JACOB LIND

**THE POLITICS OF
UNDOCUMENTED
MIGRANT CHILDHOODS**

Agency, Rights, Vulnerability

THE POLITICS OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANT CHILDHOODS

Dissertation series in Migration, Urbanisation, and Societal Change

Doctoral dissertation in International Migration and Ethnic Relations
Department of Global Political Studies
Faculty of Culture and Society
Malmö University

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Till Mika, Ellis och Vide

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SUMMARY

In this thesis, I investigate the paradoxical characteristics of political struggles that take place in relation to undocumented migrant childhoods. Drawing on ethnographic research in Birmingham, UK and Malmö, Sweden between 2014 and 2017, I take as my starting point the everyday life experiences of children and families who have experienced living under an immanent risk of deportation. Through a critical engagement with issues of agency, rights and vulnerability, I contrast the experiences of the children and their families with the development of policies and political debates in both countries. By analysing the contexts of Birmingham, UK and Malmö, Sweden in parallel as sites of irregular migration, I contribute with a clearer understanding of the specific characteristics of how each context constructs and governs irregular migration and how this is experienced by migrants themselves.

In this thesis, I argue that a discussion about the political agency of children positioned as undocumented migrants is crucial for an informed and contextualised understanding of the political conflicts that characterise the issue of undocumented migrant childhoods. Through an analysis of the children and families' everyday struggles, I highlight the role played by children's rights as being perhaps the most important resource for enabling limited forms of support for these families from the host societies. However, I also show how the arguments and practices surrounding rights can be mobilised for migration control. In this sense, rights are "dangerous".

I suggest that if the intergenerational context of undocumented children's rights is neglected, there is a risk that the human rights of chil-

dren as well as adults will be marginalised. State actors arguing for the rights of undocumented migrant children often attempt to strengthen children's deservingness by portraying their parents as "bad parents" who put their children at risk of increased vulnerability. While the state views the parents as putting their children at risk by "hiding" them, the parents view the state as putting their children at risk by trying to deport them. Parents are then forced to act as "humanitarian agents" responsible for caring for the children when state support to the rights-bearing migrant *child* is limited by the notion of the *migrant* child at risk of deportation.

This "child migrant paradox" is an overall entrance point from which many of the political issues discussed in the thesis can be traced. The politics of rights in the context of undocumented migration is closely related to processes of vulnerability. Rights are mostly perceived as a matter of implementation while vulnerabilities, which rights are supposed to ameliorate, are mainly understood as descriptively self-evident. In this thesis, I problematise such commonplace understandings of rights and vulnerabilities and theorises them as fundamentally political concepts that need to be understood as enacted and reproduced through different political processes at different scales.

I introduce the concept of "vulnerabilisation" to capture how states first *create* vulnerability through hostile policies towards undocumented migrants, then *label* the targeted groups as vulnerable and finally utilise this vulnerability to rationalise the *governing* of undocumented migrant children and families' mobility and territorial presence. To enable children's rights to be a productive tool for challenging the repressive governing of migrant families and children, I argue in this thesis that both the children's rights paradigm and the vulnerabilisation of migrant childhoods need to be problematised and contextualised. Rights struggles by and on behalf of undocumented migrant children and families thus need to be aware of the fundamentally political character of rights and vulnerability.

SAMMANFATTNING

I denna avhandling studerar jag de paradoxala politiska processer som formar erfarenheten av att vara barn och leva i papperslöshet, det vill säga med ett ständigt överhängande hot om upptäckt och utvisning. Jag lyfter fram *aktörskap*, *rättigheter* och *utsatthet* som centrala begrepp i dessa processer. Utifrån en bred förståelse av politik som något som pågår samtidigt och i växelverkan på flera nivåer kopplar jag i avhandlingen ihop vardagliga erfarenheter med lokal myndighetsutövning och nationella politiska debatter. Studien baseras på ett etnografiskt fältarbete jag utförde mellan 2014 och 2017 i Malmö, Sverige och Birmingham, Storbritannien och jag tar som min utgångspunkt vardagslivserfarenheter hos barn och familjer som levt med ett ständigt överhängande hot om utvisning. Genom att jämföra dessa två platser framträder en tydligare bild av hur papperslöshet erfars, konstrueras och regleras i respektive stad och nation.

Jag visar i avhandlingen att både barns och vuxnas mänskliga rättigheter riskerar att marginaliseras om papperslösa barns rättigheter inte sätts in i sin intergenerationella kontext. När statliga aktörer argumenterar för papperslösa barns rättigheter gör de ofta detta genom att framställa barnens föräldrar som ”dåliga föräldrar” som bidrar till sina barns utsatthet. Medan staten anser att föräldrarna utsätter sina barn för risker genom att ”gömma” dem, så anser föräldrarna att staten utsätter barnen för risker genom att försöka utvisa dem. Genom detta tvingas föräldrarna att agera som sina egna ”humanitära aktörer” när statens stöd till det rättighetsbärande *barnet* begränsas av föreställningen av barnet som främst en *migrant* som hotas med utvisning. Många av de politiska ämnen som jag

diskuterar i denna avhandling kan härledas ifrån denna ”barn/migrant-paradox”.

I en kontext av irreguljär migration är politiska frågor om rättigheter tätt sammankopplade med politiska frågor om utsatthet, här förstått som komplexa processer snarare än ett statiskt fenomen. Rättigheter ses i allmänhet främst som en fråga om implementering och de utsattheter som rättigheter är menade att motverka tas i allmänhet för självklara och som empiriskt deskriptiva. Denna avhandling problematiserar sådana allmänna föreställningar om rättigheter och utsatthet och konceptualiserar dem som i grunden politiska koncept vilka behöver förstås utifrån hur de konstrueras och reproduceras genom olika politiska processer på olika nivåer som vardagsliv, lokal styrning, nationell debatt och internationell rätt.

Jag introducerar konceptet ”utsatthet-görande” (vulnerabilisation) i avhandlingen för att fånga hur stater först *skapar* utsatthet genom fientliga policyer i relation papperslösa och sen *betecknar* gruppen som ”utsatt” för att till sist använda sig av denna utsatthet (som staterna alltså själva skapat och betecknat) för att rationalisera *styrningen* av papperslösa barn och familjers mobilitet och territoriella närvaro.

Jag visar i avhandlingen att om barns rättigheter ska kunna vara ett användbart verktyg i kampen mot staters repressiva styrning av papperslösa barn och familjer så behöver såväl barnrätts-paradigmet som utsatthet-görandet av barndom i papperslöshet synliggöras, kontextualiseras och problematiseras. Rättighetskamper utkämpade av och för papperslösa barn och familjer behöver därför föras med en medvetenhet om att ”rättigheter” och ”utsatthet” är fundamentalt politiska begrepp.

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In quarantine, Ekenäs, August 2020

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BBC:</i>	<i>British Broadcasting Corporation</i>
<i>CRC:</i>	<i>Convention on the Rights of the Child</i>
<i>EU:</i>	<i>European Union</i>
<i>ICE:</i>	<i>Immigration Compliance and Enforcement</i>
<i>NGO:</i>	<i>Non-Governmental Organisation</i>
<i>NHS:</i>	<i>National Health Service</i>
<i>NRPF:</i>	<i>No recourse to public funds</i>
<i>OECD:</i>	<i>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</i>
<i>PICUM:</i>	<i>Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants</i>

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

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1. INTRODUCTION

In August 2017, the Church of Sweden in Malmö organised a summer camp for a group of families. The camp was part of a programme that had been going on for a few years supporting migrants at risk of deportation. According to one of the deacons, a key aim of the programme was to help children suffering from trauma rebuild trust and security. I had participated in the programme as a researcher and volunteer over the previous four years and I knew most of the families that were present, but this time I was unable to attend. The strange and frightening events that took place at the camp have been described to me by the organisers and participants afterwards.

While travelling in minibuses from Malmö to a national park in the North-western part of the region of Skåne, some of the participant parents noticed a car following them, but they assumed the car was part of the travel company. About an hour after the church workers and the families had arrived at a scenic hostel in the forest and dinner was about to be served, one of the organisers noticed some people passing by the kitchen window outside. He pointed at the suspicious-looking visitors and jokingly told one of his colleagues, “perhaps they are policemen, they can’t be, right?” But just as he finished his sentence, they witnessed how the men showed their police badges to the people at the barbeque outside. The colleague thought to herself in despair, “so now it is over...”

Figure 1. A policeman at the raid playing football with one of the children of the families. Photo by one of the organisers of the camp (used with permission from the photographer and the child's parents).

At least 30 Border Police officers, some with police dogs, surrounded the hostel on all sides. As they circled the site, they summoned the families to the courtyard, making sure they were all in sight at all times. One police officer guarded the bathroom door that was kept ajar as the children and parents made use of it one by one. The atmosphere was strange and unsettling. Some of the older children were feeling stressed and tried to talk to the leading officers about what would happen to them but

received few answers. Some of the younger children who did not understand what was going on engaged in a game of football with some of the police officers (see *Figure 1*). A makeshift internal border control office was set up in the dining room and the families were interrogated one by one as the food in the kitchen turned cold. Five of the six families at the camp were arrested and brought back to Malmö that same night. After several of the family members had spent some time in detention while the police organised the necessary documentation, all five families were deported.

**

Less than a year earlier, in November 2016, the Border Police in Southern Sweden had taken the unprecedented decision to request information about the postal addresses of undocumented migrant families from the Social Services in Malmö. These addresses had been collected as the families approached the Social Services to apply for food and rent support. According to an earlier decision made by the Malmö city council in 2013, undocumented migrant children and families were allowed to access this support. This decision was based on children's rights arguments grounded on the presence of the children in the city and put in place to ameliorate their specific vulnerabilities (Nordling, 2017, pp. 30–31).

It was highlighted by several of the participants in my research that the struggle to find housing was the single most difficult issue they had to deal with in their everyday lives and the rent support the participants in Malmö received at the time from the Social Services was crucial for providing some security to these families. Consequently, it was devastating to all of them when their address information was shared with the Border Police. As a result, most of the families immediately moved out of the apartments they were living in at the time and had often fought hard to find. One of the families whose address had been requested in November 2016 was at the time interviewed for the largest newspaper in Southern Sweden (Mikkelsen, 2016b). In the news article, the family

was portrayed as having to “hide in the forest” since the Social Services had handed over their address information to the police. This was all a result of the fact that the rights-based practice of providing social support to vulnerable undocumented migrant children and families was utilised by the Border Police to enable efficient border police work.

Several of the families at the summer camp had already experienced the increased activity by the police in their efforts to locate and deport them during the nine months that had passed between the sharing of information and the raid. The same family that was in the newspaper after their address had been shared with the police was interviewed again after they had been arrested at the camp and were put in detention (Mikkelsen, 2017). As I spoke to the families and deacons after the raid it was clear that the raid had been traumatic and had created increased vulnerability in the families and children present at the camp. The camp was organised with the purpose of providing these vulnerable children and their families a break and enable the children to have their right to rest and play fulfilled (rights that are made explicit in the Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC]). This right-based activity was then utilised to enable efficient border police work.

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The above events were recorded as part of my ethnographic work that this thesis builds upon. Apart from following a number of families and children at risk of deportation for around four years between 2013 and 2017 in Malmö, Sweden, I also spent six intense months in Birmingham, UK during the winter of 2014–15 with families in similar situations. I did not experience any similarly rupturing events during my fieldwork in the UK. There the Social Services were already sharing information with the Border Police through joint databases. In the UK, the “hostile environment” introduced during Theresa May’s time as Home Secretary (Kirkup & Winnett, 2012) has put in place a long series of draconic policies targeting undocumented migrants to “motivate” them to leave the UK by purposefully creating vulnerabilities. The actions by

the Border Police in Sweden can be considered to have broken new ground in relation to what kind of police work could be considered legitimate in relation to Sweden's self-image and reputation of being a "humanitarian superpower". The UK has not cultivated a similar position and similar actions would most likely not be considered as controversial there. Still, in both countries, the state is simultaneously the creator (through hostile policies and practices) and ameliorator (through the provision of rights) of undocumented migrant children and families' vulnerabilities. In this thesis, I compare the two countries' approaches to undocumented migrant childhoods and show how their differences should, in many ways, be understood as generally confirming how the phenomena of irregular migration exposes core paradoxes characteristic of Western nation states.

The cover image of this thesis is a section of a picture portraying a refugee family that is commonly seen at migrant rights demonstrations together with the slogans of organisations such as *Refugees Welcome*.¹ The picture continues on the back of the book, with the father in front and the mother in the middle, who is holding the hand of the child on the cover as they dash forward. The image was created by artist John Hood, a Native American working for the Californian traffic authorities, and it was originally used on a road sign warning drivers of refugees crossing the highways close to the border between the US and Mexico (Volpp, 2019). Hood explained his choice of design to an interviewer, who reports: "When you think about a little girl, you are more sensitive to something horrific, he said. Plus, he said, he could give the girl pig-tails—a visual tool that made it easy to demonstrate the idea of motion, of running" (Gold, 2008). The image speaks to the content of this thesis in several ways. Hood's attempt to depict the child in a manner that would instil a sense of vulnerability in drivers, speaking to their unconscious understanding of children as helpless and innocent, which would make them drive more carefully, says something about the general positioning of children in our society today. The visualised flying motion in

¹ <http://www.rwsverige.se>

how the child gets dragged along by her parents reproduces understandings of refugee families and their intergenerational relationships, where children's position is perceived as "luggage" (Orellana et al., 2001) and just following the lead of their parents. This thesis problematises such commonplace understandings of migrant childhoods by arguing that children are active political agents in undocumented migrant families and highlighting the interdependent character of their intergenerational relationships.

The emphasis in the title of this thesis on "undocumented migrant childhoods" aims to point towards an open and inclusive approach to the experiences of children who are varyingly positioned over time as migrants and whose legal statuses are continuously changing. The categorisations of children discussed in this work primarily include, but are not limited to, asylum-seeking children from countries outside of the EU, Eastern European EU citizen children (often Roma) migrating to other EU countries and undocumented migrant children who have no legal right to remain in the host country and who may or may not have ever migrated themselves. The concept of "undocumented migrants" used throughout this thesis is then not an exclusionary, strict categorisation but is used to highlight the experience of lacking the legal right to remain in the host country, which all of my participants were experiencing or had experienced at some point in their lives. In my discussion on earlier research, I explain my approach further and inclusively conceptualise the wide variety of positions that children perceived as "migrants" hold. I also elaborate on how the experience of fearing deportation is central to the narratives and observations described and analysed in this thesis.

The findings and arguments in this thesis primarily draw on and are inspired by ethnographic research. As such, I attempt to make an empirical contribution through interviews and participant observation that deepens our understanding of the everyday lives of undocumented migrants in Birmingham, UK and Malmö, Sweden, focusing specifically on the politics that takes place across different scales and are enacted by various actors in undocumented migrant childhoods. The perspectives of the individual children themselves are of central importance for under-

standing this politics. I specifically study the everyday scale of how children navigate the positions they are being offered inside the deportation regime (De Genova & Peutz, 2010). I show how undocumented migrant children contest being positioned as potentially deportable and instead offer their own positioning of being “just like everyone else”. Undocumented migrant children’s everyday negotiations make possible a better understanding of where the lines of conflict occur in relation to the governing of migrant childhoods.

Politics takes place in the everyday lives of undocumented migrant children and families and their struggles are directly connected to political processes across different scales. The position or figure of the child is often utilised in arguments for the rights of migrants. Depictions of children as innocent and vulnerable may often seem strategic in rights struggles since they may generate compassion from the general public, but arguments for children’s rights can also, as I show in the present research, sometimes pit children against other groups, such as their parents, or be mobilised for limiting their mobility and territorial presence. Many studies of children’s rights take the *implementation* of rights as their starting point and my research confirms that children’s rights are the basis for most of the social rights that undocumented migrant families are entitled to in Sweden and the UK. However, focusing on implementation means running the risk of de-politicising the role of rights in our societies, which means one will not be properly equipped to confront arguments regarding children’s rights that primarily have the interests of the state as their agenda.

Therefore, I focus both on how rights are understood and mobilised in negotiations about the living conditions of undocumented migrants as well as on the everyday struggles of undocumented migrant families themselves. In this way, I attempt to contribute to discussions on the role that children’s rights arguments can play in political processes around the governing of migration. I also highlight the consequences of the individualisation of children’s rights that occur when undocumented migrant parents are demonised and positioned as putting their children at risk in arguments attempting to strengthen the position of children. During my fieldwork in Sweden and the UK, I saw how the interde-

pendence of children and their parents was a result of the shared vulnerabilities they experienced, which tied them closer to each other. As a consequence, I argue for an understanding of the intergenerational character of rights in which the rights of undocumented migrant children must be understood in relation to their family context. Overall, a problematisation of the use of children's rights is necessary to enable arguments that highlight and criticise the positioning of children as innocent and vulnerable and parents as harming their children, which are used to enable and justify migration control.

I am especially interested in the positioning of children, and specifically undocumented migrant children, as "vulnerable". Vulnerability is a lived, embodied experience and certain vulnerabilities can be detrimental to one's health and wellbeing. The children and families that I met in my fieldwork expressed various forms of vulnerabilities that were bestowed upon them as a result of hostile policies towards undocumented migrants. Rights can, from one perspective, be understood as a tool provided to remedy certain vulnerabilities that are considered unwanted (Turner, 2006). What makes rights and vulnerability interesting vantage points from which to analyse the politics of undocumented migrant childhoods is the fact that the state is responsible for *both* the hostile policies that create certain unwanted vulnerabilities *as well as* the provision of rights that are supposed to ameliorate these vulnerabilities. In this sense, human rights do not only ameliorate vulnerability; they can also be part of the governing of vulnerability and this governing can create additional vulnerabilities. A theoretical starting point for this thesis is thus that human rights are not inherently "good" or "bad", they are rather "dangerous" (Sokhi-Bulley, 2016), meaning that they have the potential to be mobilised for different agendas that in different ways define what vulnerabilities need to be ameliorated or not and in what ways.

"Children" and "undocumented migrants" are arguably "critical cases" (Flyvbjerg, 2001), meaning that by studying these socially constructed positions on the margins of society, one can learn something profound about our societies on a more general level. Both children and undocumented migrants are recognised as vulnerable groups in society. I attempt to make a theoretical contribution about the political character of

vulnerability and how it is created, defined and governed in this context. To understand the political processes across different scales through which undocumented migrant children and families' rights are negotiated and vulnerabilities are created, defined and governed, I engage in an analysis of the logic behind the policies and practices of the respective governments and their representatives. In this thesis, I show how different scales, from the everyday to institutionalised debates, are all connected and part of the constant struggle over the position of undocumented migrant children and families in Western societies.

This introduction began with an extended vignette from my ethnographic fieldwork and developed into a discussion about the potential theoretical contributions of this thesis. Throughout this thesis, the focus will shift back and forth between these two aspects of my work. My hope with this approach is that empirical ethnographic observations and theoretical conceptualisations will cross-fertilise each other with the understanding that no perspective is more important than another. However, the experiences my participants shared with me have been the starting point for all of the arguments I make in this thesis and I am ever grateful to them for letting me get a glimpse of their everyday lives. 16-year-old Niklas, whose family (except for him) was present at the camp mentioned above, shared some lyrics with me (translated by me from Swedish) that he had written. To me, this song captures in a few brief words some of the most central concerns and experiences of the children and families that I have had the privilege to get to know through my research and whose struggles have inspired me to write this thesis from the beginning.

I have fled across half of the world
Everything I do, I do for my family and my friends
In my heart I feel great love
I know many people who have doubted me
But now I will prove to you
That I am here to stay

Paradoxes

Paradoxes, dilemmas and ambiguities could be understood as the ontological starting point of this thesis. According to philosopher Margaret Cuonzo (2014), paradoxes are not puzzles that remain removed from everyday life but are rather very much a part of everyday life (p. 26). The main puzzle that this thesis centres around is the “child migrant” paradox, which highlights the position of undocumented migrant children in Western nation states as simultaneously *undocumented migrants* with little access to human rights and *children* with access to an extended rights catalogue. As childhood researcher Jonathan Josefsson (2016, p. 51) points out, much of the literature on migrant children’s rights points towards this paradox (Bhabha, 2001, 2009; Eastmond & Ascher, 2011; Giner, 2007; Seeberg, 2016; O’Connell Davidson, 2011; Vitus & Liden, 2010; Watters, 2006). This body of existing research has shown that by studying the paradoxical position of migrant children one can gain a better understanding of the characteristics of both childhood and statehood. In this thesis, I discuss how the child migrant paradox creates a paradoxical response from the state in which its conflicting interests of controlling migration and caring for children causes contradictory and counterproductive policy outcomes and practices.

Philosophically speaking, paradoxes can be defined as “a set of mutually inconsistent propositions, each of which seems true” (Cuonzo, 2014, p. 18, referring to Rescher, 2001). One of the most famous examples of a “real” paradox is the “liar paradox”, which arises from the claim that “what I’m now claiming is false” (Cuonzo, 2014, p. 11). The often-sloppy use of paradoxes is highlighted by Marxist scholar Bertell Ollman (2015) who observes how the concept is “dear to op-ed columnists who hope to benefit from the air of mystery and profundity that surrounds it” (p. 8). From a Marxist perspective, Ollman suggests, a class-conscious worker is someone who realises that the major paradoxes in his or her life are actually better understood as contradictions (2015, p. 22). This point is valid when law is not the starting point for understanding conflicts. However, in this study, law and state policies are central to understanding the perplexities of persons in undocumented situations. In this thesis, I mainly focus on the paradoxical aspects of the legal-

political regulations that are central to the situation that undocumented migrant children find themselves in.

It is not the aim of this thesis to identify “proper” paradoxes of illegality; I also discuss dilemmas and contradictions that do not count as strict paradoxes throughout my work, and the vocabulary of this thesis is not consistent in this manner since it is also not possible to definitely define and separate different issues as being dilemmas or paradoxes, etc. Ambivalence characterises the state of illegality and, consequently, research focusing on experiences of irregular migration will unavoidably need to engage in ambivalences and contradictions (Söderman, 2019, see also Hale, 2008). The purpose of this initial discussion on paradoxes is rather to highlight the ontological importance of paradoxes in politics and rights for this thesis.

The child migrant paradox is related to a number of adjacent paradoxes also touched upon in this thesis, of which most are more or less direct expressions of the contradictory legal obligations of states in relation to human rights. Legal and political theorist Bonnie Honig (2009) analyses the paradox of democracy and rights as related to the “paradox of politics”, which has occupied political theory at least since Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762/1968). Honig references Rousseau’s definition of the paradox of politics: “You need good men to make good law, but you need good law to make good men” (Honig, 2009, p. xvi). Rousseau approaches this paradox as a problem of *origins*—the problem of founding the republic through law. Honig disagrees, however, and suggests instead that the paradox of politics is not a paradox of founding law, or similarly founding human rights, but rather a problem of everyday political practice that “highlights the chicken and egg circle in which we are law’s authors and law’s subjects, always both creatures and authors of law” (2009, p. 3). Honig emphasises that the limits of law make us all responsible for it. The political paradox, or paradox of *origins*, teaches “that the stories of politics have no ending, they are never-ending” (Honig, 2009, p. 3). This approach to politics as never finding closure runs as a recurring theme throughout this thesis.

Earlier in this introduction, another key paradox relating to the perceived *universality* of human rights was hinted at; namely, how the state

is simultaneously the creator (through hostile policies and practices) and ameliorator (through the provision of rights) of undocumented migrant children and families' vulnerabilities. This is an expression of a paradox famously identified by philosopher Hannah Arendt (1951) in her conceptualization of "the right to have rights"; when humans are stripped down to their bare humanity (through, for example, becoming positioned as undocumented migrants or being put in concentration camps), so-called "universal" human rights are no longer able to protect them. "No paradox of contemporary politics is filled with a more poignant irony," Arendt suggests, "than the discrepancy between the efforts of well-meaning idealists who stubbornly insist on regarding as 'inalienable' those human rights, which are enjoyed only by citizens of the most prosperous and civilised countries, and the situation of the rightless themselves" (1951, p. 279). To Arendt, lacking the right to have rights means not living in a framework where one is judged by one's actions and opinions—human rights are not grounded in one's humanity but rather mainly depend on one's citizenship. Human rights are contingent on both citizenship and perceived rationality and autonomy. As Arendt puts it: "The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human" (1951, p. 299). Rather, Arendt suggests, rights are grounded in our mutual ability to guarantee ourselves equal rights. As such, we are not born equal; we become equal members of a community through this process of granting each other rights. Honig (2009) suggests that Arendt's paradox is a political call that "directs our attention repeatedly to the need for a politics whereby to express and address the paradox as it is experienced by minorities, the stateless, the powerless, and the hapless" (p. 117). This thesis is in many ways a response to Honig's call as it focusses specifically on the positionalities of *undocumented migrants* and *children* simultaneously; two positionalities that, in the eyes of general society, are respectively defined precisely by their lack of *the right to reside* in the host country and *perceived rationality* as adults-in-the-making.

All in all, legal scholar Coustas Douzinas (2007) suggests that "human rights have only paradoxes to offer" (p. 7). This academic "catchphrase" by Douzinas draws on the work of feminist philosopher and historian Joan Wallach Scott (1996), who, in turn, cites 19th century feminist

Olympe de Gouges, who suggested that the feminist movement at the time “only had paradoxes to offer” (Gouges, 1788, cited in J. W. Scott, 1996, p. 4).

