduces each other in an othered relationship.

From a methodological point of view, to further explore issues of working with multiple languages would be beneficial for cross-cultural research. Furthermore, the girls in this study knew very little of Sweden before they arrived. Thus, they were not influenced by the same style of thought that shapes how Sweden or Swedish people relates to their perceived others. Therefore, a question to explore further is how living in Sweden for a longer period of time would affect the girls' perceptions and thoughts on othering, as well as their experiences. Additionally, in this study I have mainly focused on the girls' relation to what they see as part of the Swedish society. However, in the interviews they also, to some extent, spoke about other communities they still felt part of, both in Sweden and abroad. I touched briefly on this in Paper 1, but to look more closely into how their experiences from Sweden affected their relations with these communities might broaden the understanding of the girls' views on integration.

Svensk sammanfattning

Den här avhandlingen handlar om ensamkommande flickor och deras erfarenheter av att bli sedda och bemötta som 'den andre'. Studien som avhandlingen baseras på fokuserar på flickornas egna erfarenheter som nyanlända i Sverige. Som grupp har ensamkommande flickor, hittills, varit relativt osynliga inom såväl svensk media som akademisk forskning. Däremot visar tidigare forskning på att de, till följd av att de är både flyktingar, nyanlända och flickor, riskerar konstrueras som 'den andre' i relation till vad som vanligtvis uppfattas som en svensk identitet.

Studien är baserad på kvalitativa intervjuer med 11 ensamkommande flickor, i åldrarna 13 till 18 år, som kom till Sverige som ensamkommande flyktningbarn mellan 2014 och 2017. Intervjuerna gjordes i två omgångar med ett mellanrum på 9 månader till 1 år mellan den första och andra intervjuomgången. Fokus under den första omgången låg på att lära känna flickorna och utforska vad de själva bedömde som viktigt att få prata om, medan den andra omgången gav möjlighet att fördjupa diskussionen. Materialet från intervjuerna analyserades abduktivt och tematiskt. Flickornas berättelser har utforskats i relation till ett teoretiskt ramverk kring 'andragörande' (othering). Utan att förlora perspektiv på andragörande som en effekt av sociala maktstrukturer närmar sig den här studien andragörande som en ömsesidig relation genom att undersöka hur kunskap (om den andre) värderingar och beteendet interagerar och påverkar denna relation.

Slutsatserna av den här studien tyder på att ensamkommande flickor ofta förstås utifrån föreställningar av en främmande kontext. Som en konsekvens av detta blir deras egna röster inte hörda, och de ses inte fullt ut som aktiva subjekt. Metaforiskt kan detta beskrivas som att bli placerad i ett tyst rum. Samtidigt tillämpar flickorna olika strategier för att motsätta sig och motarbeta andragörande, genom att själva kritiskt tänka kring de interaktioner i vardagen där de upplever utanförskap.

Ytterligare en slutsats från studien är att flickorna själva, genom att även frivilligt positionera sig som den andre och utforska marginalerna mellan olika

identiteter, bidrar till att överbrygga dikotomier som 'vi' och 'dom', vilket kan förstås som en steg ut ur det tysta rummet.

Avhandlingen omfattar två artiklar.

Artikel 1

Artikeln fokuserar på flickornas upplevelser av att migrera från länder där religion har en integrerad roll i vardagslivet, till Sverige, där religion har en betydligt mer marginell roll i det offentliga. Artikeln fokuserar på flickornas egna erfarenheter samt vilka strategier de tillämpar för att förstå och förhandla upplevelser av att deras religion plötsligt blir något de behöver förklara och försvara.

Religion har tidigare varit ett omtvistat ämne inom migrationsforskning, och sett både som ett hinder och en brygga till integration. Religion har också visat sig fungera som ett viktigt stöd för människor som migrerar, både som en länk till hemlandet likväl och som en källa till tröst och hopp inför framtiden.

I artikeln förstås religion utifrån konceptet 'lived religion', det vill säga fokus ligger på flickornas egna erfarenheter snarare än en övergripande konceptförståelse av särskilda religioner. I analysen används Foucaults (1979) koncept 'blick' samt Hooks (2010) koncept 'motblick' för att belysa hur flickorna tolkar och förhåller sig till situationer där deras religion skapar friktion med det omgivande samhället. Artikeln visar på hur religion fortsätter att spela en viktig roll i flickornas liv även efter ankomsten till Sverige. Samtidigt blir det också något som i andras ögon konstruerar dem som den andre i relation till det svenska samhället. Artikeln visar också på hur flickorna, i sina egna reflektioner kring sin religion och sina religiösa praktiker utvecklar en motblick genom att kritisk se tillbaka på dem som ifrågasätter deras religionsutövning samt genom att hitta strategier för att behålla sin integritet.

Artikel 2

Artikeln fokuserar på tystnad i ensamkommande flickors berättelser om sina erfarenheter efter ankomst till Sverige. Tystnad förstås utifrån Mazzeis (2003) begrepp 'poetisk tystnad' (inhabited silence), det vill säga inte som en brist på kommunikation utan som någonting som har kommunikativ mening. Tidigare forskning har ofta härlett tystnad bland ensamkommande barn till traumatiska erfarenheter eller en misstro gentemot det omgivande samhällets institutioner. Det har också förståtts som ett sätt att anpassa barnens egna narrativ i syfte att följa restriktiva regler för asylprövning eller stöd från myndigheter.

Den här artikeln analyserar ensamkommande flickors tystnad och berättelser om tystnad utifrån Bourdieus (1977) teori om språkligt kapital. Studien visar på hur flickornas språkliga kapital påverkas av hur det svenska språket är sammankopplat med en normativ svensk identitet som flickorna själva inte kan göra anspråk på. Även om de kunde kommunicera på svenska uppfattade de sina egna kunskaper som bristande och tillskrev ofta sig själva skulden för andras oförståelse. Deras syn på sin egen språkliga förmåga påverkade deras kommunikation i såväl vardagsinteraktion som i interaktion med myndigheter. Studien visar däremot också på hur flickorna genom att använda olika strategier för att kompensera för bristen på språkligt kapital behöll kontrollen över sina egna narrativ. Tystnad användes både som ett sätt att inte bekräfta andras fördomar och på så sätt värna om sin egen integritet och som ett sätt att styra riktning och ämne i konversationer. Studien visar även på hur flickorna i sitt tal ibland förstods som representanter för en grupp snarare än som egna individer. För vissa av dem hade detta en tystande effekt medan andra såg det som ett sätt att stärka sitt språkliga kapital genom att använda den tillskrivna gruppidentiteten som en plattform att tala ifrån.

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