Feminism was a protest against women’s political exclusion; its goal was to eliminate “sexual difference” in politics, but it had to make its claims on behalf of “women” (who were discursively produced through “sexual difference”). To the extent that it acted for “women”; feminism produced the “sexual difference” it sought to eliminate. This paradox—the need both to accept and to refuse “sexual difference”—was the constitutive condition of feminism as a political movement throughout its long history. (J. W. Scott, 1996, p. 3-4)

This paradox of *rights claiming* from a certain positionality is constitutive of feminism as a political movement, according to Scott, and it is also relatable to the political struggle of and for undocumented migrants’ rights.

I would suggest that the everyday life of undocumented migrants is “super” paradoxical. Migration scholar Roberto Gonzales (2016) shows how the juridical status of “illegality” is a “master status” that influences all other statuses and achievements of undocumented migrants. If illegality is the central defining characteristic of your societal positioning, the paradoxes of law impregnate every aspect of your everyday life. And claiming rights as an undocumented migrant reaffirms the legal category of illegality that excludes undocumented migrants from accessing rights to begin with. Through this process, undocumented migrants become “locked” into the identity defined by their subordination, in the words of political theorist Wendy Brown (2002), and “rights that eschew this specificity not only sustain the invisibility of our subordination but potentially even enhance it” (p. 423). Furthermore, through this process of further subordination, the inequalities and injustices that are understood to originate from a lack of rights tend to be depoliticised and individualised, Brown suggests. According to philosopher Ben Golder (2015), Michel Foucault also understood rights as paradoxical in a similar way, where they are “simultaneously vehicles for political claiming and sites of regulatory control” (p. 92). In this thesis, the paradox of rights claiming and regulation of and through rights is the basis for one

of the key arguments about how children's rights can be mobilised for different agendas in the context of undocumented migration.

In this section, I have briefly discussed three paradoxes of politics and rights: what I call the paradoxes of *origins*, of *universality* and of *rights claiming*. The scholars referred to above approach the question of what to do with these paradoxes in different ways. Brown (2002) is perhaps the most sceptical of them and suggests that "paradox is certainly not an impossible political condition, but it is a demanding and frequently unsatisfying one" (p. 430). Honig (2009) is aware that paradoxes are not easy to deal with, but still suggests that the paradox of origins is productive since rights "imply a world-building" that occurs continuously both inside and outside the context of juridical institutions (p. 130). The creation of cities of sanctuary for refugees or undocumented migrants is one possible political project that the paradox of origins implies that we may engage in, or a broader demand "to extend full hospitality to refugees and other nonimmigrant border crossers simply because they are here" (Honig, 2009, p. 130; see also Lundberg, 2016a). The paradox of origins points towards the openness of how the political framework of our societies is continuously (re)constructed. Honig encourages political work in relation to this paradox to try to rewrite this framework. In this thesis, I argue that undocumented migrant children's (super)paradoxical position and political agency make these openings increasingly visible.

Scott (1996) similarly focuses on the potentially productive aspects of paradoxes but also highlights how these paradoxes will not be solved. Rather, the point with theorising them is to provoke discussion, not to end debate. The paradoxes will continue to exist and the creativity that has emerged through the struggle with paradoxes has been, and continues to be, a characteristic of feminist struggles, for example (J. W. Scott, 1996, p. 175). Cuonzo (2014) has perhaps, overall, the most optimistic approach to paradoxes in terms of being useful for thinking creatively about the future. "Paradoxes force those who study and attempt to solve them to confront strong, conflicting intuitions; discover ways in which intuitions can be misleading; and analyze ways in which our ordinary concepts are problematic" (Cuonzo, 2014, p. 261). She quotes physicist Niels Bohr who (according to biographer Ruth Moore) once said: "How

wonderful that we have met with a paradox. Now we have some hope of making progress” (Moore, 1966, p. 196, cited in Cuonzo, 2014, p. 261). Additionally, Cuonzo optimistically suggests that “where there is progress, there is paradox, and both fuel each other” (2014, p. 262). Philosophers Costas Douzinas and Conor Gearty (2012) argue in a similarly optimistic fashion:

It is paradoxes, dilemmas and aporias that move human rights practice on. When lawyers, campaigners and dissidents mobilise these conflicts and tensions—between international and national law; between the claims to universality and the exclusions of particularity; between law and justice—then we can see the potential of the future and the dues of humanity shining like a strong sun through the hackneyed house of law. (p. 14)

These are some of the perspectives one could take on the central paradoxes relating to issues of politics and rights and their potential productivity. I do not choose one or the other as my approach, but the overall focus on paradoxes is the ontological starting point for all of the arguments I put forward below. My initial discussion about the paradoxes of politics and rights has served to clarify what debates this starting point mainly relates to. Throughout this thesis, I focus on paradoxes, dilemmas and ambiguities as I discuss how migrants’ rights can be fought for politically in the contradictory and hostile realities in which undocumented migrant children and their families find themselves.

Aim and research questions

To understand the paradoxical positionalities of undocumented migrant children as both *undocumented migrants* and *children*, one needs to look for the places where key political processes in this context are made visible. I do this mainly by drawing on interviews and participant observation of the everyday lives of children and families that I conducted in Birmingham, UK and Malmö, Sweden between 2014 and 2017. Through these observations, I learned from the children and their parents themselves about how they contest being positioned as potentially deportable and “bad parents” and saw how they express political agency

in the process. Their struggles drew my attention to how children's rights are a central resource in their everyday lives as they endure the effects of hostile policies. By following discussions in the media and policy developments during my research, I further understood that children's rights are also at the centre of political conflicts regarding undocumented migrant children and families. Therefore, I have complemented my fieldwork with a study of the arguments put forward in institutional debates regarding undocumented migrant children's rights. Furthermore, I saw that understandings of children's vulnerabilities more or less implicitly underpin the different positions in these conflicts, especially in relation to discussions about rights. Studying processes of vulnerability led me to further consider how the everyday experiences of being at risk of displacement are connected as spatial vulnerabilities at different scales. Thus, the overall aim of this compilation thesis is *to investigate, across different scales, the politics of undocumented migrant childhoods in the UK and Sweden through a critical engagement with the concepts of agency, rights and vulnerability*. This aim is addressed through the following four research questions:

1. How do undocumented migrant children navigate being positioned as potentially deportable in their everyday lives?
2. How can undocumented migrant children's rights be understood in relation to their intergenerational context?
3. How are the rights and vulnerabilities of undocumented migrant children mobilised by different actors?
4. How do undocumented migrant children and families experience spatial vulnerability across their life trajectories?

These four questions correspond to, and are discussed in, each of the four respective articles included in this compilation thesis. They concern different aspects and scales of the politics of undocumented migrant childhoods. Throughout my study, I draw together these various scales and their intersections, comparing and contrasting them to show how politics takes place in many aspects of the highly politicised context of irregular migration.

Outline

In the following chapters, I will discuss key concepts from the literature on childhood, rights and migration and construct an overall theoretical framework (chapter 2), present my methodological approach (chapter 3) and provide the contextual background of Sweden and the UK (chapter 4), before I make a summary of the articles (chapter 5), which is followed by the articles in full (chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9). In the conclusion (chapter 10), I discuss the aim of the thesis in relation to the articles by drawing on the background and theoretical framework and reflect on the implications for future political work and research.

As this is a compilation thesis in which the articles are structured in line with established academic article formats, each article has a discussion on methodology and its own theoretical framework, and hence there is a risk of repetition. I have tried to avoid this by organising the chapters on earlier research and theory (chapter 2) as well as background (chapter 4) so that they speak to the whole of the thesis, including all of the articles and the discussion in the concluding chapter of the thesis. The earlier research and theory chapter (2) discusses the central debates and contextualises the theoretical concepts used in the articles in more detail. Also, the methodology chapter (3) develops issues that are only discussed briefly in the articles.

During my PhD studies, I published additional stand-alone articles that are not included in this compilation thesis. However, the methodology chapter (4) builds partly on a published method article (Lind, 2017); the discussion in the conclusion is partly inspired by another article I took part in writing with a number of colleagues (Hermansson et al., 2020) and some of the other additional articles (Lind & Persdotter, 2017; Lundberg & Lind, 2017) are referred to and are drawn upon to construct the argument presented in *Article 3*.

2. EARLIER RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis primarily connects three different research fields: *childhood research*, *human rights research* and *migration research*. The theoretical discussion in this chapter is mainly concerned with the overlaps between these three fields. The key political issues in relation to undocumented migrant childhoods that I have identified through my research—agency, rights and vulnerability—can arguably be positioned where all three fields overlap. Within all three fields, there is an ongoing discussion about how they should be opened up for interdisciplinary work and how key concepts within the fields need to be reconsidered (Alanen et al., 2018; Dahinden, 2016; Moody & Darbellay, 2019).

In line with the arguments made in this thesis, migration scholars Ruth Brittle and Ellen Desmet (2020) suggest that migration is the field “*par excellence* where children’s rights come face to face with the sovereignty of states” (p. 37). They argue for the need of more interdisciplinary research in this area, more explicit conceptualisations of childhood and children’s rights in such research and more research on children in families and undocumented migrant children in relation to children’s rights. These recent calls for specific kinds of research in relation to migrant children’s rights point at the timeliness of this thesis.

In the following, I position my work within earlier research and discuss its potential contributions. Furthermore, I draw on specific theoretical developments within the *critical* study of migration (Editorial Board movements, 2015), childhood (Alanen, 2011) and human rights (Douzinas, 2000), which I argue are fruitful to consult when trying to under-

stand the politics of undocumented migrant childhoods. This does not make the theoretical sections of the articles redundant, but rather sets the scene for the discussions in the articles in which specific aspects of larger debates are utilised for the arguments put forward there. This chapter also lays the theoretical foundation for the concluding discussion in chapter 10.

Agency

The starting point of this thesis is the everyday life experiences of undocumented migrant children and their families. On a fundamental level, when undocumented migrant children navigate being positioned as potentially deportable, they express agency. According to childhood scholar Roy Huijsmans (2011), the study of children as migrants offers a fruitful approach for responding to the problems within childhood studies that are involved in the theorisation and conceptualisation of children's agency.

The relationship between agency and structure was identified as a key sociological dichotomy within the field of childhood research early on (A. James et al., 1998). Migration studies, to a larger extent, is more occupied with questions of structure, whereas childhood research has made agency a central conceptual focus (Seeberg & Goździak, 2016; Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Recent developments within the sociology of childhood have suggested, however, that the dichotomy of agency/structure is increasingly irrelevant and that one needs to discuss agency in the context of "contingent empirical realities" (Oswell, 2013, p. 50). The relationship between the two concepts is perhaps best understood by following "human agency as it manifests itself in action and creates events" since both agency and structure always need to be connected to their historical and localised contexts to make sense (Seeberg & Goździak, 2016, p. 182). By studying expressions and effects of both agency and structure, I aim to enable discussions on the normative assumptions of migrant childhoods and how children negotiate their own positions in relation to their families and the state.

Migrant childhoods

Sociological research generally understands childhood as a socially constructed category. It is defined in legal documents, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), by chronological age² and socially it is constructed in relation to other generational cohorts such as youth, adults and elderly people. Already in the 1960s, historian Philippe Ariès (1962) recognised that childhood is not a universal category but a shifting concept. Contemporary childhood researchers have moved away from viewing childhood as a period in life when people learn and grow into the adults they are “becoming” and instead focus on the experience of “being” a child and have continued the work of Ariès in challenging assumptions of childhood as a unitary and homogenous phenomenon (A. James et al., 1998; A. James & Prout, 1997).³ I discuss children’s own experiences of being positioned as “children” but also as “undocumented migrants”, and this focus on “children” and “migrants” as subject positions makes possible a theoretical approach that keeps the definitions of different positions or categorisations open. The concept of “subject positions” also recognises the political character of and importance of power for the struggle around “what kinds of identity forms and world views should be considered as natural and truthful in particular situations” (Törrönen, 2001, p. 316). As I will show, this is important since the struggles within the field of irregular migration often play out around how children are defined, including into which legal categories they can be positioned and what consequences this has for their immigration status.

A number of special issues and edited collections in recent years have attempted to address the lack of childhood research within migration studies (Coe et al., 2011; Ensor & Goździak, 2010; Gardner, 2012; Ní Laoire et al., 2010; Seeberg & Goździak, 2016; Veale & Dona, 2014; A.

² CRC article 1: “For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.”

³ Recently, by going beyond the binary of the “being” and “becoming” child, the adding of a focus on the historical experiences of having “been” a child (Hanson, 2017) has further been suggested to enable a better understanding of children’s positions here and now.

White et al., 2011) and the research project⁴ that this thesis originated in was inspired by some of these earlier works' call for more research on migrant childhoods. The project drew upon, for example, Allen White and colleagues' (2011) argument that migrant childhoods were studied with an adult-centric focus. In such research, children tend to be positioned as needy and different, and children who challenge these dominant perceptions of vulnerability are not ordinarily the subjects of concern. Children are not only neglected in much migration research; if their perspectives would be taken more seriously, research would gain important insights regarding transnationalism (Gardner, 2012). Also, migrant children are often related to more as future adults in research than as active agents with their own experiences here and now. My study is part of an on-going development and steady growth of research that tries to undo this adultism and theoretically discuss children's agencies within migration research.

Many of the children I met during my fieldwork, especially in the UK, were born in the host country and had never visited their parents' country of origin. My discussion about 7-year-old Andrea (*Article 1*) highlights her experience of this and how she still, regardless of never having migrated herself, was positioned as a potentially deportable migrant. In their seminal book *Contested Childhoods: Growing up in Migrancy*, childhood and migration researchers Marie Louise Seeberg and Elżbieta M. Goździak (2016) have suggested an inclusive conceptualisation of the variety of positions of children who are positioned as migrants by talking about these children as "growing up in migrancy", where migrancy is understood as a social space and not primarily a place or period. Seeberg and Goździak refer to Lena Näre (2013) who defines migrancy as "the socially constructed subjectivity of 'migrant' [...], which is inscribed on certain bodies by the larger society in general and legislative practices in particular" (p. 604).

It is useful to juxtapose this understanding of migrancy with what childhood researcher Karen Wells (2015) identifies as a dominant neo-liberal

⁴ <https://blogg.mah.se/undocumentedmigrants/project-description/>

model of childhood that is being globalised and which originates in Western ideas about what differentiates children from adults. According to this model, healthy childhoods aim at independence, rationality and autonomy and separates children from politics, economy and society (Wells, 2015, pp. 50–51). This dominant, individualistic model of childhood affects the life worlds and possibilities of children in migrancy as well as other children's lives. But it is also deeply flawed, which the extreme diversity of the social category of children in migrancy underlines (Ensor & Goździak, 2010, p. 3).

As a result of these conflicting perceptions and positionings of mobile children, when you grow up in migrancy your childhood is contested. When approaching children in migrancy, non-migrants seem to feel that they have the right to decide what is best for them and define who they are, Seeberg and Goździak (2016) argue. Thus, one central aspect that is contested is the future of these children. Children are supposed to be the future, but it is less certain *whose* future children in migrancy are (Seeberg & Goździak, 2016). Also, mainstream approaches to childhood expressed through platitudes such as “children are our future” risk taming children and limiting their possible futures (Aitken et al., 2007).

I recognise the usefulness of the concept of child migrancy and its possibility of opening up understandings of children's different experiences of migration and how they are being governed. However, in this thesis, I use the more familiar concepts of “migrant children” or “migrant childhoods”, understood here as inclusive, open-ended and continuously contested subject positions and categorisations, to talk about the context that the children I met grew up in. This approach is also reflected in my understanding of politics as an open-ended concept that, in the context of undocumented migrant childhoods, often plays out in relation to struggles over what is taken for granted.

Politics

One of the key aspects of how migrant childhoods are contested is how they are *de-politicised*. De-politicisation is a highly political process, as philosopher Jacques Rancière (1999, 2004) has pointed out. For him, politics happens very much in the negotiations that precede the point at

which something is being taken for granted or in the activities that bring back into question what is being taken for granted. Even more specifically, politics is often what takes place when what is to be considered political from the beginning is negotiated (Rancière, 2004, p. 303). Depoliticisation is the expression of consensus, according to Rancière, and politics, or re-politicisation, is consequently best expressed as dissensus:

A dissensus is not a conflict of interests, opinions, or values; it is a division put in the “common sense”: a dispute about what is given, about the frame within which we see something as given. This is what I call a dissensus: putting two worlds in one and the same world. A political subject, as I understand it, is a capacity for staging such scenes of dissensus. (p. 306)

Childhood is one concept around which many consensual ideas prevail in Western societies regarding how it could be understood (see A. James & Prout, 1997). As I will discuss below, human rights, and perhaps even more so children’s rights, are other such concepts. Drawing on Rancière’s understanding of politics, the politicisation of issues such as childhood and rights means to open up what is taken for granted in understandings of these concepts and to break consensual or commonsensical discourses and practices regarding their meaning.

In the field of political theory, the lack of a childhood perspective has been specifically prevalent. Leading contemporary political philosophers, such as John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Ronald Dworkin, and Michael Walzer, etc., do not engage in a “sustained discussion of how the moral and political status of children should be understood or what the implications of considering children directly might have for the shape of a defensible theory” (Archard & Macleod, 2002, p. 4). This neglect can be undone through a relational understanding of politics that refrains from viewing politics in childhood as an ontological given (Kallio & Häkli, 2011a, p. 31).

Politics in childhood can be found in empirical studies that focus on a study of *how* things are political from the starting point that everything *can* be (made) political (Kallio & Häkli, 2011a). One perspective on how I understand expressions of everyday politics is discussed in *Article*

I; Children's everyday actions and agency always hold the *potential* of being political and each expression of agency has to be analysed individually in its societal context through empirical observations to understand whether it is of political significance in the specific social context (Kallio, 2009; Häkli & Kallio, 2014). It is through everyday contestations that "revolutionary imaginations" understood as a "creative force" emerge (Aitken & Plows 2010, p. 329). Relatedly, two of the empirical contributions of this thesis are the examinations of how undocumented migrant children's political agency comes about in their everyday lives (*Article 1*) and how undocumented migrant children and their parents understand their own positionalities inside the family and in relation to the state (*Article 2*). I argue that children's political agency is important to understand and recognise for a better understanding of the political context from which it comes about.

Political agency

In *Article 1*, I discuss literature on how and when children's agency can be considered *political* (for a review, see Skelton, 2013) and suggest that there is a need to discuss children's agency more in relation to its political contexts (Bordonaro, 2012). It is logical to study the *activities* of children if one wants to understand their political agency, especially if one agrees, as I do, with political theorist James Ingram (2008) who suggests that "politics rests on the activity of those who practice it" (p. 411). Similarly, Rancière (2001) argues that "if there is someone you do not wish to recognize as a political being, you begin by not seeing them as the bearers of politicalness, by not understanding what they say, by not hearing that it is an utterance coming out of their mouths" (§23). This is the fate of many children today as well as undocumented migrants. I therefore attempt to acknowledge undocumented migrant children as political actors by studying their political actions and contextualising their positionality and their rights within current political struggles.

By discussing *children's* political agency, one gets a better general understanding of how *agency* and *politics* are connected (Kallio & Häkli, 2010, 2011). Furthermore, individuals with recognised political agency will more likely be recognised as actors in political conflicts and debates

(Nakata, 2008, p. 23). In *Article 1*, I further argue that children's political agency is best studied in the specificities of their everyday lives through their banal practices and bodily experiences (Kallio, 2007; Kallio & Häkli, 2011) and in how they relate to the subject positions they are being offered by surrounding society (Kallio & Häkli, 2010), which, in the context of this thesis, primarily concerns the subject position of being considered deportable. Political agency is not only expressed through acts of change, but also through the "aim toward continuity, stasis, and stability" (Mahmood, 2001, p. 212), which some children in my study expressed as their primary wish: to be just like everyone else. Overall in *Article 1*, I use "deportability" (De Genova, 2002, I discuss this concept in more detail below) as a context to understand how children's political agency comes about and suggest that children's political agency is an important impetus for social change (Aitken et al., 2007, p. 3).

Significant contributions to theoretical debates on children's politics and political agency have been made by geographers Kirsi Pauliina Kallio and Jouni Häkli (together and separately) (Häkli & Kallio, 2014; Kallio, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2018; Kallio & Häkli, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2013, 2017). They argue that children's politics can potentially be found in any aspect of mundane everyday life. A key argument for my study, which Kallio and Häkli also make (and I discuss in *Article 1*), is that children's politics should be reserved "to those situations where children as intentional social beings relate to subject positions offered by parental (peer) cultural or institutional forces of socialization" (Kallio & Häkli, 2010, pp. 357–358). This approach has influenced the overall framing of this thesis in which I have chosen to focus on the positionalities of undocumented migrant children.

It is important to point out, however, that being positioned as an undocumented migrant is not only about the perceptions of surrounding society; it is also very much a result of legal categorisations in which the threat of deportation is a lived reality. In relation to this, I argue in my research (*Article 1*) that the political context of deportability (De Genova, 2002) strongly shapes children's everyday life experiences, which makes it important to also highlight the political character of the agenti-

val responses children give in regard to being positioned as undocumented migrants at risk of deportation. I return to the issue of deportability later in this chapter and here continue to discuss how children's political agency relates to their intergenerational context.

Relational agency

The four articles included in this thesis were chronologically written in the same order as they are presented here. *Article 2* develops in a direction that is already hinted at in *Article 1*, arguing that children's agency has to be understood in its relational context (Häkli & Kallio, 2014). The concept of "intergenerationality" is introduced and understood in *Article 2* as a non-fixed concept that combines the different understandings of generation as life stage, birth cohort membership and position within a family structure (Vanderbeck & Worth, 2015). Some researchers have argued that the focus on agency in childhood studies has added to the individualisation of the experience of "age-itself" (Kraftl, 2013) and recent debates on agency have re-emphasised its relational character (Raithelhuber, 2016; Vanderbeck, 2007; Wihstutz, 2016). Much of the earlier research on undocumented migrant childhoods has focused on the intergenerational relationships within families and the impact of differing legal statuses within families (Abrego, 2016; Ayón, 2016; Boehm, 2012; Cardoso et al., 2018; Enriquez, 2015; Foner & Dreby, 2011; Lykes et al., 2013; Menjívar & Abrego, 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). This thesis can partly be understood as a response to sociologist Amy Thompson and colleagues (2019), who argue that future research needs to more closely analyse "the influence of migrant children's role within their familial and social structures on their expression of agency" (p. 14). Some research in recent years has started to emphasise the relational and interdependent aspects of children's agency and how childhood should be understood in relation to other generational cohorts, such as adulthood, through an intergenerational lens (Bloemraad & Trost, 2008; Esser, 2016; Huijsmans, 2012; Leonard, 2016; Ní Laoire, 2011; Vanderbeck, 2007; Vanderbeck & Worth, 2015).

Family can be an important focus for research that intends to understand the interdependence between human beings in general, and the family is

usually the site where the most intense and long-ranging intergenerational encounters in people's everyday lives take place. However, from an analytical perspective, intergenerationality is a more open concept than "family" in the sense that the latter has the luggage of connotations and understandings attached to it that some readers of research on "families" may have difficulties seeing beyond. Intergenerational relationships between members of different age cohorts can be significant outside the nuclear family, which is mainly built on understandings of the importance of blood ties and heterosexual norms (for a discussion on the "queer politics of no borders" and the connection between the family and the state in this context, see M. A. White, 2014, p. 984). Still, family life is important, and my aim is not to neglect the influence the nuclear family has on (especially Western) societies at large, rather the opposite. One researcher who highlights the centrality of the family in the lives of many undocumented migrants is Nicole Berry (2015). In a study about undocumented families in Durham, US, she found that the families saw their migration as a "family project [...] as a project not of self, but one that would move the family to a different future" (Berry, 2015, p. 95; see also Katz, 2014).

My choice to study families is primarily a pragmatic one. It is based on the fact that in the case of migration and asylum studies, the family, regardless of what it looks like, becomes an important entity since strict understandings of the family unit are central to international conventions (regarding family reunification or the right to family life, for example). The importance of the family unit is therefore reproduced and enacted through migrant struggles that make claims based on these conventions. Also, gender scholar Maja Sager (2016) has shown how in Sweden, political and legal developments regarding asylum seekers and undocumented migrants have at times led to differentiations of deservingness or privilege between single migrants and families with children. Furthermore, Rosalind Edwards (2014) has pointed out that it can also be problematic to avoid the concept of "family" in research in fear of reproducing stereotypes, since one then loses a central and valuable lens for studying and understanding contemporary societies.

In *Article 2*, I relate discussions on intergenerational positionings with the feminist concept of “motherwork” (Collins, 1994; Sager, 2014) and show how both children and parents enact parental practices in their everyday lives. I suggest that motherwork can help in making better sense of intergenerational relationships in undocumented migrant families. Motherwork adds an intersectional perspective on the concept of motherhood in which the care work of migrant mothers has been analysed as contesting racialised citizenship and private, public and national boundaries (Brouckaert & Longman, 2018; Erel, 2011; Erel & Reynolds, 2018; Longman et al., 2013) and where motherwork can be performed by any member of a family (Sager, 2014). Through the lens of motherwork, undocumented migrant parents could be understood as their own humanitarian agents, protecting themselves and their children from deportation to gain a better future. Motherwork, understood as humanitarian agency expressed through unrecognised parental practices of care, can be understood as parental political agency. However, motherwork can also be performed by children since political agency is an “intergenerational human condition” (Kallio, 2015a, 2018). The shifting intergenerational positions of undocumented migrant children have been described as an “intergenerational rupture” and the “parentification” of children who take care of family responsibilities (Vandenhoe et al., 2011). The discussion on motherwork connects with long running discussions in feminist research on the unrecognised emotional labour and domestic work of women. This is comparable to the position of undocumented migrant parents that I discuss in *Article 2*, as they are being accused of putting their children at risk by exposing them to life in deportability. The parental work of undocumented migrants goes unrecognised by the state, just as the domestic labour by women has gone unrecognised throughout history.

Children expressing political agency are seemingly positioned as what childhood geographer Stuart Aitken (2001) calls “the unchildlike child”. One of the theoretical contributions this thesis makes is to discuss questions of children’s political agency and the intergenerational aspects of agency simultaneously. In this way, I hope to contribute to an understanding of how it is not unchildlike to express political agency, but rather how, as I discuss in *Articles 1* and *2*, political contexts such as ir-

regular migration make expressions of political agency occur—sometimes individually through children’s actions but always in relation to its intergenerational context.

During the course of my research, I concluded that children’s rights play a central role in the processes that uphold the dominant or taken-for-granted and simplified understandings of migrant childhoods. One of the main contributions of this thesis in view of earlier research on migrant childhoods is the discussion that connects the role of children’s rights in political struggles to migrant children’s everyday lives. The politics and political agency of migrant children as well as the politics of children’s rights are issues currently debated within the research fields of childhood, rights and migration, but this thesis connects these debates and attempts to provide new insights into each individual debate as well. To enable such interdisciplinarity, I will now turn to critical research on human rights and relate it to the above discussions about political agency in migrant childhoods.

Rights

Scholars who approach human rights from a critical perspective recognise that human rights have become the main language with which ethical and moral issues are talked about today. Philosopher Eric Santner (2015) suggests that the most optimistic critics of human rights emphasise the potential of human rights to promote responsibility and solidarity towards “the oppressed”. On the other end are those who see any optimistic approach as a contribution to the de-politicisation of rights and a reduction of the struggle towards biopolitical humanitarianism and aid provision (Santner, 2015). This section continues the discussion in the introduction on the paradoxes of rights and traces some different approaches to rights that have emerged through an engagement with these paradoxes. I begin by discussing the aspect of de-politicisation and the more critical views on human rights as a starting point for my critical inquiry into what role rights play in the politics of undocumented migrant childhoods, which is also reflected in the articles. At the end of this section, I return to the more optimistic approaches that see a radical potential in rights, which will enable a discussion in the conclusion that

reflects on the more optimistic possibilities hinted at in the articles as well.

Dangerous human rights

As a result of the development of international human rights treaties and conventions over the last century, especially in the wake of the First and Second World Wars, rights claiming has become the main form of modern-day morality. In regard to children, the process of creating the CRC that mainly took place during the 1980s (although the process had originated in the 1924 Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child) has further specified rights as a hegemonic way to talk about children's needs and issues of justice for children. In contrast, concepts such as responsibility, virtue and duty have lost their former statuses of moral weight, according to legal scholars Costas Douzinas and Conor Gearty (2014, p. 6). Arguably, the understanding of rights as "trump cards" (Dworkin, 1984) that defeat state policies adds to the individualisation of society at large, and the human rights discourse has led to "complex historical, social and political situations" having been simplified into "rights talk" (Douzinas & Gearty, 2014, pp. 6–7).

Human rights, as they are understood and discussed in mainstream politics, are mainly an issue of implementation, which puts the state at the centre of attention as the agent that is supposed to implement human rights in practice. However, as Ingram (2008) points out, drawing on Arendt (1951), this focus struggles with the paradox that even though rights are supposed to be something that each individual is entitled to as a protection against the potential totalitarian power of the sovereign state, rights and their beneficiaries depend on the state as a superior external power. To limit the influence and tame the power of the sovereign state, human rights institutions have been set up to protect individuals. Although institutions are important for human rights, this does not solve the fundamental problem of the dual role of states but rather transforms it into a problem of achieving just institutions (Ingram, 2008, p. 405). This transformation, namely how the human rights paradigm is responsible for a de-politicisation of the issues in which human rights are put

forward as the solution, is part of an overall process that many critical human rights scholars have pointed out.

The de-politicisation of rights is strongly connected to widespread sentiments that one should not expect more than the prevention or alleviation of suffering from human rights. Political theorist Wendy Brown (2004) suggests that the human rights paradigm in this way quietens and displaces other political possibilities. Consequently, human rights are an “aspect of governmentality” and “a crucial aspect of power’s aperture” (W. Brown, 2004, p. 459). Human rights in their contemporary dominant form are not only simply rules and defences against power, and their practice is not only responsible for de-politicisation, but they “can themselves be tactics and vehicles of governance and domination” (W. Brown, 2004, p. 459).

Parallel with the accomplishments of human rights struggles, rights have also been a tool for governing, according to legal scholar Bal Sokhi-Bulley (2016), who acknowledges that rights are able to do “good” in the world, but they are also regulatory and limiting. Rights have the *potential* for many different kinds of governing of subjects. Throughout this thesis, I emphasise the need to study “how” different phenomena are expressed and practised rather than what they “are”. *How* does children’s political agency come about? *How* do states govern irregular migration? Consequently, all four research questions are *how*-questions. Similarly, Sokhi-Bulley suggests that the important question is *how* rights operate, since such an approach can help to “better understand rights as strategies of power” (2016, p. 9). Rights are not good or bad, they are *dangerous*, Sokhi-Bulley argues, and need to be permanently critiqued. This suggestion is derived from an argument made by Foucault:

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to hyper- and pessimistic activism. (Foucault, 1984, p. 343, cited in Sokhi-Bulley, 2009, p. 3)

The notion of rights being dangerous also connects with Arendt's (1951) analysis of the situation of stateless populations in the wake of the World Wars: "the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human was their greatest danger" (p. 300). There are risks involved both with basing struggles on rights-logic as well as with refuting rights altogether, Sokhi-Bulley argues; we should not refuse rights in themselves but rather their "regulatory potential and instrumentalization" (Sokhi-Bulley, 2016, p. 144). Rights are not the "fulfilment of the Enlightenment promise of emancipation" but are used as tactics of measurement and produce normalised identities and forms of behaviour (Sokhi-Bulley, 2016, p. 14). We will always have something to do as long as we refuse to take rights discourse for granted and examine the "different ways in which activities of government happen and have been made possible (through) rights" (Sokhi-Bulley, 2016, p. 14).

Some may object that many proponents of rights today, who hang on to the illusion of rights struggles as merely being a matter of implementation, are aware that this approach is "dangerous", but still support it as a tactical choice. They choose to "play the game" and argue for rights in accordance with current hegemonic understandings of rights as the least bad option. I agree that this approach can have its merits, and I have myself been part of and signed campaigns that have formulated their goals within a limited human rights agenda. However, what I show in this thesis is that the actors against whom human rights struggles are often fought can also play this game to their advantage. If I play the same game, it becomes increasingly difficult to criticise the use of rights for agendas whose political aims I oppose. The question follows: is the utilisation of simplified understandings of rights an effective political strategy? This question highlights how difficult it is to carry out political work in practice.

I do not consider rights as either "bad" or "good" in themselves, but my approach is that they can be utilised for all kinds of purposes. Rights discourse and rights arguments have been utilised in much successful political work since the Second World War and can be a unifying language for political struggles. This thesis does not aim to disregard the gains that have been made through human rights work; it rather adds

fuel to debates about the problematic aspects of rights that always need to accompany any struggle for the extension of the reach and inclusivity of human rights.

As I briefly discussed in the introduction in relation to what I call the paradox of *rights claiming*, Brown (2004) makes her readers aware that rights “produce and regulate the subjects to whom they are assigned” (p. 459). For Brown (2002), rights often appear for subordinated groups “as that which we cannot not want” (p. 421). In this way, she argues, “rights almost always serve as a mitigation—but not a resolution—of subordinating powers” (p. 422). This gives rise to a paradoxical situation in which the more specified the rights are for a specific group, the more likely they are to cement the definition of said group as subordinate and vulnerable. In this situation, rights become a “double-bind” of rights claims for undocumented migrants (Parla, 2011, drawing on W. Brown, 2002). Through the designation of rights, subordinated positionalities are re-inscribed, enhanced and locked up. “That which we cannot *not* want is also that which ensnares us in the terms of our domination”, Brown argues (2002, p. 430, drawing on Spivak, 1993, my emphasis). Brown’s perspective on rights is drawn upon in the theoretical framework of *Article 3* in which I show how rights as a system of governance are not straightforward but expressed through ongoing processes and negotiations in which various actors utilise rights for different agendas. I further argue that de-politicisation could be considered especially prevalent in relation to *children’s* rights.

Problematising migrant children’s rights

In Birmingham, a pro bono lawyer described, with detestation in his voice, how immigration solicitors take money from unknowing clients by using the language of human rights as a way to rip people off. “They will send in a Human Rights application—it sounds posh, doesn’t it? But they have no chance”, he said. This is one short example from my fieldwork of how rights can be mobilised for different agendas, in this case economic profit. One contribution of this thesis is the suggestion that *children’s rights* arguments seem to be particularly at risk of being mobilised for agendas that primarily have the state’s interest as their

priority rather than the individual rights bearers (*Articles 2 and 3*). Here, I extend the argument above about how migrant childhoods tend to be de-politicised. I suggest that one reason for why children's rights seem especially susceptible to being utilised for state agendas is that both *childhood* and *children's rights* tend to be de-politicised.

Children's rights are currently under-theorised, and my work is partly an attempt to add to the theoretical literature on children's rights (see Arce, 2015; Ferguson, 2013; Quennerstedt, 2013; Reynaert, Bouverne-de-Bie, & Vandeveld, 2009; Vandenhoe et al., 2015). Sociologist Didier Reynaert and colleagues (2012) argue for the need of critical perspectives on children's rights:

There is no need for more practical tools on implementing the UNCRC. There is much more need to obtain insight in to the underlying norms, values and logics that shape practices in children's rights today and the way these norms, values and logics are understood. This signifies critically analysing social constructions of children's rights in a diversity of practices and analysing the diverse interpretations that are given to the underlying logics. (p. 196)

Children's rights scholar Matías Cordero Arce (2015) suggests, drawing on Reynaert et al. (2009, 2012), that children's rights studies have been ensnared by a consensus that regards the CRC as a "sacred text" (speech by Karl Hanson, quoted in Arce, 2015) encompassing the totality of children's rights in an unproblematic way and in which it is believed that children's rights studies should be occupied with researching how the CRC can be implemented. I call this perspective or consensus "the altar of children's rights" (see *Article 2*) to highlight how this reading of the CRC often sacrifices other contextual perspectives on children's rights to preserve the elevated status of the convention. Arce suggests that a critical approach to children's rights should view them in the wider interdisciplinary field of childhood studies (see also Freeman, 1998). However, the prevalence of superficial discussions on the CRC in childhood studies has emptied the study of children's rights of its content, and Arce argues that children's rights studies need to be reinvigorated with committed, critical theoretical perspectives. Similarly, childhood

researcher (and editor of the journal *Childhood* in which *Article 3* was published) Karl Hanson (2014) suggests that children's rights studies need to "develop and integrate interdisciplinary perspectives that also examine the consequences of children's rights in practice and the contexts in which they are applied" (p. 444). Here, I attempt to do so by connecting debates on different understandings of childhood with critical approaches to human rights and applying these theories to the case of undocumented migrant childhoods.

Humanitarianism, innocence and guilt

To understand the politics of undocumented migrant childhoods in relation to children's rights one must look in detail into the positions that children have been placed in throughout history. In migration research, the presence of children "has progressed from silent belongings to visible anxieties and active agents, demanding attention in their own right" (Dobson, 2009, p. 358). Still, migrant children are continuously positioned as innocent and vulnerable. Children have been considered "innocent" since philosophers started thinking about the position of children in society (Jenks, 2005). It may seem like a favourable position to be in since it potentially draws attention to one's needs and provokes action to attend to them from people with the capacity to do so. However, being positioned as innocent also puts you in a position of being governed, a governing that is primarily expressed in terms of protection (Nakata, 2015, p. 44, see also Smith, 2014; Stretmo, 2014). Arguably, putting children on a pedestal of innocence primarily ends up in dehumanisation and exclusion; as childhood researcher John Wall (2008) puts it: "If children are the very origin and means of a good society, then society itself can owe them very little" (p. 526).

Anthropologist Miriam Ticktin (2016) discusses how "innocence works as part of a binary: guilt is its necessary other, and the pendulum can swing quickly between the two" (p. 259); hence, positioning children as innocent does not give them protection from the exclusionary logic of humanitarianism. Referring to the death of 3-year-old Syrian refugee Aylan Kurdi (variously spelled as "Alan") that stirred up an emotional response around the world during the "long summer of migration" (of-

ten called the European “refugee crisis” or “migration crisis”) in 2015, Ticktin (2016) argues that the perceived innocence of the figure of the refugee child embodied in Aylan Kurdi was temporary:

There are many “Alans”—two- and three-year-olds—attempting to cross borders every day, and they are not treated as innocent. When one cannot establish innocence, one joins the cavernous ranks of the guilty, and guilt, it seems, removes the value from one’s life or death. When one is guilty, there is little available language to speak of injustice, hardship, or death. Moral judgment has already been passed—one has brought on one’s own misfortune. (p. 261)

A similar argument has been put forward by gender and migration scholar Eithne Luibhéid (2013) who argues that when migrants are designated “illegal” they are, at the same time, positioned as the cause of their own vulnerability and exploitability (p. 2). The binary of innocence and guilt reflects the dialectic of the child migrant paradox that this thesis investigates: undocumented migrant children are positioned simultaneously as (innocent) children with access to an extended rights catalogue and as (guilty) migrants with little access to human rights, while the pendulum of public opinion can swing quickly from one position to the other.

Arendt (1951) discusses how innocence was the greatest misfortune of the stateless refugees in post-war Europe. “Innocence in the sense of a complete lack of responsibility was the mark of their rightlessness as it was the seal of their loss of political status” (Arendt, 1951, p. 295). Sociologist Monika Krause (2008) comments on Arendt’s discussion on innocence, emphasising the function of innocence in hiding the agency and voice of those regarded as such (p. 336). Innocence is a major characteristic of historical as well as contemporary understandings of childhood, and, just like in the case of stateless people, this innocence is arguably also a central function in the continued stripping away of human capacity from children.

The response to innocence is often expressed through various forms of humanitarianism. However, as Ticktin (2016) points out, “compassion comes with repression” (p. 258) as humanitarianism and policing go

hand in hand and humanitarianism is often a cover for “removing rights from the many in the name of the few” (p. 261). Arendt (1963/2006) argues similarly about the closely related notions of pity and compassion. She suggests that pity could not exist without the presence of misfortune “and it therefore has just as much vested interest in the existence of the unhappy as thirst for power has a vested interest in the existence of the weak” (Arendt, 1963/2006, p. 89).

Fassin (2012), inspired by Arendt, argues that today’s societies prefer to speak about suffering and compassion rather than about interests or justice and the humanitarian responses to suffering primarily function as legitimisations of the way these groups are being governed. “Humanitarian government is indeed a politics of precarious lives”, Fassin argues, as the suffering of others urges us to remedy them (p. 4, see also Aradau, 2004). According to Fassin (referencing Saint Augustine), we love to feel pity as the suffering of others instils both horror and pleasure: “one feels sadness when one sees the misfortune of others, but cannot detach oneself from this vision” (2012, p. 251). Therefore, humanitarian governing has an important function of salutary power for us, “because by saving lives, it saves something of our idea of ourselves, and because by relieving suffering, it also relieves the burden of this unequal world order” (Fassin, 2012, p. 252). This duality—our love of feeling pity and the need to relieve ourselves from the burden of inequality—provides perhaps part of an answer to the reactions to the photos of Aylan Kurdi; when Western media chose to put Aylan on the front page of every newspaper and one could hence not look away, the image evoked a myriad of feelings and the response was strong. Western societies needed to save their idea of the humanitarian state of Europe. But once the tide of public opinion turned, Aylan was forgotten (or ignored) and refugees were instead (again) seen as a threat.

Following the literature above, I suggest that positioning migrant children as innocent and vulnerable “becomings” is what, to a large extent, also enables their governing. The response to innocence and vulnerability is often expressed through pity, which is then usually formalised in practices of humanitarianism clothed in a hegemonic rights discourse that shields from other possible responses expressed in terms of justice

and equality, etc. With childhood being “the most intensively governed sector of personal existence” (Rose, 1999, p. 123), state responses to migrant childhoods are expressed primarily through paternalism as an expression of governing and controlling the “becoming” child or future citizen (Arce, 2015, p. 13), which is then resisted by the children themselves (Seeberg & Goździak, 2016, p. 180). Hence, both as children *and* as undocumented migrants, undocumented migrant children are susceptible to being caught in a pendular movement between binary positionalities of innocence and guilt and pity and indifference through which their agency and self-determination are digested and consumed.

A radical potential of rights?

At the end of *Article 3*, I briefly suggest that I still believe there is radical potential in rights. Above, I also pointed at this potential when considering the implications of rights being understood as dangerous. But how can this potential be unlocked in the context of undocumented migrant childhoods? Taking the risk of de-politicisation and re-inscription of subordinated subjectivities into consideration, as well as the function of rights discourse in humanitarian governing, there are still several critical scholars who try to renew the radical potential in human rights. A problematisation of how children’s rights are mobilised in relation to irregular migration highlights the complex nature of rights; they can be used to govern migrant childhoods as well as be a productive resource for political work aiming at increased justice for this group.

Recent developments within human rights literature can be understood as a “critical turn”, according to human rights scholar Anna Lundberg and international relations scholar Michael Strange (2016), who have tried to understand the complex dynamic between dominant understandings of human rights as law and critical engagements with human rights as having the potential for a form of contestation. These contestations are played out at the everyday level through the claiming of rights. Such contestations and claims are constitutive of the political power of rights (Lundberg & Strange, 2016, p. 7). In a similar, somewhat optimistic tone, Ingram (2008) argues that human rights should be understood as a practice and a process (although Sokhi-Bulley [2016, p. 11] also views

rights as a process, the author argues that this should make us aware of the tactics and technologies that enable governing through rights). Referring to philosopher Etienne Balibar's (1994, p. 212) interpretation of Arendt's "right to have rights" as "the right to politics", Ingram argues that rights always holds political potential and are invented and reinvented by rights claimants; they are vehicles of politicisation. In Ingram's view (2008, p. 411–412), Arendt's thinking about rights is concerned not so much about rights as a status but as an activity; the *creation* of rights. By focusing on the actions of rights claimants, Ingram argues that one can see the root of human rights politics in the direct practical expression of the felt needs of the claimants and their autonomy (2008, p. 413). For Ingram, the consequence of an Arendtian approach to the politics of human rights would then mean that when promoting human rights we understand them as "active, critical-democratic politics that rests first and foremost on the activity of rights bearers themselves, and human rights promotion as the practice of supporting and enabling such a politics" (2008, p. 414). Similarly, literature theorist Bruce Robbins (2014, p. 271) argues that rights could productively be thought of as something to be "conquered" rather than something to be protected. These approaches in some sense respond to both the paradoxes of the *origins* and *universality* of rights by highlighting the political character of rights and how rights both come about and gain meaning through political struggles.

The struggles of undocumented migrants have been pointed out by different scholars as critical examples of how the radical potential of rights could be understood. Political scientist Ayten Gündoğdu (2015) discusses the case of the *sans-papier* movement in France in which politics was practised in inventive ways, such as "designating a name for themselves, occupying politically strategic sites, and perhaps most importantly, articulating their demands in a manifesto mimicking the eighteenth-century declarations of rights" (p. 24). These examples of practices are not sufficient for guaranteeing rights in the absence of institutionalised rights for this group, she argues, but they are necessary for institutional mechanisms to keep their eyes open to the problems of rightlessness and to provoke a rethinking of human rights in response to these problems. Through her analysis of the *sans-papier* struggles Gündoğdu concludes

that these kinds of political practices involving the founding of human rights are contingent and fragile. These inaugural practices of rights claims will not automatically result in their legal recognition, she argues, but an Arendtian perspective suggests that human rights are validated, guaranteed and constantly recreated through such practices (Gündoğdu, 2015, p. 168).

These approaches try to understand the ways in which human rights hold radical potential. But it is important to remember that there is no single theory that can describe or explain rights. Douzinas (2007) describes the fundamental paradox of human rights (which has already been introduced above): they are tools of public power as well as that which protects the individual from the state's "cannibalistic power" (p. 270). Legal scholar Illan Rua Wall (2012) suggests, drawing on Rancière (2004), that human rights are both dissensus and consensus. Human rights are two-sided; they are both demands or rights claiming and decisions or a settling of claims (I. R. Wall, 2012, p. 121–2). This is where the remaining trace of radical politics can be found in human rights, according to Wall: in the oscillation or trembling between demand and decision. Only when the radical potential is brought back into human rights can they provide the tools to resist the everyday networked power of what he calls "soft totalitarianism" (I. R. Wall, 2012, p. 8). In this way, he argues that thinking politically about the political potential and possibilities of human rights is more related to riotous streets than to supreme courts.

To create a language for the radical potential of human rights Wall (2012) develops the concept "right-ing", first coined by Douzinas (2000), which is understood as perpetual and antagonistic rights claiming (p. 216). Right-ing is not an alternative model but rather an experimental approach to rights; rights are understood as a practice or event rather than a property in need of protection (I. R. Wall, 2012, p. 133–4). When oppressed voices challenge the given understanding of the consequences of human rights in specific situations, their demand for recognition challenges the hegemonic, commonsensical understandings of human rights. Right-ing is then not so much a question about rediscovering a radical substance in human rights that has been forgotten, but rather

Wall (2012) points towards the constituent potential in rights and their political function of “unveiling the possibility of the political” (p. 7). Still, Wall cautions that one should not put too much hope into the exceeding of human rights through right-ing. It is mainly a tool for collectively thinking creatively within the given human rights framework and looking for strategies of rupture at identified points of torsion where new rights may be generated or old rights can be used to reframe questions (I. R. Wall, 2014, p. 109). Similarly, for Douzinas (2007), the role of the critical scholar is to keep the rift of human rights open, so that they can again become a politics of dissensus in Rancière’s sense (p. 110). This thesis is an attempt to contribute to these processes.

Engaging with the concepts of Wall (2014), legal theorist Kathryn McNeilly (2018) applies another perspective on how the radical potential of human rights can be opened up. She constructs an argument in which human rights have political potential primarily because they “remain inherently ‘to come’”, implying that human rights conflicts are never brought to an end and rights are characterised by uncertainty. This resembles Sokhi-Bulley’s (2016) approach to rights as being “dangerous”, which always gives us something to do; rights struggles never finish. McNeilly understands rights as a productive “site” where alternative futures can be strived towards through an ongoing working and reworking of dominant human rights understandings. For McNeilly (2018), rights can be productive for a criticism of asymmetrical relationships of power and as fuel for radical social transformation (p. 7). There are opportunities created by crisis that enable a return to the discourse of human rights, according to McNeilly. Human rights emerged out of crisis, especially in the wake of the Second World War. The uncertainties of the future and of human rights are a potential driving force for radical politics. A futural understanding of human rights opens up for an unfixed sense of human rights and rights politics characterised by conflict. This unfixedness becomes a space for radical possibilities, McNeilly argues. She concludes her argument by highlighting the non-conclusive character of rights:

Because a final conclusion can never be reached on understandings of human rights, because their alterity is ineradicable, thinkers and

activists can, and must, engage in an ongoing politics of human rights which does not use rights to advance the claims of those on the margins merely once, but in a continual and never-ending way, always attentive to the limits of current articulations of rights. (McNeilly, 2018, p. 158)

The juridification and internationalisation of human rights in recent decades has led to a logic of closure, Douzinas argues (2007, p. 175), and McNeilly suggests that one must instead be open to unpredictable new possibilities for rights. However, human rights can do little against capitalist exploitation and political domination (Douzinas, 2007, p. 293). In the end, Douzinas (2007) argues, utopia “is constructed here and now with friends, in acts of hospitality, in cities of resistance” (p. 298).

The futural approach of McNeilly can be compared to legal scholar Linda Bosniak’s (2006, 2007) theory of “ethical territoriality”; migrants who manage to “get in” are prioritised over those who do not manage to cross the border and enter a country and it is on the basis of presence in a nation’s territory that undocumented migrants still access certain rights. This is not a normative argument, but an empirical observation, Bosniak argues (2006, p. 137–8). At the same time, it is the presence, or hereness, of undocumented migrants that puts them at risk of deportation. Hereness, or presence, “brings them within the circle of national normative concern, but it is also their territorial hereness that is objected to, that subjects them to potential territorial removal and renders them vulnerable to subordination in the process” (Bosniak, 2006, p. 139, see also Lind & Persdotter, 2017)—yet another expression of the paradoxical position of undocumented migrants.

Ethical territoriality resembles an argument made by philosopher Joseph Carens (2005): “The longer the stay, the stronger the claim”. Still, a long stay does not guarantee inclusion. Ongoing deportations of people who have lived their whole lives in the UK to Jamaica is a case in point (Walker, 2020). However, ethical territoriality, expressed as presence, has been the baseline argument for why undocumented migrant children in Malmö have been able to access support from the social services. Are Bosniak’s (2006) hereness approach of ethical territoriality and McNeilly’s (2018) futural approach to human rights contrasting? I do

not believe so. Rather, the process of opening up access to social rights for undocumented migrants in Malmö on the basis of presence in 2013 (see Nordling, 2017) can be interpreted as an example of, at the time, “new usages of the language of rights...to address differential vulnerability” (McNeilly, 2018, p. 107). The processes that have followed in recent years, in which access to these rights has again been limited and the city has in part retreated from its inclusive approach, confirm the point McNeilly, Sokhi-Bulley (2016) and other critical human rights scholars make about rights being a constant political struggle that never ends.

By highlighting children’s political agency, children’s own capacity to contest how they are being governed is recognised. The ruptures that children can produce to the childhood paradigm of innocence and vulnerability, which leads to humanitarian governing, can be expressed through *rights claims*, understood by political theorist Karen Zivi (2011) as a performative practice of persuasion and, as such, as a “permanent provocation” (p. 112). Viewing rights claims in this way potentially enables groups and individuals to form a shared way of seeing the world and to reimagine and act out “the political life of a community” (Zivi, 2011, p. 115). Rights claiming can potentially be a fruitful concept when one wants to understand how agency and rights are connected. The politics of undocumented migrant children’s agency, rights and vulnerability is perhaps best expressed through the political practices involved in the ongoing rights claiming for and by these children. One can understand undocumented migrant children’s right claims as acts of “child-right-ing”, to play on Douzinas (2007) and Wall’s (2014) concept. Child-right-ing would highlight the specific position of children in relation to the human rights paradigm and the way their marginalised and simplified positionalities can be opened up for constructive and alternative interventions into the human rights paradigm.

Even though as children they may have access to an extended rights catalogue, their possibility of having their rights claims being taken seriously is still limited as they are perceived as “adults in the making”. In relation to undocumented migrant adults, undocumented migrant children are then both in a better position because they have access to a

larger catalogue of rights and in a worse position because they are generally positioned as a-political beings. This highlights how undocumented migrant children are a critical case for understanding the politics of irregularity better. Furthermore, child-right-ing by and on behalf of this group involves constructive ways of challenging the prevailing order through continuously expanding the scope of the human rights paradigm in regard to children. Aiming for utopia even though it will not be reached means realising that it is the struggle to get there that must never end.

The paradoxes, dilemmas, conflicts and tensions of human rights are all central to thinkers such as Douzinas, Gearty, McNeilly, Sokhi-Bulley and Wall. They all urge for a mobilisation of these precise contingencies in the struggle for a more open approach to the political character of human rights. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I attempt to draw on some of these ideas for my own conclusions regarding the paradoxical character of the social positionality of undocumented migrant children as expressed through agency, rights and vulnerability. Here, I continue by discussing the concept of vulnerabilisation, which I develop to understand how undocumented migrant children are being governed through rights in more detail.

Vulnerability

In the articles included in this thesis, the focus is less on the radical potential of rights and more on the way undocumented migrant children's rights and vulnerabilities are being mobilised to govern their mobility and territorial presence. The main theoretical contribution of this thesis is expressed in *Article 3* in which the concept of "vulnerabilisation" is discussed,⁵ which I argue captures the political processes (in the context of migration and beyond) of constructing, attributing and governing vulnerability. I suggest that the concept of "vulnerabilisation" can fruit-

⁵ Parts of this section overlap, to a limited extent word by word, with the theoretical discussion in *Article 3*, but here I perform a more elaborate argumentation about my use of the concept "vulnerabilisation" than I had room for in the article, which enables me to explain in more detail its relationship to current scholarly debates on vulnerability.

fully be used to understand the political character of the concept of vulnerability, which in the context of migration and childhood is often used in strictly descriptive terms to highlight the needs and dire circumstances of certain groups and categories of migrants and children. Migration scholars Giorgia Doná and Angela Veale (2011) identify how forced-migrant children have been positioned either as a product and (vulnerable) victim of, or as a threat (with problematic agency) to, the nation state system. These parallel and fluid positionalities are expressed through ambivalent discourses around the world, but they are usually “couched in neutral terms of vulnerability and protection” that “underlie ambivalent discourses that are politically driven and as such need to be explicitly re-politicised” to make the tensions and conflicts visible and thus possible to affect (Doná & Veale, 2011, p. 1280). This need for re-politicisation is a response to the de-politicised character of how childhood, human rights and vulnerability are predominately understood. My discussion on the concept of “vulnerabilisation” can be seen as a development of Doná and Veale’s thinking, as I attempt to contribute to the re-politicisation of our understanding of vulnerability as a political process rather than an empirical essentialism.

Just like pity and innocence, vulnerability is a position defined primarily by the ones who see it as their responsibility to attend to the “vulnerable” groups in society. However, there is a difference between being seen as “innocent” and being seen as “vulnerable”; innocence implies inexperience, immaturity and harmlessness, whereas vulnerability is generally perceived as being exposed to the possibility of harm but also as describing someone who could potentially harm others. Vulnerability is seemingly less patronising than innocence and pity, but the perceived descriptive neutrality of the term and its connotations of danger are part of how it can be mobilised so effectively for governing.

Vulnerability and human rights

Our understanding of vulnerability is ambiguous at best, according to legal scholar Martha Fineman (2008, p. 9). On a fundamental level, vulnerability is about relations (Goodin, 1985, p. 112) and, as such, a universally shared experience by all humanity that arises primarily because

of our embodiment and imminent possibility of harm (Butler, 2004, 2009; Fineman, 2008; Turner, 2006). Fineman argues that it is not possible to achieve “invulnerability”. The counterpoint to vulnerability, she suggests, is rather the resilience that stems from a capacity to address the limitations one experiences (Fineman, 2013, p. 22).

If vulnerability is a universal experience, it is reasonable to argue that the concept is also related to the idea of universal human rights. Sociologist Bryan Turner (2006) attempts to construct a normative sociology of rights around vulnerability in which he argues that the universality of human rights can be defined based on our shared common vulnerability. Like Fineman (2013), Turner directs his attention towards institutions that have been created as humanity’s shared response to the experience of vulnerability, but these institutions are imperfect and precarious and are thus a global reflection of the extent of our “capacity to sustain solidarity in the everyday world” (Turner, 2006, p. 28). Sociologist Jorge A. Bustamante (2002) suggests a straightforward approach to the relationship between vulnerability and rights in the context of migration: “the vulnerability of immigrants is equal to a virtual disempowerment of their human rights” (p. 352). In human rights activism, vulnerability is increasingly used to identify “which individuals are understood as victims of human rights violations” (Merry, 2007, p. 195). The concept of “vulnerable groups” is also increasingly used in the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (Peroni & Timmer, 2013).

While Turner suggests that human rights are needed to protect us from contingency (p. 126), McNeilly (2018) instead argues that the approach of “human rights to come” draws attention to contingency as productive. Human rights language needs to make the shared and differential experiences of vulnerability visible in never-ending critical interrogations of and responses to vulnerability (McNeilly, 2018, p. 106). Turner’s approach of using ontological vulnerability to defend universal human rights is in contrast to McNeilly’s approach in which the ideas of universal vulnerability, as proposed by Fineman (2008) and Butler (2006), for example, are utilised to “think through new usages of the language of rights and their politics to address differential vulnerability within the contexts of power” (McNeilly, 2018, p. 107). For the reasons outlined

above, I believe that McNeilly's non-closure approach is more useful for the struggle for human rights than the essentialising ontological approach to vulnerability and rights represented here by Turner.

Studying vulnerability may lead to an examination of institutions and rights but also politics, since vulnerability does not necessarily only imply an inability to act but can be a decisive factor in acting in ways that respond to the deficiencies that are the source of one's vulnerability (Mizen & Ofosu-Kusi, 2013; Sayer, 2011). For philosopher Judith Butler (2004), our shared relational and universal vulnerability implies our interconnectedness and interdependence. According to Butler, vulnerability can be a starting point for a more just and fair society. However, in the current social world, certain vulnerabilities count more than others and, in this way, fighting for a more just society means striving for equal recognition of vulnerability. Overall, the link between vulnerability and human rights is arguably strong and I suggest that the concept of vulnerability, just like human rights, is "dangerous" and needs to be problematised.

Theorising vulnerability

A useful taxonomy of the different sources and states of vulnerability has been developed by feminist philosopher Catriona Mackenzie (2014). *Inherent* sources of vulnerability stem from the embodiment that is intrinsic to the human condition. *Situational* vulnerability depends on context and is caused by external social, political and environmental (etc.) factors that are either dispositional (potential) or occurrent (actual). *Pathogenic* vulnerability is a subset of situational vulnerability and refers to what is seen, in a specific context, as morally problematic or to what are seen as unacceptable vulnerabilities that need to be eliminated (Mackenzie, 2014). Mackenzie takes the case of asylum seekers in detention to show how their vulnerability is primarily situational and the sources of their vulnerability are often found in the persecution they have had to endure but also in their incarceration and potential mistreatment by authorities in the country where they seek asylum. Their vulnerability is thus most often pathogenic since the sources of vulnerability arise from social injustices. If asylum seekers are not suffering

from occurrent (actual) mental illness after having endured war they are dispositionally (potentially) vulnerable to mental illness by being caught up in stressful asylum systems and being potentially at risk of detention and deportation (Mackenzie, 2014, p. 38–40). As such, pathogenic vulnerability can be the result of social policy interventions aimed to *ameliorate* inherent or situational vulnerability (Mackenzie et al., 2014, p. 9).

Agency and vulnerability are not always opposites but both concepts can be perceived as more or less problematic through political processes (J. Anderson, 2014; Mackenzie, 2014; Mackenzie et al., 2014). Therefore, our understanding of both vulnerability and autonomy must be premised on the recognition of one by the other (Mackenzie et al., 2014, p. 16). In a similar vein, sociologist Kate Brown (2014, 2015) discusses how vulnerability has been advanced as a concept that can both potentially enable social justice as well as stigmatise by psychologising and individualising social problems to invoke problematic paternalism. Contemporary understandings of vulnerability “are loaded with moral and ethical connotations about deservingness and entitlement”, Brown (2015) argues, and therefore “vulnerability is an under-researched and highly relevant concept in debates about citizenship and the relationships between individuals and the state” (p. 3).

According to Brown (2014), vulnerability has become an increasingly important concept within UK social policy in recent years, which has been a period characterised by austerity politics. She argues that discourses around vulnerability in liberal democracies such as the UK do not draw on the universalistic understanding of vulnerability. Rather, vulnerability “tends to be conceptualised as ‘other’ and as ‘deficit-orientated’” and thus in need of governing (K. Brown, 2015, p. 49). Vulnerability in these contexts differentiates people and directs attention to how welfare should be focused and resources distributed in an age of austerity. Vulnerability branding then becomes an expression of defining deservingness and, in austerity, this reaffirms the distribution of resources to certain groups at the expense of others. Just like the more theoretically developed concept of “risk”, vulnerability both points at

how people are *at risk* and simultaneously are perceived as *a risk* to the rest of society (K. Brown, 2015, p. 179).

Brown (2015) highlights a number of empirical studies that have shown how policies that are centred on vulnerability and labelling groups as vulnerable increase vulnerability in practice through constraining their agencies and focusing on individual behaviour rather than structural conditions. For Brown (2015), prevalent vulnerability policies and discourses often merely provide a façade of good intentions “behind which a number of more partisan re-moralising messages may operate in ways that are largely hidden from view” (p. 68) and through which specific groups are “otherised” rather than included (p. 191). By classifying certain people as “vulnerable”, sympathy rather than redistributive solidarity is evoked, vulnerability becomes exchangeable with “deservingness” and, as such, also becomes a tool for rationing limited, pre-defined resources between less well-off groups rather than a tool for larger societal redistribution.

Vulnerability is often theorised in relation to precarity. Butler (in Puar, 2012) differentiates between the two in terms of precariousness being an expression of our social vulnerability, which is unevenly distributed. Precarisation is then an ongoing process of precarity that “allows us to think about the slow death that happens to targeted or neglected populations over time and space” (Butler in Puar, 2012, p. 169). I read Butler’s understanding of precarity as a kind of situational vulnerability or, as anthropologist Clara Han (2018) interprets Butler: “precarity is the differential distribution of a common human vulnerability” (p. 339). In this way, I consider the terms “precarity” and “situational vulnerability” to be interchangeable. In the next section, I discuss how processes in which vulnerability is governed play out in the context of irregular migration.

Vulnerabilisation

From the above reading of the literature on vulnerability I conclude that vulnerability should not be understood in terms of the neutral, descriptive conceptualisation that prevails in current discourse—the state of being at risk of harm. Rather, vulnerability is highly entangled in political processes in regard to how specific groups in society should be attended

to, cared for or governed. Policies that are put in place with the purpose of ameliorating inherent or situational (contextual) vulnerability can have the opposite effect and create more pathogenic (problematic or unacceptable) vulnerability. The labelling or attribution of vulnerability, which happens by defining what is to be considered pathogenic or unwanted vulnerability, is central to this process since policies are embedded in discourses that define certain groups as more or less vulnerable. In this way, labelling certain groups as vulnerable become part of the governing of these groups. According to philosopher Joel Anderson (2014), deciding which vulnerabilities are to be considered problematic, or what the “surplus vulnerabilities” are, is a political question in any given situation.

Here I want to put forward an argument that positions deportability in the vulnerability debate and vice versa. As I argue in the articles, deportability is interesting as a critical case since it draws our attention to the borders of the state itself. Philosopher Christine Straehle (2018) suggests that “all people at the border are vulnerable because the state may prevent them from realizing their migratory project, from entering a safe state, or a country full of opportunities” (p. 258). Similarly, Butler (2012) argues that “every political effort to manage populations involves a tactical distribution of precarity” (p. 148) that is unevenly distributed between those whose lives are “grievable” (Butler, 2004, 2009) and worth protecting and those whose are not. Furthermore, deportations are constitutive of the state (Walters, 2002), meaning that they function as a way to define who belongs to the state by removing those defined as not belonging from the state’s territory. I argue that deportability, or illegality, is a form of vulnerability created by the state through its stripping of rights and entitlements from certain groups of people positioned as potentially deportable migrants. I believe that so far, the literature on vulnerability, to a large extent, lacks the perspective of how vulnerability, in the form of deportability, can be constitutive of the state itself and not just something that states address through the creation of just institutions (see De Genova, 2002).

I suggest that affective governing in the deportation regime (see *Article 2*) is a source of situational, pathogenic vulnerability, and humanitarian

governing is then rationalised as a response to this vulnerability first created by the state. Marcus Taylor (2015) suggests that “the relational processes in which vulnerability is produced and reproduced over time” could be called “vulnerabilisation” (p. 8, for other uses of “vulnerabilisation” see Casalini, 2016; Sardadvar et al., 2012; Mai, 2014; Zarowsky et al., 2013, p. 3, and for a discussion on the use of “precaritisation” as connected to debates around precarity and its relation to labour, see della Porta et al., 2015). However, the state’s role in constructing vulnerabilities is often invisibilised (B. Anderson, 2012) and I want to develop the concept of vulnerabilisation further to suggest that it can be used to name not just the relational aspects of vulnerability but also the political processes by which states create the conditions for vulnerability as well as define and attribute it, which enables the governing of the “vulnerabilised”. This state practice—first (out of sight) *creating* vulnerability, then *labelling* the targeted groups as vulnerable and finally utilising this vulnerability (defined as pathogenic or unwanted) to rationalise their *governing*—is what I call “vulnerabilisation”. I believe it is useful to suggest this concept as a specific form of creating pathogenic vulnerability since it is something that is, to a large extent, the exclusive privilege of the state through its sovereign power.

Protracted vulnerability is a characteristic of the state of deportability, according to migration scholar Nicholas De Genova (2002). The social construction of deportability is thus a production of situational vulnerability, which the state then reacts to through governing by blaming the migrant for creating his or her own vulnerability and illegality. It is thus the privilege of the state, or the “vulnerabiliser”, to detach the act of creating vulnerability from the definition of vulnerability and the assignment of the label “vulnerable”. This detachment hides the processes by which vulnerability is constructed in the same way that states move the responsibility of the creation of “illegality” away from its point of production (the law) and attach responsibility to migrants through the criminalisation of individual movement and mobility (De Genova, 2013a).

In this way, deportability governs through vulnerability both in that the state creates situational vulnerabilities by stripping migrants of rights and creating an affective state of fear and stress and by then assigning

labels of vulnerability to certain groups, which further enables governing through practices concealed as protection. In this sense, migrant children are “vulnerabilised” in a similar way as they are *irregularised* or *undocumented*, meaning that vulnerability is something that has primarily been bestowed upon them as structural limitations on their capacity and possibilities to live as full participants in society.

An example from my fieldwork exemplifies how pathogenic vulnerability is often a result of living in an irregular situation. Mina and Ali, parents of two children in Malmö and who all were deported to Kosovo in late 2016, explained to me while they were still in Sweden how difficult it was to be in an irregular situation. “We have had so many problems here in Sweden that we forgot our problems in Kosovo”, Ali said. “Mina has developed schizophrenia, that should be enough to understand how bad it is. She got it in Sweden, that is how hard it is.”

Individualisation is prevalent in vulnerability policy mechanisms, according to Brown and colleagues (2017) who suggest that this makes “individuals regulate their own behaviour in ways that conform to particular norms about ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ behaviours” (p. 501; see also Brotherton, 2013). Central to vulnerabilisation through deportability is the way the state tries to put the blame on the migrants themselves for causing their own vulnerability and how the state consequently tries to make undocumented migrants “govern themselves” into returning to their assigned country of return (Luibhéid, 2013). Vulnerabilisation in the context of migration control then includes states’ attempts to force migrants into “self-deportation” (Park, 2018) by “squeezing out” or forcing out the agency that the state believes the migrant still possesses. However, this generally does not result in increased deportations or returns but rather further constructions of migrant vulnerabilities. Self-governing is the primary goal of migration regulation that emphasises the need for “voluntary return”. Affective governing, through hostile policies (which I discuss in more detail in chapter 4) that remind migrants of the threat of deportation, is crucial to the logic of this self-governing. *Article 3* connects vulnerabilisation to critical discussions on children’s rights by problematising how the practices that have been put in place, as well as arguments ostensibly formulated to strengthen chil-

dren's rights and consequently to ameliorate their vulnerability, are instead mobilised by different state actors to govern migrant children's territorial presence and mobility and, as such, become expressions of vulnerabilisation.

Deportability

A key component of the theoretical approach of this thesis that needs further elaboration is the concept of deportability (De Genova, 2002). As I discussed above, deportability can be understood as a form of vulnerabilisation but it is important to discuss in more detail how deportability, and irregular migration in general, have been understood and approached in existing research and what implications they have for the overall arguments of this thesis. How migration researchers understand and approach these issues influences the outcomes of their empirical research, and critical migration scholars (De Genova, 2013b; Hatton, 2018) have highlighted how a lack of reflection on and problematisation of the issue of irregular migration can lead migration research to be too closely intertwined with the central actors and powers in control of migration policies and practices, such as local, national and regional institutions governing issues of migration. Working closely with governing authorities puts a lot of pressure on researchers to see migration issues through the eyes of the state and makes it very difficult to keep a critical perspective towards the governing actors themselves. Collaborating with such actors always has the potential of harming the human subjects of the field of research if it feeds policy formations that further control territorial presence and mobility (Hatton, 2018), which is something I have tried to avoid throughout my research. This is hence partly connected to the issues of ethics and methodology that I discuss in the following chapter. This last, concluding section of this chapter on earlier research and theory is an attempt to bridge the theoretical discussions on my central concepts to the methodological discussions of how I went about studying these concepts. Therefore, I discuss the places where vulnerabilisation takes place in deportability and the scales at which it operates as well as reflect on how I relate to these processes in my research.

Researching deportability

The concepts of “deportability” and “illegality” are central to critical scholarship on irregular migration. Throughout my research, I have followed De Genova’s (2002) advice to study deportability and illegality as social phenomena rather than “undocumented people” as individuals. He warns that the study of “undocumented *migrants*” (compared to “irregular *migration*”) risks becoming a sort of “anthropological pornography”, where research that is “showing it just to show it, as it were” (p. 422) in terms of being an undocumented migrant serves, at best, a voyeuristic function and, even worse, may be a kind of surveillance at the service of the state and its control mechanisms (De Genova, 2002). He states:

By constituting undocumented migrants (the people) as an epistemological and ethnographic “object” of study, social scientists, however unwittingly, become agents in an aspect of the everyday production of those migrants’ “illegality”—in effect, accomplices to the discursive power of immigration law. (De Genova, 2002, p. 423)

Critical research on the phenomena and socio-political conditions of irregular migration, deportability and illegality can still draw on the experiences of those positioned as undocumented migrants, but the focus of study should be the legal processes and power relations that create the state of deportability and illegality in which people are positioned.

The concept of deportability highlights the experience of continuously being at risk of potential deportation. For De Genova (2002), this potentiality of deportation, rather than the deportations themselves, is what renders “undocumented migrant labor a distinctly disposable commodity” (p. 438). Migrant illegality is then “lived through a palpable sense of deportability” and the legal production of illegality creates a situation in which “some are deported in order that most may remain (undeported)—as workers, whose particular migrant status may thus be rendered ‘illegal’” (De Genova, 2002, p. 439). As discussed earlier, De Genova argues that this is one aspect of how deportability creates vulnerability, typically through a racialised differentiation that produces a precarious workforce. However, deportability does not only create vulnerability in relation to precarious labour. Luibhéid and colleagues

(2018) show how undocumented migrant mothers in the state of Arizona had to risk being deported if they chose to take their children to health care facilities even though their children were legally entitled to health care. Luibhéid and colleagues argue that this is an example of how deportability both reconfigures and is constituted through “state-recognized intimate ties” and not just through the vulnerability of a (predominantly male) precarious work market. In *Article 2*, I discuss the shared experiences of mothers, fathers and children in families and how they together cope with the effects of deportability in practically all aspects of their everyday lives.

In *Article 4*, I suggest that the concept of “displaceability” could be useful for an understanding of how the spatial vulnerability of undocumented migrants, of which deportability is one form, continues throughout their life trajectories. Through this concept, I connect experiences of forced mobility in countries of origin as people are forced to flee from violent conflict with experiences of deportability in host societies, as well as with the difficulties undocumented migrants have in finding stable housing arrangements in their host societies. In this way, I suggest that spatial vulnerability is often experienced at every scale throughout the life course of undocumented migrants. This argument further connects the concepts of deportability and vulnerability and aims to bridge different research fields in which issues of displacement are studied to enable an understanding of spatial vulnerabilisation as a technique of contemporary governing globally.

The continuum of deportability

A review essay (Ruszczyk & Yrizar Barbosa, 2016) suggests that there has recently been a “second wave” of illegality research (referring to Bloch et al., 2014; Dreby, 2015; Gonzales, 2016; Menjivar & Kanstroom, 2014). This collection of research has focused on the “pernicious yet highly contingent” characteristic of the experience of illegality and the individual as well as the collective agency of undocumented migrants’ responses to increasing legal restrictions (Ruszczyk & Yrizar Barbosa, 2016). This variation in experiences as well as the increasing irrelevance of separating different groups of migrants according to fixed

categories have also been highlighted in recent research. Through an analysis of shifting policies from permanent to temporary resident permits for refugees in Sweden after 2015, migration researchers Maja Sager and Klara Öberg (2017) suggest that deportability should be understood as a “continuum”. Migration scholar Franck Düvell (2008) similarly uses the term “scale of clandestine migration” to discuss how the difference between regular and irregular migration statuses is sometimes indefinable. As Sager and Öberg (2017) highlight, even if you get a working permit in Sweden you are susceptible to deportation since you are dependent (at least for the first few years) on the benevolence of your contractor to uphold her or his part of the contract so that the permit will continue. This reflects De Genova’s (2002) analysis that there are no limitations for the state to deport even “legal” non-citizens if it wishes to do so. In this manner, De Genova (2002) argues, deportability is profoundly disciplinary.

The continuum of deportability (Sager & Öberg, 2017) or scale of irregularity (Düvell, 2008) implies that the borders between different legal migrant categories are blurry and overlapping. This is reflected in the myriad conceptualisations that have emerged in research in recent years that aim to reach beyond rigid distinctions between regular and irregular migrants, and instead try to capture in different ways the paradoxical and ambiguous positions of migrants at risk of deportation, such as “semi-legality” (Düvell, 2006; Kubal, 2013); “semi-compliance” (Ruhs & Anderson, 2006); “liminal legality” (Menjívar, 2006); “formal informality” (Erdemir & Vasta, 2007); “precarious statuses” (Goldring et al., 2009) or “permanent temporariness” (Bailey et al., 2002). Illegality is constructed through law and many people with “documented” status are also directly or indirectly affected by an imminent threat of deportation. Therefore, in this thesis, the concept of the “undocumented migrant” has an open meaning that I use to talk about anyone who has had the experience of being at risk of deportation at some time in their life.

All concepts currently in use in research on irregular migration are problematic in some way. The concept of “undocumented migrant” does not reflect the fact that migrants often have more “documents” recording their migratory and legal encounters than most “documented” migrants.

“Irregular migrant” is awkward as it suggests that someone is not “normal”, although migration researcher Anne McNevin (2011) uses this concept as “the best of a bad bunch” (p. 20). Migration scholar Harald Bauder (2014) prefers “illegalized migrant” as it draws attention to how people are rendered illegal through institutional and political processes. Civil society organisation PICUM⁶ has suggested, in their recommendations for what language to use in official policy, that both “undocumented migrant” and “irregular migrant” work equally well. Importantly, the concept of “illegal migrant” is not useful for categorising people as it “implies that an immigrant has committed a crime, that she does not belong, and that someone else (often the speaker) has been wronged” (Bauder, 2014, p. 328). In this thesis, I mostly use the concepts of “undocumented *migrant*” and “irregular *migration/situation*”, primarily to create some variation in language as they refer to the same experience of being at risk of deportation.

The field⁷

The question of categorisations had implications for how I designed my research, and the process of delimiting the “field” I wanted to study went hand in hand with the process of understanding how deportability plays out in different national contexts as the legal and social conditions differ. I discussed the differences between Sweden and the UK with an NGO worker in Birmingham and described how, in Sweden, undocumented migrants are sometimes referred to as “hidden” refugees (Holgersson, 2011), whereupon the worker replied that in the UK “more than hidden they would be lost” since the UK is such a big country and the ethnic minority groups are large and therefore it may be easier to blend in among those groups. The Home Office is also regularly criticised for its delays in processing immigration cases (Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman, 2017), and earlier research has shown how the irregular situation in the UK is not seldom created by bureaucratic fail-

⁶ <https://picum.org/words-matter/>

⁷ This section draws in part on my article published in *Migraciones*, “The Method of Ethics-as-Process: Embracing Ambivalence in Research on Childhood and Deportability” (Lind, 2017).

ures in processing immigration applications (Sigona & Hughes, 2012). One consequence of this is that activists are making migrants aware of the risk that submitting applications may “wake up the lion that is asleep”, as one legal advisor said in a meeting with a client during my fieldwork. Instead, “the charities give them status”, another NGO worker in Birmingham said to describe how important charities are for many undocumented migrants in the UK because of these circumstances.

The research “field” of any scientific study does not just exist out there to be explored but is constructed as part of the research process itself (Amit, 2000). I call it “co-constructing” the field to emphasise that my delimitation was a result of on-going conversations with my participants. I spent much time during the initial stages of my fieldwork discussing which people would be relevant to approach; too narrow a definition would have excluded people who may have wanted to take part, and too broad a definition could potentially have made the result less relevant for the people it was meant to be of benefit for. In Sweden, undocumented migrants themselves have contributed to establishing a relatively clear-cut category of *papperslösa*,⁸ which translates into English as “without papers”. The category of *papperslösa* consists to a very large degree of asylum seekers who have been refused asylum but have avoided deportation and stayed in Sweden without leave to remain (see Lundberg & Söderman, 2015; Sager, 2011; Strange & Lundberg, 2014). In the UK, the categories are much more diverse; an “undocumented” migrant in the UK usually refers to visa-overstayers, whereas migrants who have unsuccessfully claimed asylum and who are either hiding from the migration authorities to avoid deportation or challenging this refusal through legal means usually refer to themselves as “refused asylum seekers” (see Ruhs & Anderson, 2006; Bloch, 2013a; Sigona & Hughes, 2012).

⁸ However, recent political developments around so-called “vulnerable EU-citizens” who beg in the streets and often overstay their three-month right of residence in Sweden as EU-citizens have opened up a discussion about the categorisation since government representatives have tried to argue that they are not *papperslösa* in an attempt to exclude them from the right to education (see Lind & Persdotter, 2017).

In Sweden, *papperslösa* is a category that has been recognised in recent legislation, which has extended the right to health care and education to this category (Nielsen, 2016), whereas in the UK, similar debates generally concern “destitute migrants”, including migrants with various legal statuses. As practically all of my participants described, seeking asylum in the UK usually meant navigating the slow processes that they saw as an incompetent bureaucracy, combined with poor immigration advice from those they experienced as corrupt solicitors. This results in a shared vulnerability affecting many people who are not seeking asylum or who do not know what their exact status may be at the moment. Recent developments in Sweden, where new harsher immigration legislation has been introduced, are likely to further blur the levels of vulnerability between asylum seekers and *papperslösa* (see Crouch, 2015). What I learned in the field by talking with support workers and participants was that many people with various legal statuses in the UK, or who are variously positioned in relation to the Home Office, are to a greater or lesser degree likely to be deported or fear being deported, and the likelihood does not necessarily correspond with the level of fear. Likewise, it is not usually possible to say how likely it is that someone will be deported sometime soon.

According to most support workers I met in the UK, families with children are especially less likely to be deported, if for no other reason than because of the relatively large amount of work involved for the migration authorities to make it happen. However, at the same time, as a mother from Jamaica expressed it when discussing the impact of deportability on her community, the impression is that “half of Britain is afraid of being deported”. At the end of my fieldwork in Sweden, the notion that families living there are less likely to be deported than in the UK (as I had understood to be the case) was suddenly shattered as the initial information sharing between the Swedish Social Services and the Border Police took place, as well as the raid at the church camp primarily targeting families from the Balkans.

During my fieldwork, all of the participants were living in an irregular situation or had been in the past and were then at different stages of applying for leave to remain—though still feeling the very real threat of

deportation in their everyday lives since a negative decision from the UK Home Office or the Swedish Migration Agency could potentially lead to deportation at any time. Arguably, by including children and parents at different stages of the immigration process—before, during and after the periods in which they experienced a lack of regular immigration status—makes it possible to show what is particular to the irregular situation. It would have been almost impossible to meet Avani and her children, for example (see *Article 2*), during the time the father of her children, who was a British citizen, for dubious reasons was keeping the mother and children (who were not UK citizens and had entered the country on false visas) out of the authorities' sight.

A teenage girl, Nadine, in Malmö, also had opinions about whom it would be appropriate for me to talk to. When I met Nadine, she was applying for asylum, and she said that she might not have wanted to talk to me a few years earlier when she was still in an irregular situation, whereas at the time of the interview she had a larger picture and could compare her experience of both irregularity and applying for asylum. I asked her if she had more of a distance to her difficult experiences in irregularity now:

Nadine: Yes, it feels like I have made it into a fact now, a small text of facts, that I have collected it all now in my brain, that I have everything in a picture. I can sort of see how it was then, I can walk past it and see, I can see how it has been. But I would not have been able to do that if I was undocumented now. I sort of did not know, everything was not clear, and it still is not clear, but it is much better now. Something is sort of over.

We then discussed a friend of hers that was still in an irregular situation and she suggested that it would be a bad idea for me to talk to her at that time. Nadine also pointed out that she had been interviewed by many people before me, maybe ten times or more, by counsellors and people at the immigration authorities, so she was used to talking about her situation. She suggested that this made it easier for her to talk to me, even though she pointed out that no one else had taken notes of everything she said the way I did. I believe that Nadine's reflections are very sound

and reflect some of the ambiguities involved in this kind of research that resonate with most of the research in which similar kinds of methodological issues are discussed (Allerton, 2018; Wahlström Smith, 2018, 2020).

The implication of this for research among vulnerabilised migrant children is that the consequences of one's categories and delimitations must be carefully considered in terms of one's interaction with the field and how it will be represented. In my case, I came to understand that amongst all the variations of legal statuses that I encountered, the fear of being deported was still the main underlying concern of the families and children I talked to, both in Sweden and the UK. Therefore, it made most sense to include anyone who had at some point avoided the migration authorities because of this fear since they all still experienced that they could potentially be deported whenever the migration authorities chose to say so. Such an approach does not leave out the need for the researcher to conceptualise the field, but it draws primarily on the experiences and knowledge of the participants themselves.

One specific categorisation of migrants in Swedish public discourse and debate that I refer to in this thesis is "vulnerable EU citizens", which primarily refers to EU citizens who beg and live rough in Sweden (Lind & Persdotter, 2017). The category or label of "vulnerable EU citizens" is specifically ambiguous and unstable, as urban studies scholar Maria Persdotter (2019) highlights, and it is unclear how it differentiates from the category of "*mobile* EU citizens". Seemingly, the former is more closely connected to understandings of unwanted "migration" whereas the latter connect to understandings of desirable "free movement" in the EU. "Vulnerable EU-citizens" is perhaps a specifically clear example of how categorisations are performative practices of drawing boundaries that then create the very differences that they name (Persdotter, 2019). Persdotter shows how the unstable character of the category "vulnerable EU citizens" means that it is constantly contested and redefined in Swedish political discourse, especially in relation to what differentiates it from the legal category of undocumented migrants (*papperslösa*). As I discuss in *Article 3* (in which I draw on the work of Persdotter and myself [Lind & Persdotter, 2017]), public officials in Sweden are strug-

gling to define these differences to enable an exclusion of so-called “vulnerable EU citizens” from the right to education. The sentiment of the preparatory work (SOU 2007:34, 2007; SOU 2010:5, 2010) preceding the law from 2013 (when the category “vulnerable EU citizens” had not yet been established) was that *all* children, including undocumented migrants, should have the right to education. However, a later public report (SOU 2016:6, 2016) suggested that “vulnerable EU citizen” children should be included in the only exception in the law, namely temporary visitors spending less than three months in Sweden. Persdotter (2019) further highlights the unlikelihood that anyone would self-identify as a “vulnerable EU citizen”. I did not conduct any interviews or participant observation with any person categorised as a “vulnerable EU citizen”, but this category is discussed in this thesis primarily in relation to how it is contrasted against the category of undocumented migrants (*papperslösa*) in Sweden.

Earlier research on irregular migration

Struggles for the inclusion of undocumented migrants have taken place in Sweden at least since the 1980s, most often in connection to issues of asylum and refugee rights (cf. Vestin, 2002). This work was accompanied and strengthened by different reports and other publications that more or less explicitly focused on issues of irregular migration (see, for example, Hunt, 2007; Khosravi, 2006; The Solstickan Foundation & Nordic School of Public Health, 2009; Vestin, 2002, 2008). However, up until the last decade, academic research specifically focusing on irregular migration has been scarce. Ethnographic research about irregular migration that considered the specific characteristics of illegality in a Swedish context was first conducted by anthropologist Shahram Khosravi (2006, 2009, 2010a; 2010b).

In the wake of Khosravi’s studies, a growing body of research on irregular migration has emerged in the last decade that has provided rich insights into the particularities of how illegality is experienced in Sweden (cf. Sager et al., 2016). A variety of aspects concerning the irregular situation have been analysed in more detail in the past decade, such as issues of activism and resistance (Keshavarz, 2016; Nordling et al., 2017;

Spång & Lundberg, 2019; Söderman, 2019); children and families (Ascher & Wahlström Smith, 2016; Wahlström Smith, 2018, 2020); education (Lind & Persdotter, 2017; Strange & Lundberg, 2014); gender (Sager, 2011, 2016); geography (Holgersson, 2011); health (Andersson et al., 2018; Björngren Cuadra, 2012; Lundberg & Spång, 2017; Lundberg & Söderman, 2015; Sigvardsdotter, 2012); labour (Selberg, 2014; Öberg, 2015); policy (Nielsen, 2016); rights (Andersson & Nilsson, 2011; Noll, 2010; Sager, 2018); sanctuary practices (Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2018; Lundberg & Strange, 2016); social work (Björngren Cuadra, 2015; Holmlund, 2020; Nordling, 2017) and young people (Djampour, 2018; Stretmo, 2014).

The research analysing the UK context that is most relevant for this thesis was conducted by migration scholars Nando Sigona and Vanessa Hughes (2012) who were the first to properly analyse the experiences of undocumented migrant children in the UK and what the effect of UK illegality had on their and their families' everyday lives. As in Sweden, a variety of concepts and issues have been studied in the UK in relation to irregular migration, such as deportation (Gibney, 2008; Tyler, 2018); destitution (Cunningham & Tomlinson, 2005); everyday life (Bloch, 2013a; Bloch & McKay, 2016; Sigona, 2012); housing (Crawford et al., 2016); labour (B. Anderson & Ruhs, 2010; Bloch, 2013b; Ruhs & Anderson, 2006); policies (B. Anderson, 2013; Jones et al., 2017); rights (Gibney, 2009); sanctuary (Darling, 2010); social work (Jolly, 2017, 2018) and young people (Bloch et al., 2014).

Outside of Sweden and the UK, the body of research on irregular migration in general is too vast to summarise comprehensibly, but some research focussing on children, young people and families is especially relevant for my research and covers issues of activism and resistance (Nicholls, 2013); agency (Mai, 2011; Terrio, 2008, 2010); education (Abrego, 2006; Laubenthal, 2011; Green, 2003; Vandenhoe et al., 2011); everyday life (Abrego, 2016; Allerton, 2018; Balderas et al., 2016; Berger Cardoso et al., 2018; Brabeck et al., 2016; Dreby, 2012, 2015; Enriquez, 2015; Gonzales, 2011, 2016; Gonzales & Chavez, 2012; Lykes et al., 2013; Menjívar, 2006; Mann, 2010; Shapiro, 2013; Thronson, 2006; Yoshikawa, 2011); gender (Boehm, 2012; Doering-

White et al., 2016; Luibhéid et al., 2018); health (Chang, 2005; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011); policy and discourse (Meloni et al., 2013; Spencer, 2016); rights (Bhabha, 2009; Gonzales, 2009) and vulnerability (Macioce, 2017). The main contributions of my work in relation to this rich and growing body of research are arguably the comparison between Sweden and the UK, the intergenerational analysis of undocumented migrant children and families' political agency and rights and my conceptualisation of child rights governing and vulnerabilisation in the context of undocumented migrant childhoods.

The “migrant”

Early in this chapter, I discussed the concept of migrancy and how it reflects how people positioned as “migrants” often have not experienced transnational migration themselves. Consequently, the categorisation of “migrants” attached to differently positioned people is, in its most fundamental form, an expression of colonial and racial stratifications (B. Anderson, 2019; Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991). Historically, immigrants have been considered a fundamental threat to the nation (Sharma, 2015) or, as De Genova (2013b) puts it: “if there were no borders, there would be no migrants—only mobility” (p. 253). The term “migrant” has in many ways replaced the despised term “race” (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991, p. 222). Illegalisation, according to De Genova (2013a), is closely connected to racialisation and racism, just as deportability is closely connected to vulnerability. Geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) defines racism as “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (p. 28). An analysis of vulnerabilisation in the context of migration must be attentive to the racialised structures that are at play and reaffirmed in these processes.

Not all migrants are equally affected by racialisation. Migration scholar Kara Cebulko (2018) shows, for example, how undocumented migrants in the US of Brazilian origin, who are often lighter skinned than many other Latin American groups, are relatively privileged, especially in interactions with the police and border patrol. Still, they experience a profound sense of exclusion because of their legal status (Cebulko, 2018).

This connects with the colonial legacies of most host countries where migrants exclaim how “we are here because you were there” (Kushnick, 1993). The current UN *Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance*, law scholar Tendayi Achiume (2019), suggests that (especially so-called economic) migration should be understood as a form of decolonisation, where colonial histories give colonial subjects valid claims for inclusion by colonial powers. The political agency of migrants engaging in migration as a form of decolonisation should be recognised as they exercise equal rights (Achiume, 2019).

The interconnection between the nation, race and coloniality is inherent to migration research: “if there were no nations, there would be no migration research”, to paraphrase De Genova (2013b, see also Dahinden, 2016). Migration research thus risks reproducing naturalised differences between migrants and the host population. To avoid this, migration scholar Janine Dahinden (2016) suggests that migration research should be “de-migranticized” (p. 2207) and more clearly reflect on the categorisations it reproduces as well as link the research more to social science theories in general and focus on parts of the whole population rather than migrants as a supposedly coherent group (see also B. Anderson, 2019). I am aware of these problematics in relation to my research on irregular migration and in this section, as well as in the following methodological chapter, I reflect on how I have tackled them.

As a researcher within the subject of International Migration and Ethnic Relations (IMER) (cf. CEIFO, 2009; Petersson & Johansson, 2013) I have great responsibility in what categories and understandings I reproduce. De Genova (2002) suggests two basic different standpoints in relation to research on irregular migration: the perspective of the state in which the migrant is the problem and the perspective of free movement in which the state is the problem. My starting point is the latter. This standpoint originates in an understanding of borders as necessary for the current world system of neo-colonial predatory capitalism that wreaks havoc on our environment and human wellbeing in general. No borders is not a utopian vision (B. Anderson et al., 2009), rather it is the project

of attempting to control states' borders that is utopian and unrealistic (Khosravi, 2013).

Even if one views no borders as a utopia, I argue that the same approach is necessary here as in relation to human rights: one must aim for utopia even though it will perhaps not be reached in full and realise that it is the struggle to get there that must never end. Such an approach is more likely to result in an expansion of the reach and inclusivity of rights in general, and the right to freedom of movement in particular, than a pragmatic approach that has already succumbed to the limitations of the given order.

Still, the neoliberal logic that amplifies individualism and strategic career planning for survival within academia, together with the increasing demand for research-based migration policy recommendations, tend to make researchers more and more dependent on collaboration with the state agencies responsible for migration governance. As I discuss above, such collaborations always have the potential of harming the human subjects of the field of research if they feed policy formations further controlling territorial presence and mobility (Hatton, 2018). To avoid this, one has to consider what understandings of the state are potentially reproduced in one's research.

The state

Research on migration in the contemporary world uses nation states as a choice of scale for analysis in more or less reflective ways. However, the often-sloppy use of the concept of "the state" reflects how "we have come to take the state for granted [...] while remaining spectacularly unclear as to what the state is" (Abrams, 1988, p. 59, cited in Gill, 2010a). As I discuss in *Article 3*, when I talk about "the state" I mainly refer to the overall policies and practices of governments. However, the different parts, institutions and individuals that make up the state do not all have the same power or responsibilities.

A line of argument that characterises my approach to the phenomena of the state is that I am not so much interested in defining what something *is*. I do not view the state as something "preconstituted that perform giv-

en functions” (Sharma & Gupta, 2006, p. 27). Questions in search of essential characteristics most often lead to a dead end in analytical thinking. My social constructivist approach leads me to rather ask what something *does* or, in other words, what the *function* of something is in different contexts. By studying actions, practices and functions I argue that one often comes closer to understanding what different social constructions, or understandings of a social phenomenon, are reproduced in a specific context. The state is thus “produced through everyday practices and encounters and through public cultural representations and performances” (Sharma & Gupta, 2006, p. 27).

I do not aim to engage in complex historical debates on how the state is constituted, even though this is a concern within critical human rights research since the issue of human rights forces philosophers to consider the relationship between the people constituting the state and the way the state behaves towards its individual constituents: the state is both the entity responsible for most human rights violations and the primary protector of these rights. For me, it is primarily important not to think of the state too much in terms of being an “other”, or an entity that cannot be affected or changed. The state is constituted by its members. Philosopher Etienne Balibar (2014) defines the state as something dialectical, organic and “not as an authority external to social relations, but as the very agent of their regulation and reproduction” (p. 112). As a lot of earlier research has shown, the social relations that are produced in relation to illegality are characterised by contradictory processes of inclusion and exclusion (De Genova, 2013a; Karlsen, 2015; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2012; Sager, 2011). Balibar discusses the question of inclusion and exclusion and argues that “the ethical problem politics poses is not that of choosing between inclusion and exclusion in an absolute way, without remainder; it is rather knowing who is excluded, why, from what, by what mechanisms” (2014, p. 124). State institutions thus produce both inclusion as well as exclusion and state actors take part in constitutive violence in different ways (M. Weber, 1946). When I say “the state” or “state actors”, I am referring to institutions or their representatives that in some way exercise public authority by right of their position within the state or supra-state organisations. I primarily relate to the institutions that the families and children partaking in my study are affected by.

These include, but are not limited to, the Swedish Migration Agency and the UK Home Office, the Social Services, the Border Police and Government-appointed commissions of inquiry, but also the government itself, which all enact state power in different ways.

The state is not a monolith, it is actually “a cluster of relationships, entities, and agencies reflecting and shaping public norms and values through law and policy” and we are very much dependent on the state in our everyday lives, legal scholars Martha Albertson Fineman and Anna Grear (2013) suggest. They argue, “In a responsive state, individuals realize that we, too, are part of the state. We do not—cannot—stand outside of the state and we have a responsibility to participate—to be vigilant in seeing that the state is working effectively and in an egalitarian manner” (Fineman & Grear, 2013, p. 26). Such a pragmatic approach to the state and its institutions appeals to its members to actively take responsibility for the actions of the state. However, this approach needs to be understood in light of the perspective that Balibar (2014) represents in which the constitutive violence of the state is highlighted, and the members of the state need to be aware that they too are part of the mechanisms that negotiate inclusion and exclusion.

The contradictions and tensions between the dual roles of states as providing rights and securing sovereignty can be studied in a meaningful way through ethnographies of the state (Fassin, 2015). For Fassin, the state “is what its agents do” while being influenced by “the policies they implement, the habits they develop, the initiatives they take, and the responses they get from their publics” (p. ix). In this way, we can understand how political and public discourses around migration affect how state actors act out policies that are open for interpretation. Understandings of the state are also historically and contextually specific, as they are “situated both geographically and historically” and the ethnographic method enables an uncovering of the distinct realities of the state (Fassin, 2015, p. x). By studying the margins of the state, where issues of irregular migration can often be found, we can also capture how the state functions and what logic it is built upon (Fassin, 2015, p. 3).

The relationship between the state and the concept of refugees is a “symbiotic relationship”, according to migration scholar Nick Gill (2010a). The concept of the refugee is contingent on a nation state system and nation state sovereignty, within which the refugee, understood as a person without the protection of the state, is an anomaly and exception. At the same time, the state system is bolstered by the objectification and abjection of refugees as it is depicted as the only system that can provide what refugees lack (Gill, 2010a, p. 626). Gill suggests that critical asylum scholars need to make their implicit notions of the state explicit as much contemporary research reproduces essentialised understandings of the state by not reflecting on the assumptions they are based on. Furthermore, Geographer Joe Painter (2006) suggests that one should study *notions* or *ideas of* the state; it is more interesting to ask what the state is taken to be than to ask what it is. Drawing on Painter, Gill suggests that a critical approach to the state in relation to asylum and migration issues includes:

[...] acknowledgement of the different forms of state power, including governmental power; awareness of the contingency (and hence the contestability) of state power upon practices that produce the state itself; awareness of the importance of people within the state and, relatedly, the importance of struggles around the labelling and enrolling of people as “state” actors; and sensitivity to the power of claims made concerning the state’s presence and absence. (Gill, 2010b, p. 639)

Implicit approaches to the state affect how asylum activists act and the strategies they enact. Appreciation of differences in approaches can make the struggle richer and more effective, Gill argues (2010b, p. 1068). Furthermore, if one does not reflect on one’s use of the concept of the state in research, one risks falling into the trap of methodological nationalism.

When studying two countries (as I do), one runs the risk of reproducing methodological nationalism, which Nina Glick Schiller defines as “an ideological orientation that approaches the study of social and historical processes as if they were contained within the borders of individual nation-states” (2010, p. 110). According to Daniel Chernilo (2006), the

strength of the nation state is its stability and ability to “impose order and provide welfare”, while its weakness is that it “faces constant crises which threaten to divide the nation and weaken the state” (p. 202). The nation state is an “unfinished project” that describes itself as a stable social-political entity (Chernilo, 2006). Thus, the nation state has an ambivalent position in modernity and should not be treated as a given, since that makes it impossible to actually understand the ambivalent role of states in current society (Chernilo, 2006). Therefore, to be able to understand and analyse the role of the nation state in modernity and beyond, one has to transcend methodological nationalism.

Looking for alternatives to methodological nationalism, it is important not to turn towards what Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2003) call “methodological fluidism”. For them, this opposite extreme is just as problematic as its counterpart. The migrant is neither a marginal figure in global society nor the prototype for the human condition. Migrants themselves often adapt the discourse or rhetoric of the nation state when speaking up for their own rights to citizenship. Thus, nationalism is still a “powerful signifier that continues to make sense for different actors with different purposes and political implications” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003, p. 600).

The critical question for researchers who want to avoid methodological nationalism is how one should then relate to the nation state instead. It is likely that the nation state will not just disappear; there is strong reason to believe it will be important even in the long term. How do you write about issues closely related to the nation state without reproducing the hegemonic discourse of the nation state as the only thinkable social order? Could you avoid the nation state all together? One key could be focusing on the ambivalent nature of the nation state, as Chernilo (2006) points out. Fassin (2011) further suggests that a focus on the limits of the nation state rather than its powers shows “its illegality and illegibility, demonstrates its partiality and ineffectiveness, but also establishes the functionality of these apparent dysfunctions” (p. 217).

In my own work, I run the risk of reproducing methodological nationalism for several reasons. The comparative setup of my research project is in its very nature structured around two nation states. However, local

governments have been quicker than states in creating policies in relation to irregular migration. This asks for an analysis that is able to look beyond the presumptions of the nation state and that poses new kinds of questions about how and where the rights of children in undocumented positions have the greatest potential of being realised. As Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2003) say, “the challenge remains to develop a set of concepts that opens up new horizons for our understanding of past and contemporary migration” (2003, p. 600). One concept that is important for the discussion on the nation state in critical migration research is that of scales and the related role of cities.

Scales

The last section of this chapter on earlier research and theoretical concepts bridges further conceptual discussions on scale with the methodological reflections that the following chapter engages in. A key aspect of scales is that they are relational, although scales can be conceptualised and utilised in a variety of different ways (Persdotter, 2019, p. 96f). Together with the state, cities have emerged as a central scale where migratory processes and politics take place and are negotiated (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2009, 2011). Much research has highlighted how tensions between human- and citizen rights play out in cities (Holgerson, 2011; Isin, 2007; McNevin, 2012; Varsanyi, 2006). Sociologist Saskia Sassen (2005) suggests that the national scale, as a container of social processes, has been “cracked” and that cities have emerged as subnational spaces where politics can take place.

At the same time, there is no consensus on exactly how the city, or the urban scale, could be understood methodologically and conceptually (Brenner, 2001; Brenner & Schmid, 2014). The national and the urban scale are intertwined and are not discrete domains of power, but should rather be understood “as a set of topological arrangements that exert influence in a variety of diverse spaces” where we “cannot rely on the city or nation scale as a guide to know where politics happen” (Davidson & Martin, 2014, p. 4). Geographer Jonathan Darling (2017) argues that by studying irregular migration in urban contexts, we see how the nation state is “entwined with the city, relationally constituted through the city,

but not necessarily above or before it” (Darling, 2017, p. 192). The city, Darling suggests, should be understood as a “situated and contested interlocutor for state discourses and practices” (2017, p. 192) as cities are more and more politicised in the context of irregular migration. Malmö is specifically politicised in current political debates in Sweden as it was the main transit city during the 2015 “long summer of migration” and has recently been at the centre of debates around highly contested and racialised issues of gang violence (Schclarek Mulinari, 2017).

In this thesis, I mainly utilise the concept of scales in *Article 4*. There I use it as a way to talk about how undocumented migrants are governed at different sites (country of origin, transit routes, host countries) and how governing takes place at different scales at the same time. The scales of governing I refer to in this context are mainly the national scale of violent conflict or migration control and the local scale where gentrification and limited housing markets create a vulnerable position for undocumented migrants. The concept of displaceability that I discuss in *Article 4* is an invitation to think more about how the governing of undocumented migrants takes place across different scales and sites at the same time.

In relation to this thesis, the question of *presence* becomes crucial as cities cannot control their borders in the same way the nation state can (Ang, 2007). In Malmö, the right to economic social support for undocumented migrant children was argued for on the basis that the city is responsible for any child present or residing in the city (Nordling, 2017, cf. Spencer & Delvino, 2019). Furthermore, national political debates on benefits and economic social support have also focused on Malmö as it is the city in Sweden spending the most money in relation to its size on social support (Persson & El-Alawi, 2020). Consequently, NGOs have seen how it has recently become more difficult for undocumented migrants to access this kind of support. In the growing debate on whether cities should be allowed to provide social support for undocumented migrants, Malmö is frequently pointed out as an example either in support or against this practice (see, for example, Magnusson, 2018a). The struggle for social support for undocumented migrant children in Malmö is one way that the politicisation of the urban scale is relevant for my

research. By providing social support to undocumented migrants and, at the same time, sharing the address information of those who receive support with the Border Police, Malmö as a city clearly exemplifies how the relationship between the state and cities is ambiguous and intertwined in the context of governing irregular migration. This is one reason why this thesis focuses on multi-scalar political processes and their implications for undocumented migrant children's everyday lives. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodological implications of this focus in more detail, including why I chose to study Malmö and Birmingham.

3. METHODOLOGY

Irregular migration is a challenging issue to study as it is one of the most controversial and divisive topics on the political agenda today. A consequence of this is that most involved actors are cautious and sceptical to research within the area for different reasons. People at risk of deportation are careful of whom they trust since anyone could potentially be an informant to the police, which would put their safety at risk and hence complicates the issue of finding participants (see B. Anderson et al., 2012). But the scepticism also comes from other actors. Within certain parts of academia, activist research, for example, is being criticised for being biased and naïve (I respond to this criticism below); however, I found an “activist research” approach (Hale, 2008, see also Gruber and Lundberg, 2020) absolutely necessary for working closely with undocumented migrants (I will explain why later in this chapter). Furthermore, as a researcher of irregular migration one is also increasingly scrutinised by surrounding society as public opinion is currently shifting towards more hostile and exclusionary migration policies, which can also include personal threats from extremists.⁹ Last, but definitely not least, my own self-critique and doubts about my motives, privileges and positionalities as a white, middle class, heterosexual cis-man with no experiences of migration myself, yet still conducting this kind of research, is a source of constant reflection and reflexivity.

⁹ I have not yet received any personal threats but, in 2017, was included in a long list, published on a far-right extremist website, of academics who are part of the “corrupt power-elite” who should be “purged” since we were “responsible” for Islamism taking over Sweden.

Therefore, the overall focus point for this chapter on research methodology is ethics. Several sections of this chapter have already been published in an article I wrote for the journal *Migraciones*, “The Method of Ethics-as-Process: Embracing Ambivalence in Research on Childhood and Deportability” (Lind, 2017)¹⁰ in which I develop the concept of ethics-as-process further. This approach, according to John R. Cutcliffe and Paul Ramcharan (2002), understands ethics in qualitative research as something that should be viewed as a process, where the researcher discusses ethical questions occurring within the research process with participants continuously throughout the research, rather than something static, which could be accomplished by, for example, stating intentions before entering the field by ticking a box in an ethical review application form.

For me, thinking about ethics constantly throughout my work has been crucial for my attempt to conduct politically relevant and ethically sound research. As I argued in the method article referred to above, the ethics-as-process approach can even be seen as a method in itself as I gained many important insights through conversations about ethical issues (Lind, 2017). For me, ethics is also closely related to politics. One’s answer to the question of what an ethically sound approach to the issue of studying irregular migration would be is highly influenced by one’s political approach to the issue. In the following sections, I discuss how I approached these issues further, starting with a discussion on issues of ethical principles and epistemology.

The primary material used in this thesis includes ethnographic observations, interviews and visual material produced by my participants during interviews. The secondary material used includes newspaper articles, press releases and similar texts, but also policy documents, state reports and other documents produced by state actors. Decisions by various actors in different state and local institutions that affected my participants

¹⁰ However, these sections have also, to a larger or lesser extent, been revised to better fit the changing directions my project has taken since the time that article was written. In a sense, this article could almost be considered a fifth article in this compilation thesis, but it made much more sense to partially incorporate it into my methodology section than to add it at the end of the thesis as a kind of methodological appendix.

were influenced by argumentations and understandings about irregular migration expressed in public policy (cf. Fassin, 2015). This also reflects developments within childhood and migration studies where agency and structure are increasingly studied together (see chapter 2). Therefore, I concluded that an ethically sound and politically relevant approach for me included juxtaposing the lived experiences of my participants with the policies of various state actors.

Ethics

My research project was accepted by the Ethical Vetting Board in Southern Sweden¹¹ and the Ethical Review Committee at Birmingham University.¹² In this thesis, I have kept the names of my participants as well as the organisations I worked with and their representatives anonymous, and the names I do use are pseudonyms. However, ethics in research goes far beyond just getting approval from ethics committees and ensuring anonymity. There is an on-going discussion about the need for continuous reflection on ethical issues throughout ethnographic research (see, for example, American Anthropological Association, 2012). Here, I primarily relate to Cutcliffe and Ramcharan's (2002) conceptualisation of the issue since their discussion relates to the work of ethics committees, which diligently scrutinise research among so-called "vulnerable groups". The ethics-as-process approach also covers many different "techniques that can be used to address ethical concerns in qualitative research" (Cutcliffe & Ramcharan, 2002, p. 1001) including the issues of working with gatekeepers, building up trust and obtaining consent, which are discussed in this chapter.

The ethical implications of participatory research about deportability have, to a certain extent, been discussed in earlier research, which has highlighted how the deportability of participants increases the complexity of issues like confidentiality, the researcher-participant relationship

¹¹ Application number Etik:H15 2014/899. This application was submitted with the generous support of my supervisor Anna Lundberg.

¹² Application number ERN_14-0138. This application was submitted with the generous support of Dr. Nando Sigona at University of Birmingham.

and how to disseminate one's findings in a responsible way (Bernhard & Young, 2009; De Genova, 2005; Düvell et al., 2010). The ethics of research with what is typically understood as "vulnerable groups", including migrants and refugees, have been examined more widely, including discussions on the importance of sensitive approaches and how these can be combined with effectiveness in research design (Liamputtong, 2007; Mackenzie et. al, 2007; Pittaway et al., 2010). Lastly, the ethics of participatory research with children have been even more thoroughly explored and include child perspectives on a full range of ethical issues in qualitative research (Cocks, 2006; Sargeant & Harcourt, 2012; Thomas & O'kane, 1998). However, there is limited literature that specifically discusses the ethics of doing research with undocumented migrant children and families (one of few examples is Wahlström Smith, 2020). This chapter is partly an attempt to contribute further to these debates.

The underlying ethical principle for the ethics-as-process approach is the axiom of "do no harm", especially in relation to the risks of re-traumatising interviewees in qualitative interviews with vulnerable people. Cutcliff and Ramcharan (2002) argue that the attitude of ethical vetting boards is often too cautious and list examples of ways interviewees have said to benefit from engaging in interviews about sensitive issues. Mackenzie and colleagues (2007) argue in a similar vein that ethical practice within research with vulnerable groups needs to move beyond a harm-minimisation approach to also consider how research can bring about reciprocal benefits that include its participants.

These two guiding principles, harm-avoidance and mutual gain, materialise within the field of deportability in the following ways: the question of harm-avoidance primarily concerns making sure the safety of the participants is guaranteed during the fieldwork, i.e. that my work in no way gives the migration authorities any information of their whereabouts that could be used to facilitate detention and/or deportation (De Genova, 2002, p. 422), and that my representation of their everyday life practices does not add to their already stigmatised position within public opinion (Düvell et al., 2010, p. 235). The question of mutual gain concerns whether, and if so, how, I can ensure that my participants benefit from

my research, both directly during the research process and indirectly in how it affects public opinion and policy.

These issues are dilemmas that will never be conclusively resolved. Still, the point I argue for here is that the controversial and politicised nature of the research field of deportability and childhood necessitates ethnographic research within this field to adhere to ethical principles such as harm-avoidance and mutual gain to help guide the researcher in every methodological decision being made. Gaining the trust of participants and then finding ways to relate to them, not only as a researcher, but also as a support person when they may ask for help, is at the centre of ethnographic research in this field. One's ability to conduct research depends on the process of practising ethics in this ambivalent space. This ambivalence connects with what anthropologist Don Handelman (2016) has argued for, namely that an ethical approach to ethnography involves being wrong, which he argues is *the* ethical response to otherness.

If [the anthropologists] are going to learn, they (wittingly or not) must put the other before themselves, because they can only learn from others living in their own life. In doing so, he can only be surprised, be unsettled, make mistakes and be wrong [...] *It is in being wrong (rather than right) that the anthropologist opens to and makes space for the plenitude of otherness, yet is ever unable to encompass this.* (Handelman, 2016, p. 25, italics in original)

It is the participants who are the experts on their field and the researcher will most often “be wrong” in her or his understanding of their experiences. Researchers are mainly there to try and to understand what the participants already know, and accepting the complexity of the situation is a way to stay ethically sound.

Epistemology

Reflecting on these ethical issues, I found it necessary to employ a kind of “activist research” methodology to enable an ethnographic study of undocumented migrant children and families' everyday lives. Anthropologist Charles Hale (2008) has developed a framework for activist re-

search, where he states that “activist research methods regularly yield special insight, insider knowledge, and experience-based understanding...that otherwise would be impossible to achieve” (p. 21). Inspired by standpoint-feminists, he argues that the validity of the results is potentially stronger for activist researchers since their work is under scrutiny from an academic audience as well as the activists and participants they engage with.

Hale does not distinguish the concept of “activist research” from more well-known concepts such as “action research” and “participatory action research” and his point is not, as I understand it, to construct a radically new methodological approach. Rather, the concept of “activist research” is a way to conceptualise the problems and potentials of doing research in settings where the researcher has an active engagement in a politicised issue on a personal level with the goal of achieving social change. The activist research approach of aligning oneself with the self-expressed everyday struggles of the participants does not, however, mean that the research agenda is already set and the researcher is only looking for findings that fit certain presuppositions of what will benefit the cause one is engaged in. Rather, it primarily influences the research questions asked and how one relates to and becomes accountable in the field to increase transparency of the knowledge production one engages in.

Science is a “fully social activity”, philosopher Sandra Harding has pointed out (1986, p. 37). Harding has argued for a rethinking of the concept of objectivity, where “strong objectivity”, which “requires that the subject of knowledge be placed on the same critical, causal plane as the objects of knowledge”, could be understood as “strong reflexivity” (1992, p. 458). Objectivity claims have been used to put forward certain agendas and the concept has baggage in terms of misuse, but it still has value because of its position in language and understandings of the social importance of science, Harding argues (2015, p. 32). Donna Haraway (1988) famously called the fallacy of neutrality claims “the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (p. 581). Instead, when researchers start research “from outside the dominant conceptual frameworks—namely in the daily lives of oppressed groups” (Harding, 2015,

p. 30), more objective accounts of nature and social research can be achieved, since their perspectives have been ignored historically and they can bring in a broader understanding of contemporary societies. This does not mean that the claims of oppressed groups are incorrigible; no knowledge claims can gain automatic assent, and standpoint claims are just as corrigible as others (Harding, 2015, p. 41). However, it does mean that working closely with irregular migrants is necessary for a more “objective” analysis of their everyday lives.

Historically, research has always been closely connected to the surrounding society and well-known and established schools of thought performing “objective” research were often driven by specific agendas, where schools of economics have been involved in the reshaping of economic policies and anthropologists have been complicit in colonialism, etc. However, these connections have not always been made explicit and it has often been in the interest of those in power that they remain hidden. Claims of objectivity have been part of the process of hiding the agendas of research. Activist research instead makes these agendas transparent so that they can be put under scrutiny and, as such, creates “stronger objectivity” as the research gains validity when it addresses criticism raised against it (Hale, 2008, p. 13).

This requires explicit critical reflection on one’s own subjectivity as a researcher [...] and systematic monitoring of how our relationship to research subjects affects both the content and the meaning of the data we collect. Since activist research orients reflection and analysis precisely along these lines, we are well positioned to claim a resignified objectivity, while at the same time critiquing its hegemonic (mis)use. (Hale, 2008, p. 12)

Harding (2015) emphasises the democratic aspect of involving those who are the concern of research and whose lives are affected by it in the decision making about research (p. xi). She draws on the notion from science studies that “sciences and their societies co-produce and co-constitute each other” to argue further for the importance of producing science that advocates for society to be more democratic (Harding, 2015, p. 18). In this way, activist research chooses the standpoints from

where to study the world in accordance to what will have transformative democratic effects on society.

Activist researchers who do not themselves identify as members of the groups whose experiences and positionings they are studying could, according to Hale (2008), actively align with them to enable a commitment to listen closely to their standpoint and strive towards making their voices heard. In this way, a standpoint can be an “achieved perspective” (E. Anderson, 2006). According to Alison Wylie (2003), standpoint theorists have reached consensus in rejecting essentialism and “automatic epistemic privilege” to any particular standpoint. The scope of standpoint theory claims includes the aim of generating knowledge useful to marginalised people, and the experiences of the people themselves are the starting point for such research. However, from a standpoint theory perspective, theorising from a marginalised standpoint is not the same as the thoughts of marginalised people. I, as a researcher, have a large responsibility to analyse and interpret narratives based on my knowledge but also to make this process transparent. “Anyone,” philosopher Elizabeth Anderson writes, “can start their research by sensitively engaging the problems of the marginalized” (2006, p. 8). For example, “Marx theorized from the standpoint of the proletariat,” Anderson points out, “even though he was not a worker” (2017). But, as bell hooks (2014) shows, it is then crucial to reflect on the ethics of our actions as researchers who do not identify as part of the group we study to discern if our research will be used to extend the domination and oppression of the groups we study or not, and if the research is only conducted to forward our own careers as researchers.

Historically, criticism towards research such as mine has been that it can be perceived as “stealing” the stories of those studied (Pittaway et al., 2010) and, by suggesting that one is “giving” voice to subaltern groups, one is ignoring the fact that they have always had a voice—it did not need to be given to them by researchers. The question then becomes one of representation. How do I go about listening to, writing down, selecting and interpreting the stories that my participants share with me? In my fieldwork, I have attempted to have an ethical approach throughout every stage of the process, and I have tried to be attentive to the issues

that my participants have raised as important to them. Then I have tried to connect these issues with my analysis of the structural conditions of irregularity to be able to contextualise them and critically discuss the causes of oppression and domination. Since the paradox of national sovereignty and migrant children's rights is seemingly so difficult to untangle and understand I have tried to identify what perspectives and approaches that are taken for granted to be central within the political struggles around migrant childhoods and then move beyond them. This is what led me to focus more specifically on how children's rights are used to govern vulnerable migrant children and how their vulnerability is not a given but negotiated and constructed by the state to then further enable the governing of migrant children's territorial presence and mobility (*Article 3*). In this way, I have attempted to take responsibility as an activist researcher for bringing forward analyses that highlight injustices and hopefully make social change in a more democratic and inclusive direction possible. In this way, I try to make use of my privileges, or the "unearned advantages that all people should have", to "empower others", to "shut up and listen" to the oppressed and become an accountable ally in their struggles (Pease, 2010, p. 179–85).

Anthropologist Åsa Wahlström Smith (2020), who has also conducted research in Sweden among undocumented migrant children and families, suggests that researchers can strengthen and co-constitute participants' political agency through research. Wahlström Smith points at how I (referring to my work) and other researchers studying irregular migration have neglected to discuss the issue of co-constituting agency. I agree with her that co-constitution can take place, but the reason for why I have been careful in discussing this issue is the risk of emphasising the role of the researcher too much. However, Wahlström Smith (2020) productively engages in detail in how the co-constitution of participants' political agency can take place. Her approach is similar to my discussion about the method of ethics-as-process (Lind, 2017) where I highlight the fact that ethics are not to be instrumentalised, but are important in terms of discussing how ethics in the field can lead to new knowledge and, as such, the ethics-as-process approach can become a method in itself. Wahlström Smith shows how children themselves are

the “owners” of their political agency, but we as researchers can also help strengthen their agency by engaging them in our research.

Positionalities

My interest in studying the phenomena of irregular migration from the point of view of those who have experienced it stems from my involvement in migrants’ rights activism in a No Borders context (B. Anderson et al., 2009; B. Anderson et al., 2012; Khosravi, 2013). In this context, the line is never completely clear-cut between being a researcher and alternatively a potential support person and activist (Darling, 2014). Ethnographic research is a fundamentally emotional endeavour (Davies & Spencer, 2010) and ethnographic researchers are always in an ambivalent position in relation to their participants (see Weidman, 1986), especially when conducting research among vulnerabilised groups.

The activist research approach had certain specific consequences in my fieldwork. In some cases, in both of the countries in which I conducted research, the participants asked me to help them with practical issues concerning their situation and I tried to help the best I could while still balancing the ambivalence of the dual position as researcher and activist. On some occasions, I supported participants as they took part in political campaigns and activities. I also sometimes acted as a support person when a participant went to sign at the Home Office or took part in an activity they did not want to attend alone. A couple of times I visited participants when they had been put in detention. De Genova argues for the lack of neutral ground in this kind of research:

We, as researchers or scholars of migration, are indeed “of the connections” between migrants’ transnational mobilities and the political, legal, and border-policing regimes that seek to orchestrate, regiment, and manage their energies. We are “of” these connections because there is no “outside” or analytical position beyond them. There is no neutral ground. The momentum of the struggle itself compels us, one way or the other, to “take a side”. Indeed, the larger juridical regimes of citizenship, denizenship, and alienage configure us to be always-already located within the nexus of inequalities that are at stake in these conflicts. Investigating and producing knowledge

about these struggles merely implicates us further, more directly, more immediately. (2013b, p. 252)

In my study, the ethnographic approach necessitated that I could show my participants that I also wanted to contest the “deportation regime” (De Genova & Peutz, 2010) and already supported their struggle to cope within this regime in their everyday lives. However, I am also always positioned simultaneously as a researcher. Activist research acknowledges this ambivalent dual positionality, and potentially enables more reflexivity about issues of objectivity, transparency and power inequalities.

Hence, the activist research approach does not undo the ever-present power discrepancies between researchers and participants. The activist researcher is just as privileged as any other researcher, but inherent to the approach is a need to continuously discuss the objectives and implications of one’s research. My positioning as an activist was particularly important when negotiating access and establishing trust. After I had started to find participants, I realised that none of them initially seemed to view me as someone they would ask for help to solve any of their immediate problems. The gatekeepers I worked with were the primary persons they would go to for advice and support. I was rather talked about as “that guy who is writing a book”. Initially, I struggled with the impression I would give if I brought my notebook out too much before people knew me a bit better and we had discussed what I was actually doing in more detail. But at later stages of the fieldwork, as my “activist” position or supportiveness of their situation had been acknowledged through ongoing conversations and they, in some cases, had started to ask me for help with their practical problems, I rather moved towards practices that would emphasise my researcher position to remind the participants again of my work, such as taking notes more overtly (see DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010, p. 164) or engaging more often in discussions on what they expected from me as a researcher and what impact my research may have on their situation. I argue that the ambivalent feelings I experienced in relation to these issues are to a certain extent inevitable in this kind of research and should be embraced as a source of constant reflection on the positionality of the researcher.

It is very important to note that I do not believe that my “activist methodology” renders me insusceptible to the inherent problems of ethnography or solves the issue of power relationships in the field. If anything, it helps open up for debate how the relationship between researchers and their “fields” is actually constituted. Anthropologist Don Kulick (2006) has suggested that anthropologists who study “powerless” people are “anthropological masochists”; he says, “we would be naive to ignore the ways in which the anthropological investment in the powerless is not only about the Other but also about the self and the self’s relation not only to the Other but to its own academic and social structures” (p. 943). When I write about issues of vulnerable childhoods and irregular migration, or use the picture on the cover of this thesis, I appeal to “the desire it exhibits and the considerable pleasure it generates in those who produce and consume it” (Kulick, 2006, p. 943). Interestingly, one can say that this is how children’s rights appeals are often constructed as well. In this sense, this book is part of the political struggle over childhood and children’s rights and, in this way, it is as much about the children and their families as it is about my and society’s different gazes on these people’s experiences, as I have chosen to present them here for maximum empathetic effect. Kulick says that this is not necessarily anything problematic, but by recognising this underlying, psychological aspect of anthropology we enable a problematisation that would “enrich it by helping us to think about the different kinds of positions and investments that are materialized by it, but that also are assumed, buttressed, hidden, or blocked by it” (2006, p. 944). I believe that openly discussing the relationship between activism and academia, rather than taking for granted either that they are incompatible or that they are practically the same thing, can enable a more honest and “objective” knowledge production that recognises the specific contexts within which it is produced.

Ethnography

The initial starting point for my fieldwork was to compare the everyday experiences in the deportability of children and families in Malmö, Sweden, and Birmingham, UK, two examples of “smaller, more provincial and less flashy cities” that need to be studied more in comparative

migration research (Martiniello, 2013, p. 14). The basic idea was to get in touch with families at risk of deportation, preferably with children old enough so that I could talk to them directly, through working with local organisations that had continuous contact with this group. According to anthropologist Clara Rübner Jørgensen (2015, p. 13), this kind of cross-national comparative ethnography enables an exploration of themes and topics in relation to different local policies and practices as well as “contra-posing discourses used in different contexts”. Comparative fieldwork is also heavily advocated for in migration research (D. FitzGerald, 2012; Martiniello, 2013).

In general, the ethnographic approach is more and more established within research with children and tends to be particularly popular in rights-based research (Tisdall & Punch, 2012, p. 252). James and Prout (1997) argue that ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. “It allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data than is usually possible through experimental or survey styles of research”, James and Prout (1997, p. 8) argue. Fassin (2012) has also argued that ethnography is an adequate method for studying illegality. However, it is also important to point out, as Lesley-Anne Gallacher and Michael Gallagher (2008) do, that ethnography does not in itself guarantee that the research will achieve ethical and epistemological validity. Still, I am inspired by Harriot Beazley and colleagues (2009), who argue that being “grounded” in childhood research “is both good research and good human rights” (p. 369). This is important since children have a “right to be properly researched”, a right that children derive from several adjacent rights in the CRC, they argue (Beazley et al., 2009, p. 370). When I started my research, it became clear that the micro-scale level I wanted to explore demanded an inductive or grounded approach in line with the suggestions of Beazley and her co-authors. This approach also seemed well suited for practising ethics-as-process within the field of deportability and childhood since it enabled continuous communication with participants about ethics.

When comparing Sweden and the UK, I came across the effects of two similar, but in several ways also very different, legal and societal con-

texts. By comparing irregularised migrant children's everyday life experiences I gained an understanding of the particular effects these different legislations and societal norms and values have from the ground up. This approach can be described as belonging to what Dobson (2009) calls "micro-scale methodologies". Through conducting a form of micro-scale methodology, I aimed to provide room for children's own voices, which would then enable me to discuss, among other things, how one could understand their political agency in deportability from a position of the everyday (*Article 1*). This follows the approach of childhood researchers Sarah Elwood and Katharyne Mitchell (2012) who state that children's "dialogues of the everyday...can constitute a significant (yet under-examined) space for their politics and their formation as political actors" (p. 2). Also, when setting up my fieldwork it was necessary to avoid the potential harm of what childhood researchers Sheila Greene and Diane Hogan (2005) call problematic "smash and grab approaches to collecting data" (p. 17) where not enough time is spent to enable a trustful relationship with the participating children. Arguably, such an approach is often a consequence of researchers neglecting the need for ethical reflexivity about one's own ethically ambivalent position. The main practical way I chose to try and avoid this was to establish working relationships with local NGOs and get access to participants through their activities.

NGOs

Representatives of NGOs supporting undocumented migrants were absolutely pivotal for my research. They helped me make sense of and construct the field as well as access it. Through cooperating with them, I gained "trust by affiliation". By this I mean the process by which participants chose to talk to me after being asked by the NGO representatives to do so, since they trusted that the NGOs had chosen to refer them to me for good reasons (see Emmel et al., 2007). In the UK, many of the participants initially referred to me as "Jacob from [NGO]". This does not mean, I think, that they were not aware that I was a researcher—we discussed this continuously throughout my fieldwork and afterwards as I conducted respondent validation in which I discussed my written texts

with some of the participants—but it rather shows how important those NGOs are for the participants’ everyday lives. In Sweden, the people I met seemed to have a greater awareness of what it meant that I was a researcher, and the reason for this may be that they knew me over a longer period of time. This reminded me again of the importance of never taking for granted that your participants understand what you do as a researcher but to constantly discuss it as a part of the ethics-as-process approach.

There were a few instances where NGO representatives did not want to help me. One gatekeeper in Birmingham chose not to participate since she was afraid that people would not feel able to say no if she asked them on my behalf. In this way, she helped me realise that I can never completely get around the issue of “trust by affiliation” when I cooperate with intermediaries such as NGOs to help me find participants for my research. That is one reason why I did not take the rejection of potential participants as a failure, since it implied that they felt that they had a choice, which hopefully meant that the ones who said “yes” felt the same. In Malmö, one organisation supporting undocumented migrants had recently had negative experiences with researchers who acted unethically and intrusively in the eyes of many members of the group by gaining access to their meetings in what was perceived as disingenuous ways¹³ and therefore, it was not an option for me to approach them for help with recruiting participants at their meetings. However, individual members of the group contributed in contacting families they were supporting directly.

Many NGOs are constantly getting requests from researchers. A youth group for unaccompanied migrants run by a Birmingham NGO had two to three researchers visiting every year, but according to the group leader the youths enjoyed getting involved in the research. One NGO worker in Birmingham told me at one of our first meetings that she had helped other researchers before me. In one case, a researcher booked a room at

¹³ See a blog post by the researchers <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2015/02/suspicious-minds>, and the reply in the comment section by a representative of the NGO for an insight into this conflict.

the hostel where many families getting social support were located and told the NGO worker to give her a list of the families living there. The researcher then asked her to deliver certain families down to her room. "The researcher wanted me to do all the work, I don't have time for that," the NGO worker told me. This made me initially rather ambivalent in my relationship to the NGO worker and I tried to discuss these issues further, but then she stopped me and told me not to "overthink it". She was also sceptical about me getting involved as a volunteer in their work as a way to give back to the organisation and the people going there since she thought that "it might just complicate things". It was perhaps easier to stay in the role of the researcher as I visited their rather large organisation where thousands of people passed through over the year to get free food, language classes or legal advice, etc. She suggested that if I wanted to contribute, I could dress up as Santa Clause at their Christmas party, which unfortunately took place when I was back in Sweden over the holidays. This specific NGO was a place where many of my gatekeepers from other NGOs met to give weekly legal advice, and thus an important place to connect with my field in general. In the end, I wrote a report for the NGO evaluating their work that they had requested when I asked if there was any way I could give them something back for letting me take part in their activities.

The lesson I learned from this for research with vulnerable migrants generally was that working with NGOs holds a lot of potential for an ethically sensitive approach to accessing this field. However, it is crucial to have an open discussion with gatekeepers about the aims, methods and expected outcomes of the research and not be afraid of the possibility of being rejected. Rather than a failure, rejections may be understood as an opportunity to gain knowledge by further reflecting upon one's work and the ways in which we as researchers can be more in tune with what is happening in the world we aim to study. The possibility of rejection is part of the ambivalence included in accessing the field and accepting rejection is important if we follow the guiding principles of harm-avoidance and mutual gain. Similarly, to the question of how to delimit the field, continuous discussions with gatekeepers about access is a central aspect of ethics-as-process and an opportunity to gain important knowledge about the field itself. Also, having to repeatedly re-

formulate what the purpose of my study is and how it could impact my participants' situation helped me to better understand what my project would actually be about.

Interviews

My methods included both interviews as well as participant observation, which mainly consisted of "hanging out" at different settings, usually in the context of NGO activities but also at participants' homes and at various excursions. Getting to a point where I could sit down with a child and ask questions that I had prepared beforehand was the most complex and complicated task for me.

When interviewing children, the question of relationships and positionalities in the field becomes immediately critical. As I was visiting the house of the family in Birmingham that I had engaged with the most, a social worker came by. She asked the 7-year-old girl who I was, and she replied that I was "a friend". A boy in another family that I also got to know rather well included me in a social map he was constructing for me and said, "you bought me pizza, so you'll be close to the centre of the circle". The issue of becoming friends with participants has been thoroughly discussed within ethnographic research (for a review, see Taylor, 2011, p. 7) where both the benefits and problems of informant friendships are highlighted. My experience of attempting to study children's everyday lives was that it was the children who defined me as a friend initially, not the other way around. As I was hanging out in their homes or participating in daylong activities together with them, it seemed unavoidable that they started to regard me as a friend, or as someone they interacted with on a personal level and not just in terms of being a researcher, and I do not find this to be inherently problematic. Rather, it is yet another issue that leads to ambivalence for researchers because of the power discrepancies in our relationships, which, in the case of children, is increased. To be able to avoid the ambivalence I would have had to distance myself further from the children. To avoid becoming a friend I would have had to abstain from engaging in activities like playing games or going on daytrips together. However, this would have made it much harder to conduct participant observation and,

in my case, I believe such an approach would have impacted the quality of my findings in a negative way.

When I first tried to interview the 7-year-old girl, I asked her about how it had been to live in London before moving to Birmingham and this upset her: “Mom is telling you secrets!” she said. Even though this information was not very sensitive in my eyes, her statement made me think twice about my practice of talking to the parents before talking to the children. However, my experience is that in most cases children are likely to trust you if you gain the trust of their parents and have a generous attitude towards their thoughts, feelings and needs. It can also be the other way around; as you start interacting with children and their parents see that they enjoy your company, the parents can become more willing to participate. Children choose their own ways of relating to researchers and adults in general, and the important thing for researchers is to be flexible to the framework that the children draw up for the relationship (Bushin, 2007).

Trust, or rapport, goes beyond the question of access; most importantly, it is a way of talking about the relationship that is built between the researcher and the research subject (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 56). To be able to talk to children directly I first needed to gain the trust of their parents, therefore I always interviewed the parents at least one time before any of the child interviews were conducted (except in one case in which I only interviewed the 16-year-old daughter in the family, see my discussion about families below). The parent interviews were semi-structured and focussed on their everyday life experiences of parenting in the context of deportability. I especially encouraged them to recall conversations with their children where they discussed issues relating to their legal status and many of the insights into the children’s everyday life experiences of deportability came about through these recollections by the parents of what their children had said. At the end of the parent-interviews, I asked the parents if they would allow me to speak to any of their children, and not all parents agreed. However, for the ones who did, the impression they got of me during our interview, together with recommendations from NGO representatives or other participants, was enough for them to decide that they would let me talk to their child.

Most of the parents who only had children below five years of age I only interviewed once, but a few of them came regularly to various events at NGOs and we had informal conversations over time as well. I met most of the families that had older children on several occasions and I saw a few of the children in the UK on an almost weekly basis during the 6 months I spent there, whereas in Sweden I met some of the families only occasionally over three years.

Many of the participants, including a few of the older children, both in Birmingham and Malmö, initially asked me questions about my thoughts on migration politics or their situation as a way of checking my position. One teenage girl in Malmö asked me the first time we met if I thought my work would make any difference and if my book would also be sent to politicians. Here, it was the children who asked me to position myself within the framework of their struggles to make sure they could trust me and wanted to talk to me. In those cases, it became clear that I needed to thoroughly express my support of their everyday struggles against being positioned as deportable (see *Article 1*) and explain some of my personal opinions about the immigration system and related issues (for similar discussions about this, see De Genova, 2005, p. 13f; Mackenzie et al., 2007, p. 316). This made me realise that the research I was trying to conduct would not have been possible in the grounded way I intended if I had held a political standpoint that did not align with the claims and injustices the participants expressed.

The girl in Malmö also raised concerns about validity by saying, “it must be hard to know if people say what they really think”. At the time, I did not get the impression that she meant anything about herself being honest or not, but rather it showed her ability to reflect on the research process she took part in. My own epistemological approach to validity is very much in line with the following way of thinking:

[B]y interviewing a number of participants, we can connect their experiences and check the comments of one participant against those of others. Finally, the goal of the process is to understand how our participants understand and make meaning of their experience. If the interview structure works to allow them to make sense to themselves

as well as to the interviewer, then it has gone a long way toward validity. (Seidman, 2006, p. 24)

My experience in almost all of the interviews was that my questions made sense to the participants. The shared experiences that they all portrayed in different ways in the interviews made me relatively certain that I could take their general experiences of living in an irregular situation as genuine. However, there may have been cases where the participants altered specific details in their stories to protect themselves.

In Sweden, I sometimes had to make use of interpreters, either in person or over the phone, and this usually made the quality of the interviews lower. Not all interpreters were competent enough to assist in the kind of interviews I conducted and even though they work under strong regulations of anonymity and secrecy, participants still seemed hesitant to talk about certain issues with an interpreter involved. In a few cases, NGO workers helped me interpret the interviews and this was useful in that the participant trusted this person (see Edwards et al., 2005), but it could also mean that the interpreter sometimes took over and explained things to me during the interview that they knew about the participant. Even if the NGO workers explained what they had told me to the participants and the participants assured me that what the NGO workers had said was true, the participants did not get to express it in their own words. In some cases, it made more sense for an older child to act as an interpreter if that was possible, even though this is often seen as ethically dubious. However, because of the interdependent character of the intergenerational relationships in deportability, the older children were already often acting as their parents' interpreters and this was both a good and a bad thing for the different reasons that I discuss in more detail in *Article 2*. Still, fieldwork in the UK, where all of the participants spoke English, was in one sense more practical and less time consuming since I did not have to deal with the issue of organising interpreters.

The ambivalence of my position as a researcher within this field was further amplified through the fact that the participants also generally asked early on what the result of the research would be. I then found myself in a complicated situation where I tried to be honest and not raise any expectations, but simultaneously not discourage them from taking

part by venting my own doubts too much about the book just ending up on a shelf collecting dust. Again, I argue that this ambivalence is not something that one as a researcher should try to get rid of, but rather something to engage with and reflect upon all through the research process. The participants' questions about the ethical and political implications of my research helped me to better understand my own position as well as how it related to their situation as being at risk of deportation.

A specific aspect of trust building is consent, and obtaining consent from children is complicated. Depending on the children's age and maturity, various levels of direct consent can be achieved and usually parents act as gatekeepers to the children as legal guardians (for a discussion on the complexities of parental consent in childhood research see Bogolub, 2005; Kendrick et al., 2008). During my fieldwork, I felt that the children enjoyed, or at least did not mind, talking to me. The parents acted as gatekeepers, clearly taking the needs of their children into consideration but often still giving me access to talk to them. There did not seem to be any direct correlation between the level of fear of deportation and the strength of the parents' gatekeeping: it varied from parent to parent regardless of their personal circumstances. In this way, I had two layers of gatekeepers that I had to negotiate access with: NGOs and parents. This may seem like a complex and demanding situation, but my experience was rather that it made me less ambivalent towards causing any harm since I was being held accountable towards multiple adults who cared for these children. I argue that "challenges in the field" like multiple gatekeepers, just as rejections, are an asset for researchers since they force us to be more reflexive and engage more deeply in ethical discussions, which can also help us gain new knowledge.

I established iterative consent, meaning that the establishing of consent is a process and not just about getting a signature on a consent form (Mackenzie et al., 2007), both with the children directly as well as with their parents and I have continuously been conducting respondent validation (to the extent it is possible) with some of the parents on the texts that I am writing. Consent builds on the understanding that participants are truly able to withdraw from the study at any time. Withdrawal can produce discomfort both for the potential participant as well as the re-

searcher, but again, it is necessary not to shy away from the possibility that participants may withdraw. By embracing the potential risk of participants wanting to withdraw rather than fearing it, I came to reflect more thoroughly about my motives and incentives for conducting research. According to the ethics-as-process approach, the establishing of trust is not just a means for enabling an interview; rather, it is a continuous process, and it can be a part of the knowledge creation in itself through bringing about and demanding further reflexivity and self-reflection.

By coming back to these questions repeatedly as a part of the ethics-as-process approach, and often on the initiative of the participants, I was inspired to try and write, together with researchers and activists, other kinds of texts outside of academia in parallel with the construction of academic papers that engaged more directly in the current debates.¹⁴ More recently, I have also presented the work of colleagues and myself at non-academic conferences, arguing, for example, for “firewalls” (Hermansson et al., 2020), which I discuss in more detail in the conclusion, and taken part in a complaint filed by researchers and activists to the Parliamentary Ombudsman¹⁵ against the actions of the Social Services and the Border Police when they shared addresses. This has made it possible for me to say with a little more confidence that my work may benefit people in deportability at least indirectly, since the slow production of academic texts can be hard to justify sometimes when arguing for one’s research in the field.

Autobiographical timeline

There is consensus within research with children that creative methods can be particularly useful for facilitating children in expressing themselves (Molina et al., 2009; Punch, 2002). Here, I discuss a specific creative method called the “autobiographical timeline” (Leung, 2010),

¹⁴ See, for example, a number of debate articles I have co-written (Anderson et al., 2016; Lind et al., 2016, 2020; Lundberg, Lind, Strange, & Spång, 2015).

¹⁵ <http://www.jo.se/PageFiles/8604/565-2017.pdf>

which was fruitful for addressing the issue of deportability with children while avoiding putting too much focus on the complicated issue of legal immigration status. This contradiction was built into my research project; I did want the children to express how they experience being at risk of deportation, but at the same time I wanted to add to this distress as little as possible through my research. I could not completely avoid stirring up emotions and thoughts when discussing these issues with the children, but the autobiographical timeline proved to be one way of talking about their deportability without constantly reminding the children of their lack of legal status.

The interviews were the organised, formal aspect of my relationship with the children but many of the findings I made during the fieldwork came about outside of the interview setting. Still, the interviews gave me an opportunity to offer the children a chance to put their own words on their experience in a defined context and remind them of my role as a researcher. During the interviews, they first got to create a Five Field Map (Samuelsson et al., 1996) of their social network. This exercise involves drawing a pie chart where each slice represents family, friends, school etc., and then the child writes the names of people more or less close to the centre of the circle depending on how important they are to the child. This was used as a way to start talking about their everyday lives in general and to make it possible for me to get an overview of their social lives. The Five Field Map was useful as a conversation starter, but it did not result in any significant discoveries as did the second creative method I used.

The second step in the interview session was the creation of a timeline that would give me an overview of the most important events the children had experienced in their lives so far, according to themselves. I began the exercise with drawing a straight line on a large piece of paper and explained that the beginning of the line represented birth, the middle of the line was the present and the other end of the line represented the future. We then talked about what the most significant events in their lives had been so far and put them down on the timeline together with thoughts about what they wanted to happen in the future. The basic timeline exercise has been discussed in more detail by, among others,

Anna Bagnoli (2009) and Hanne Kirstine Adriansen (2012) as a creative tool for talking with children about their life trajectories.

Inspired by the concept of the “autobiographical timeline”, as discussed by psychologist Pamela Pui Yu Leung (2010), I then asked the children to tell me how they felt during the different events in their lives. They then drew a second line, a kind of graph superimposed onto the original timeline, which represented their emotional wellbeing over time, where the top of the paper represented happiness and the bottom represented sadness (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2. Sunayah’s autobiographical timeline

The autobiographical timeline turned out to be useful in my study for two reasons. Firstly, it gave me a tool for talking about the children’s variation in legal status over time without explicitly talking about it. I did not know exactly how much they understood about such issues, but I had asked their parents what they thought their children knew and in all but one case the parents said that they had talked about their families’ immigration status several times. For all the parents, talking about their status was an issue that concerned them, but to varying extents. Some said there was no way of hiding their deportability from the children, but

in the case of 15-year-old Sunayah, her father said that they had made every effort possible to avoid talking to her about their status, since they did not want this to distract their children from doing well at school and become a source of anxiety (see *Article 1*). He still wanted me to talk to the girl, but I did not want to reveal things to her that her parents had not yet told her. However, in earlier interviews and during the conversation with the father I realised that the change of legal status coincided most often with a change of house. In Sunayah's case, the family had been forced to move two years before our interview, when their asylum application had been properly registered, from a house in Aston, Birmingham, where they had been living for many years completely under the radar from the Home Office, into a house supplied by the authorities in a different municipality. I could then discuss how Sunayah felt while she was living under the radar compared to when they were applying for asylum by referring to the houses in which she had lived. In *Figure 2*, the big drop in her wellbeing coincided with the family being forced to move because of their change of immigration status when claiming asylum. The cause of her feeling unwell at that time was not just due to the move in itself but also because she had started experiencing how her parents were becoming increasingly anxious and stressed.

The second way the timeline turned out to be useful was that it revealed to me something that I had not expected, namely that most of the children I talked to in Birmingham felt less distressed when they were living under the radar compared to when they were in the system applying for regularisation. The reason for this was that as long as the parents made their everyday life function in the irregular situation the children's lives were more "like everyone else's", as they said. But as they started applying for regularisation by seeking asylum or on humanitarian grounds, they became known by the migration authorities and therefore, in some practical sense, closer to deportation than when they lived under the radar. In Sweden, there were greater variations in how the children experienced the transition between being *papperslös* compared to applying for asylum than in the UK. I can only speculate on why this was the case, but one reason is most likely that this reflects how it is "easier" in a sense to lead a "normal" life as an undocumented migrant in the UK than in Sweden. A strong reason for this is the fact that Swedish society

has more control over its population (I discuss these issues in more detail in chapter 4).

The important point here, however, is how the autobiographical timeline method is a fruitful way to talk about deportability without talking about it and that it helped me gain important knowledge about temporal aspects that went beyond a simple chronological rendering of the children's lives in a way that I may not have gained otherwise. Consequently, the method helped alleviate some of the ethical ambivalence I felt towards the potential harm of talking with children about their immigration status, and, in the case of Sunayah, it helped me solve the question of how I could talk to her at all. In this sense, the methodological as well as ethical choice of this specific method and the discussions with Sunayah's parents about how to talk to her about her legal status also ended up being a source of knowledge in itself. I believe that this method could also be useful for research with vulnerable migrant children and families in general since they have often gone through various immigration statuses. Further, I believe that it also has the potential to be useful for talking with children about their emotional experiences of transnational migration in an ethically sensitive way.

Family and gender

One key aspect of studying family life and intergenerational relations as I do is the balance between doing research with children and how to include their parents in the situation. As I have already described, I talked to the parents before I talked to the children (except in one case). However, the parent interviews were not just performed to enable child interviews. They were very informative in their own sense. In some cases, the parents told me about things their children had said and done that became central to my understanding of the experiences of the children. Sarah Holloway discusses the issue of how childhood research focuses on talking to and studying children, arguing that they need to be understood in context:

This insistence that we listen to children does not always sit easily with relational understandings of the subject. It requires us, if only

strategically, to reify children as independent knowing subjects whose voices add something important to debate. However, this does not mean we need to cast them as all-knowing. They are not the only ones capable of producing accounts of their lives, and we must also continue to listen to others (parents, educators, policy-makers, business, etc.) who have the power to shape, or are shaped by, children's lives. (2014, p. 382)

As I started my fieldwork, I was aware of the criticism within childhood research that many projects who aim to study childhood and children's experiences do not really listen to the children themselves. There is an important difference between adults applying a "child perspective" and "children's perspectives"—where only the latter seeks to find the perspectives held by children themselves (Sommer et al., 2010). Initially, I felt a healthy dose of stress around the issue of actually being able to find children to talk to directly. But as I managed to do so, I gradually also understood the importance of understanding the perspectives of both the children and their parents. By getting both perspectives, I also got a better understanding of each individual subject position in terms of both the "parents" and the "children". This is in line with Greg Mannion's reflections on the intergenerational aspect of children's experiences and participation in research:

If we take a more relational approach, children and young people's participation projects are always about something that needs to be made more explicit: the creation of new dialogical intergenerational spaces of and for participation, through which new kinds of relationships, identifications and spaces for adults and children emerge and find expression. (2010, p. 339)

The tensions and relationships between different subject positions inside families and in relation to the state developed into a central theme of my analysis during the course of my project (see *Article 2*) and this analytical perspective developed partly out of methodological reflections on how to best study the issue of childhood and family life in irregularity.

Issues of parenting and intergenerational relationships were not only subjects of study for me, nor only questions about interview choices and

relationships between participants: they also affected how my participants approached me over time. During the course of my fieldwork, my wife Frida gave birth to our firstborn child. One of my participants kept saying that this had an impact on how he talked to me. Tony in Malmö argued early on during my fieldwork that I could not understand what it feels like to be in his situation—what it would feel like to flee from your country of origin and walk through Eastern Europe with a six-month-old baby—until I had a child of my own. After I had become a parent, he told me that one could tell that I had gotten a baby; that I talk a lot about my wife and child, that I am more sensitive and that it makes it easier for him to talk to me. “I tell you more things now that you have a child as well”, he told me. In this way, my own developing experiences of familial life made a richer ethnography possible, at least in relation to how Tony approached me. I am not arguing here for a general point that having children makes it easier to study families or children—it might very well generally be the other way around, who knows? What I am saying is that your own personal situation and experiences can affect how research participants approach you.

Through this thesis, I reproduce understandings about issues such as childhood, parenting and family life in ways that I cannot completely understand myself. I also cannot completely understand what my position as a white, heterosexual male married to a white, heterosexual woman enabled and hindered when it comes to what knowledge I have produced. It took me a few months to gain the trust of a women’s group in Birmingham so that I could come and visit their activities. The fact that my wife, who is a trained medical doctor, was asked by the organiser of the group to hold a couple of workshops about gender and mental health issues definitely opened up possibilities for me in relation to accessing the group. However, I held doubt throughout my engagement with the group about the fact that my presence seemed to make one of the women in the group slightly uncomfortable, even though she and the other members reassured me that I was welcome to the group’s sessions. However, at their meetings I mostly ended up playing with the seven-year-old daughter of one of the women, much to the relief of the group and, in some sense, this became a way for me to justify my presence. On one occasion when the group travelled to London for a national meeting

of migrant women's associations, I joined them for the day. When we were at Euston train station about to return to Birmingham the group leader working at the NGO organising the group's meetings was going in a different direction and asked who wanted to be responsible for the group's train tickets. At once, several of the women pointed at me and suggested that I, as the only man in the company, should be responsible for the tickets, which I strongly refused.

This anecdote points towards issues of whiteness, gender and privilege that I struggled with during my fieldwork. However, my experiences of what my gendered position enabled and hindered are not straightforward. When I interviewed parents, I sometimes sat with both parents at the same time, but often only with one. In Sweden, I talked to slightly more men than women and in certain families it was very clear that the father was the spokesperson of the family. But at the same time, some of the mothers opened up to me one on one, talking about very personal and sensitive issues such as the sexual abuse they had gone through in their countries of origin, and the specific reasons for why they chose to do so were not clear to me. In the UK, most of the parents I talked to were single mothers and I only talked to a handful of fathers. In some of the interview situations with single mothers, it felt as though gender roles restrained the conversation, but in at least one case a single mother expressed how she enjoyed talking about the difficult issues she was going through with a man. So, my experience during fieldwork was that the issues of gender played out differently in different situations and circumstances and in general I tried to embrace the ambivalences it caused to enable further reflexivity and awareness of the impact I had on the field as a researcher.

In the last two sections of this methodology chapter I move away from discussions about ethical questions toward more practical issues, such as describing my fieldwork in more detail, how it was designed and how I went about conducting it in practice. First, I focus on how the different locations impacted my research and then I describe the participants and my research design.

Comparisons

In migration research, much comparative research adapts rather traditional, positivist approaches to comparisons, borrowing for example from political science where comparative research is the “principal method” according to B. Guy Peters (1998). My research design lies rather far away from most “mainstream” approaches to comparison in migration research. However, I agree with Peters when he suggests that comparing countries makes it more difficult for the researcher to make assumptions about single countries and forces the researcher to be more specific in his or her description and understanding of political systems (p. 1, 4).

Basically, my project investigates two locations using the same research design. This design does not allow me to make broad assumptions about different national and local contexts. Rather, the main merit of my multi-sited fieldwork approach lies in the way it has forced me to challenge my own assumptions and made the specificities of each field clearer through thinking about the contexts in parallel. Anytime I encountered an interesting issue or difficult aspect to understand in one site, the ability to contrast the phenomena with its counterpart in the other context has helped me to think more creatively and openly.

The comparative aspect of my project did not become as central as I assumed it would when I set off to conduct my research. This is perhaps most clearly expressed in the fact that *Article 1* is situated in the UK and *Article 3* primarily draws on examples from Sweden. However, the insights in these articles would not necessarily have grown out of my research in the same way if the contrasting cases were not constantly accompanying my thinking. The analysis in *Articles 2* and *4*, however, draws on the narratives of participants in both countries as well as both political contexts and the contrasting examples enabled a number of interesting comparative findings that came about thanks to my ethnographic approach. In chapter 2, I mentioned a review article about what is called “the second wave” of illegality research. This thesis is a direct answer to the article’s request for comparative studies “on the effects of different manifestations of illegality within and between countries” (Ruszczyk & Yrizar Barbosa, 2016, p. 454).

Historically, comparative studies emerged in the United States as political scientists compared other countries to the US. Simply put, the benefit of these kinds of comparative studies is that one potentially gains “more knowledge about the nation studied, more knowledge about one’s own political system, or both” (Landman, 2008, p. 5). Allan Cochrane and colleagues (2001) suggest that in light of the growing number of books and journals focusing on comparative analysis, “it is perhaps no longer necessary to make the case for a comparative approach to the study of social policy. On the contrary, it may now be single-country studies that need to be justified.” In my study, I started with an interest in the Swedish context and extended my study to the UK to enable a better understanding of both contexts. In this sense, my project is very (Northern) Eurocentric and it is very difficult to say whether my findings can be generalised outside of the UK and Swedish contexts. It could be argued that the study would be more interesting if one of the sites were not located in the North, but I also believe that a North-North comparison brings about specific knowledge about the irregular situation that is useful for specific political struggles in a Northern European context that a North-South comparison would not have produced. Still, I try not to make any large general claims regarding how the irregular situation is experienced. Rather, my research points at important differences in how the context of deportability in each country could be described (see chapter 4). However, the conceptual discussions and theoretical contributions I attempt to make have potentially wider applications outside of the specificity of the UK and Sweden.

In Esping-Andersen’s (1990) classical model of three worlds of welfare capitalism, which is widely used in comparative studies of countries, the Swedish welfare state scores high on socialist characteristics and low on conservative and liberal characteristics and is positioned clearly as a social democratic state. The UK, however, is understood as a “hybrid” welfare regime that does not fit easily to any of Esping-Andersen’s three regimes (Cochrane et al., 2001). This model does not provide much help for understanding the differences in approaches to irregular migration and arguably it is rather the more detailed political systems, bureaucracies and cultural histories of the countries that affect how undocumented migrants experience their everyday lives in each respective country, and

therefore these aspects are the focus of the background chapter (4) that follows below.

Traditionally within anthropology, fieldwork was expected to include travel, and research was to be conducted away from “home”. However, in recent decades, much ethnographic fieldwork has taken place close to home (Amit, 2000). Malmö is very much my “home”; I have been living here since 2013 when I was accepted as a PhD student at Malmö University. However, this does not necessarily mean that my insights into the context of Malmö are richer or more valid—it could very well be the other way around. In Birmingham, where I stayed for the six intense winter months of 2014–2015 completely focused only on conducting fieldwork, I became more deeply “immersed” in the field. In a sense, the “field” in the UK was also a representation of my everyday life in Birmingham as more or less all of the friends I made and people I met were in some way included in it. In Malmö, on the other hand, fieldwork continued on and off over roughly three years, slowly starting even before I went to the UK in the fall of 2014 and continuing until the raid at the summer camp in August 2017. Even though I was officially on parental leave during the spring of 2017 I was regularly in contact with my participants and sometimes met them as I brought my child with me. In Malmö, I had a life “outside” my fieldwork at my workspace at the university and among friends I knew from other contexts outside my work, and the observations I made were conducted less regularly and primarily in spaces I did not enter outside of my fieldwork, such as family trips organised by the church every three months, or biweekly family drop-ins at an NGO. In this way, the material collected in the UK is more “intense” and focussed, whereas the material collected in Malmö is perhaps larger in its scope but more scattered in character. How this impacted the quality of the analysis of each space is difficult to assess, but that it has some kind of impact is clear.

The choice of Malmö and Birmingham as sites for my fieldwork came out of the original research plan of the project¹⁶ that my research has

¹⁶ <https://blogg.mah.se/undocumentedmigrants/project-description/>

been a part of. Malmö was chosen as it is the city where the researchers in the project are based, and it is a very interesting case to study as it is a transit city for migrants entering into Sweden. This fact was overwhelmingly confirmed during the summer and autumn of 2015 when Malmö was the centre of attention for political debate and media reports about the perceived reception “crisis”. Malmö has also been at the forefront of migrant struggles and initiatives both in terms of extending and limiting the rights of undocumented migrants in recent years (see chapter 4). The choice of Birmingham was also primarily a pragmatic choice as it, just like Malmö in Sweden, is the third largest urban area in the UK and has a history of immigration and a relatively young population (see chapter 4). The UK was also a convenient choice since English is the only language apart from Swedish that I speak fluently. The initial support from the people at the Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) at the University of Birmingham was also key to the decision to move forward with the choice of Birmingham.

The sizes of the two cities¹⁷ are very different, but this did not impact my research to any large extent since the networks of NGOs supporting undocumented migrants in both cities are relatively small. It was also similarly difficult to get in touch with families relevant for my project. There are more undocumented migrants in the UK than in Sweden, both in relative and absolute numbers (see chapter 4), but my understanding from discussing these differences with activists and participants is that in Birmingham it is easier to survive in this situation without the support of NGOs, most likely because of a larger and more accessible informal labour market. In this way, the number of families getting such support was perhaps not as different in the two cities as the difference in the overall number of undocumented migrants in each city in total.

In the end, the city scale did not become so central to my findings. Of course, there are many interesting and important things to say about how the local context shapes the experience of irregularity, but my experi-

¹⁷ The city of Malmö, approximately 0.34 million inhabitants in 158 km², has a third of the city of Birmingham’s population, approximately 1.1 million inhabitants in 268 km². (See <http://malmo.se/kommun--politik/statistik/befolkning.html> and <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/census>)

ence was that the “master status” of irregularity (Gonzales, 2016), which is defined mainly by a person’s relation to the state and its authorities, and the overall national and social contexts, overshadowed any local issue. There are definitely differences in the everyday struggles of families living in Birmingham compared to Malmö, as I discuss in more detail in chapter 4 below, but the issues in both cities that overshadowed everything else for the families was their legal status and lack of the right to work and provide for themselves.

Fieldwork details

In this last section of the methodology chapter, I describe in more practical detail how I went about conducting my research and also present the research participants in a bit more detail. I travelled to Birmingham for the first time in the spring of 2014 and met with a number of NGO workers whom I had gotten hold of via email and also through recommendations from Professor Jenny Phillimore and Dr Nando Sigona at the Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS), University of Birmingham, who were extremely helpful as I set up my fieldwork in Birmingham. In October 2014, I moved with my wife Frida to Birmingham and spent six intense, but dry and sunny winter months there cycling around the town between NGO meetings, church drop-ins, immigration advice drop-ins and people’s homes. When I returned to Malmö in April 2015, I immediately started processing what I had learned and wrote *Article 1*. Before and during my time in Birmingham, I had also started to plan my fieldwork in Malmö by talking to NGOs, activist groups and church workers. My first engagement with the Church of Sweden in Malmö happened already in 2014 and I became a volunteer with one of the local churches as they arranged excursions every third month for families who were experiencing or had experienced undocumentedness. This was the same church that arranged the summer camp that was raided by the police three years later, and some of the families present that summer were already part of the church activities the first time I came along in early 2014.

Then during 2015 and 2016 the main part of my fieldwork in Malmö took place, which I conducted in a less intense manner than the field-

work in Birmingham as I performed other departmental duties at my home institution, Malmö University, at the same time. I continued to visit family drop-ins and activities at different NGOs and the church. Many of my participants visited these activities regularly so I was able to arrange interviews with them that then took place in cafés, libraries or at people's homes. By the end of 2016, I was about to finish my fieldwork in Sweden as I was going on parental leave for the first time. However, shortly before I was about to go on Christmas break the police submitted the request to the social services for the addresses of hundreds of undocumented families, including several of my participant families. Again, I was at a weekend camp organised by the church, as this news had just broken on the Thursday before the camp. During the weekend, several of the participants considered whether they would even dare return to Malmö on Sunday night. During my parental leave, I continued to stay involved with some of the families who had been particularly affected by the police request. At one time, I brought my child to an "open preschool" at a church so that I could meet with members of a family in which the mother had just been detained and the police had separated the mother from her one-and-a-half-year-old who was still breastfeeding. Later, I took my child with me to court when one of my participants was being heard about accusations that she had violently resisted the police as they came to arrest her family. At the end of my parental leave, as I was just about to start working again, I was unable to participate in the camp (because of my parental leave) when the police then came and arrested five families. In some sense, I am happy that I was not present since everyone involved, including the church workers, were more or less traumatised by the experience, but in other ways it was also a shame that I was not there and able to observe what happen in person and help out.

In this way, the UK fieldwork was more concentrated in the sense that I spent every day for six months trying to meet people and set up interviews. However, during my time in Birmingham no special event such as the raid at the camp or request to the social services happened, so in that sense I was more closely capturing the ongoing, gnawing everyday struggle of my participants in an "hostile environment" in the UK. In Sweden, my study went on more slowly and over time, but then on some

occasions my whole “field” went through violent ruptures, which turned some of the understandings I had been developing on their head—such as the idea that families were less likely to be deported from Malmö when actually families from the Balkans became a specific target of the Border Police from 2016 onwards.

Although I am sceptical of counting encounters and numbers of interviews in ethnographic research (since such counting does not account for the quality of the material), below you find my best attempt of listing the activities I participated in and the numbers of interviews I conducted during my fieldwork in each country. The primary reason for doing so is to be transparent. I do not know if, nor do I suggest that, these numbers are “good” or “bad”, they are what they are: the result of hard work to ethically approach and take part in a field that does not so easily open itself up for research. Many of the activities not listed as interview sessions were where most of my participant observation took place. Also, some of the interviews took place in connection to the activities listed below.

UK

- I arranged at least 27 sit-down, semi-structured interviews with children and parents, but I also made numerous visits to people’s homes without sitting down for an organised interview.
- I met and discussed my work with stakeholders such as NGOs and gatekeepers at least 15 times.
- I attended volunteer training sessions for two different organisations.
- I sat in with a lawyer giving pro bono immigration advice at a drop-in centre at least 10 times.
- I visited a migrant women’s group at least five times and joined them once for a day trip to a conference on migrant women’s rights in London as well as twice on other day-long events in nearby towns.
- I followed one family as they went to meet their social worker and when they signed in at the Home Office (once each).

- I visited the meetings of a self-organised migrants' advocacy group four times.
- I joined an NGO twice in their outreach work with destitute migrants.
- I arranged three different daytrips with families as a thank you for participating in my study.
- I went back to the UK three times after my substantial fieldwork ended and met with participants for feedback on my writing and I kept contact with some participants via phone and online for another few years.

Sweden

- I arranged at least 20 sit-down, semi-structured interviews with children and parents, but I also (on and off) randomly ran into and conversed with participants in the streets, in the park or at church on a Sunday, etc. over the years after the fieldwork had started.
- I met and discussed my work with stakeholders such as NGOs and gatekeepers at least 13 times.
- I went with a church on daytrips eight times and joined their weekend camps for families twice during which extensive unstructured conversations took place.
- I joined a local NGO at their bi-weekly family gatherings at least 13 times during which extensive unstructured conversations took place.
- I joined one family as they visited a deacon for support at least seven times.
- I visited participants after they had been arrested and put into a detention centre twice.
- I met and kept in contact over the phone and online with several participants for another few years after the substantial fieldwork had ended.

Below, I have included three tables that describe the participants in my fieldwork for each country. All of the names of family members mentioned in this thesis have been anonymised, as well as some of the detailed information about the families, such as number of siblings and, in some cases, their country of origin has also been changed to a nearby country to anonymise the information further.

<i>Country of origin</i>	<i>Families</i>	<i>Parents</i>	<i>Children talked to</i>	<i>Children total</i>
<i>Ghana</i>	1	1	0	1
<i>India</i>	2	3	1	4
<i>Iran</i>	1	2	1	2
<i>Jamaica</i>	6	6	3	7
<i>Nigeria</i>	3	3	1	5
<i>Pakistan</i>	1	2	1	3
<i>Sri Lanka</i>	1	2	0	2
<i>Zambia</i>	1	2	0	3
<i>Total</i>	16	25	7	27

Table 1. Participants in the UK

<i>Country of origin</i>	<i>Families</i>	<i>Parents</i>	<i>Children talked to</i>	<i>Children total</i>
<i>Afghanistan</i>	4	7	2	7
<i>Albania</i>	3	5	1	5
<i>Kosovo</i>	5	10	3	9
<i>Total</i>	12	22	6	21

Table 2a. Participants in Sweden

<i>Country of origin</i>	<i>Families deported (returned*)</i>	<i>Families granted asylum**</i>	<i>Families undocumented or seeking asylum**</i>
<i>Afghanistan</i>	0 (0)	4	0
<i>Albania</i>	2 (2)	0	1
<i>Kosovo</i>	4 (1)	0	1
<i>Total</i>	6 (3)	4	2

Table 2b. Legal statuses of participants in Sweden (*Number of families who, at the time of writing in September 2018, had returned to Sweden after being deported in 2017-8.) (**At the time of writing, September 2018.)

A total of 28 families participated in my study, 12 in Sweden and 16 in the UK, and I interviewed at least one parent from each family (except in one case, see footnote below). I conducted interviews and (to a various extent) participatory observation with children in 13 of these families, six in Sweden and seven¹⁸ in the UK. The participating children's ages ranged from 7 to 18 years old (one had just turned 18 at the time of our interview). In 15 families (six in Sweden and nine in the UK) I only interviewed the parents since the children did not want to participate, the parents did not want me to interview them or they were too young to be interviewed. The informants were all recruited during activities I took part in at NGOs or churches. In some cases, gatekeepers introduced me to people and, after I had become more involved in the NGOs' work, I approached new participants myself. In a few cases, snowball sampling occurred in which participants recommended their friends to participate.

When I last recollected this information, in the fall of 2018, I knew more about what had happened to the families in Sweden than in the UK, and these numbers were then up to date, since I performed fieldwork in Sweden last and had a chance to follow the families over a longer period of time (and also establish closer contact that continued after the fieldwork had finished). To clarify, in *Table 2b* and the column "Families deported (returned)", the number outside of the bracket represents how many families were deported some time during or after my fieldwork, and the number inside the bracket represents how many of these families later returned to Sweden (based on what I knew in the fall of 2018). In the UK, I could have updated the table with information that I have about a few of the families that I have had sporadic contact with after the fieldwork finished, but since I do not have this information about all of the families I have chosen to only include information in the table based on what I knew at the end of my primary fieldwork in the UK (spring 2015), and at that stage all the participants were basically in the

¹⁸ In the articles, I say that I talked to six children in the UK; however, one of the families in the UK (from Iran) I only met once and then I only talked to the 16-year-old daughter of the family. I managed to neglect this person when counting the number of participant children for the first article and this mistake has accumulated throughout my writing until I started preparing this section of the thesis. However, this interview with the 16-year-old did not become central to my analysis and it could rather be seen as a contextual background interview. I still want to acknowledge her part in the research project by adding her to the count here.

same situation legally as they were when I first met them (from the autumn of 2014 onwards). It can still be worth pointing out, however, that after my fieldwork ended at least two families from Jamaica and one from Ghana received leave to remain on the basis of the children having lived in the UK for more than 10 years. The situation of many of the other families in the UK have most probably changed since the last time I was in contact with them, but the nature of this kind of research and the changing situation of this group of migrants makes it almost impossible to keep track of the situation of each participant. Also, one could argue that it would be highly unethical to keep track in this way since it would demand an updated information database with contact information that would be very hard to sustain in accordance with strict ethical standards and the personal data gathering rules under the General Data Protection Regulation in the EU. The information about what happened to the families in the UK is not as central to the issues discussed in this thesis as the information about the families in Sweden, since the information on those families relates directly to the events that occurred at the end of my fieldwork in Sweden when the police started to intensify its searches and deportations of families from the Balkans. In the next chapter, I discuss the contexts in which these events, as well as my whole fieldwork, took place in more detail.

4. BACKGROUND

The everyday experiences of undocumented migrants are very much formed by the locations where they live. Below, I present some characteristics of Birmingham, UK and Malmö, Sweden respectively that are central for a contextual understanding of key political questions in regard to irregular migration. This discussion complements the articles' brief discussions of the sites and introduces certain contextually relevant aspects of the empirical material.

Discursive framings

Laws, policies and practices affecting undocumented migrants change continuously and have done so since transnational irregular migration started to become a more central policy issue in the second half of the 20th century. Starting my project in late 2013 means that it has run parallel to major changes in migration policies in both Sweden and the UK. In Sweden, it is difficult to over-emphasise the effects that the “long summer of migration” of 2015 had on changes in national migration policies and public opinion, including the subsequent legislative changes.¹⁹ In the UK, the immigration bills of 2014 and 2016 have both put in place significant changes in policies towards undocumented migrants.

Irregular migration policies are, as all policy areas, informed by and inform prevalent discourses (see chapter 2). Certain concepts that have

¹⁹ See the Asylum Commission for an in-depth discussion about the effects of these changes: <https://liu.se/forskning/asylkommissionen>

become dominant in the debates around irregular migration capture the central aspects of what characterises the developments in policy and practice in relation to the issue. As mentioned in the introduction, in 2012, then UK Home Secretary of the Conservative Party, Theresa May, introduced the UK government's official policy of creating a "hostile environment" for undocumented migrants through which the denial of rights is supposed to encourage undocumented migrants to return "voluntarily" (Kirkup & Winnett, 2012; Price, 2014). This language of hostility had already been used in 2007 by the Labour government at the time (Travis, 2007), but the concept became central in the UK public debate after it was introduced by May.

The arguments for why the "hostile environment" is a, or perhaps *the*, key concept forming UK political discourse around irregular migration are rather straight forward since they have been constructed by politicians themselves with the purpose of influencing public opinion and policy. In Sweden, discourses around "hostility" have not (yet) become prevalent in the political discourse around irregular migration in a similar way. Instead, I suggest that a somewhat different kind of concept can usefully contribute to an understanding of how political discourse and policy are developing there, namely the concept of a "shadow society" (*skuggsamhälle*). The expression occurred in the media for the first time in 2008 during the debates regarding undocumented migrants' access to health care in Sweden (Nielsen, 2016, p. 90). Then minister of immigration, Tobias Billström, can potentially be "credited" for establishing the term in a debate article (see Billström, 2008). A search in the online Swedish media repository *Retriever* (Table 3) shows how the term has become a commonplace word in recent years.

During 2013, the term was increasingly used in the heated debate that took place at that time around a project conducted by the Swedish police to make their internal border police work more efficient, the so-called REVA project, which sparked criticism around issues of racial profiling and disproportionality (Bävman & Stark, 2012). The use of the term "shadow society" became even more prevalent in the debate after the 2015 "long summer of migration" when the government started to publish prognoses about the expected increase in the numbers of undocu-

mented migrants after the sharp increase of asylum seekers. The term has been incorporated in an alarmist discourse in which more (external and internal) border controls are rationalised by arguments that the expansion of this “shadow society” must be brought under control (see, for example, *Sydsvenskan*, 2017; Eriksson, 2017).

Table 3. Appearance rate of the word *skuggsamhälle* [shadow society] in Swedish media.²⁰

In Sweden, the discourse of the “shadow society” has in some cases been closely connected to the issue of children’s rights. The Social Democratic local government in Stockholm decided in 2016 that irregular migrant children are entitled to social support, just like they had been in Malmö since 2013, on the basis of the rights of these children as residents in each city (I will return to this issue in more detail below). During the debate leading up to this decision, the local right-wing Moderate party in Stockholm declared that they would reverse the decision if they got into power in the next election. They argued in a press release that

²⁰ The data from *Retriever* has not been cleared from usages unrelated to undocumented migration, but a randomised manual check of the articles included in the search show that a vast majority of the usages are in the context of undocumented migration. The irrelevant data included is arguably not a problem as the table should be read primarily as a visual expression of how the prevalence of the word has changed over the last years.

such a practice would contribute to the development of a “shadow society” in Sweden:

The Social Democrats argue that it is in the best interest of the child to live in a shadow society, where they are forced to live hidden lives. But this decision is not based on children’s best interests. Children should not live clandestinely without citizenship and leave to remain in Sweden. The Social Democratic national government is clear that deportation decisions made by the Migration Agency should be respected, but in Stockholm we instead see how the Social Democrats do the opposite of what is being said at a national level. (Moderaterna, 2016, my translation)

In similar terms, a recent governmental report (SOU 2017:93, 2017) talked about the “shadow society” and argued that it is a risky and vulnerable place to live for anyone and can lead into crime. More internal immigration checks, the report argues, can lead to more people in this situation being found so that they, if necessary, can receive support from society. The report states: “It cannot, in a democratic society, be considered humane to let some people live a ‘life in the shadows’ as irregular migrants” (SOU 2017:93, 2017, p. 155–6, my translation, see *Article 3*).

Sager and colleagues (2016) argue that care racism is a productive concept to use when analysing how arguments for limiting the rights of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers often follow a logic of what is in the best interests of the individuals. They highlight the reversed logic involved when the limitation of rights is seen as “protecting” people from entering an irregular situation through their deterrent effects. In a study of the nationalist populist party Sweden Democrats, Diana Mulinari and Anders Neergard (2014) show how the party uses a discourse of “care” to argue for racist policies in which immigration is not just considered bad for the majority population but also for the immigrants themselves. Care racism protects and cares for those considered to belong and is a “colonial care discourse that enables colonisers to construct themselves as superior” (Mulinari & Neergard, 2014, p. 53). Mulinari and Neergard show how care is a central notion of the Swedish welfare state and the “people’s home” and how this trope is appropriated by racist discourses.

The two examples mentioned above hint at a logic of paternalism and individualisation around the issue of irregular migration in Sweden. However, a number of changes in law and policy show that Sweden is turning more overtly “hostile” towards undocumented migrants as well. The rapid developments in Sweden during the “long summer of migration” of 2015 and afterwards can be exemplified in the following quote from Tina, a deacon responsible for immigration issues in the Church of Sweden on a regional level in southern Sweden. In May 2015, before the “crisis” unfolded, she said:

Tina: I do not have much experience of families being deported. The police are much worse in other parts of the country. It was worse in the 1990s. Then I was delivering food to Yugoslavian refugees hiding in houses in the forest. But things turned out well for those families, even though I was very worried for them back then.

In the aftermath of the increased number of asylum seekers arriving in Sweden during the summer and fall of 2015, the discourse and politics around immigration changed rapidly. At the end of 2016, the headline of a news article in the major newspaper in southern Sweden, *Sydsvenskan*, once again resembled the situation in the 1990s: “Children revealed by the social services hiding in the forest” (Mikkelsen, 2016b).

Arguably, “the shadow society” is different from the “hostile environment” in the UK in that the latter signals the active role of the government in constructing the hostile preconditions of the irregular situation, whereas the former does not direct attention to any specific actor responsible for the occurrence of the shadow society. In the debate, “the shadow society” is used to blame both the government and the migrants themselves for creating a parallel economy with an unregulated labour market and other kinds of exploitation. It is also used to describe society’s lack of insight into the irregular situation and connects, for example, to arguments about how increased access to rights for children will put the children in more direct contact with societal institutions who can then supply them with adequate protection from harm (see *Article 3*). In the following sections, I continue to compare the two contexts by look-

ing in more detail at the specific characteristics of the UK and Sweden as sites of irregular migration.

UK: “Hostile Environment”

Brief history of migration policies in the UK

Discourses on migration in the UK have shifted through history, but some themes have survived over the years. The “island mentality” has been important while the notion of the UK being “overcrowded” with immigrants was already suggested by politicians in the 1980s and the derogatory concept of “bogus asylum seekers”, which accuses mainly visa overstayers of abusing the asylum system as they apply for asylum when their visa runs out, was dominant during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Vollmer, 2014, p. 70). As the numbers of asylum seekers went down drastically during the 2000s the focus on so-called “bogus asylum seekers” shifted towards European low-wage workers and undocumented migrants. In 2010, the conservative government introduced their “net migration target” of below 100,000 per year and they have stuck with this target since then even though it has never been achieved (Grierson, 2019; Vargas-Silva & McNeil, 2017). Also, immigration was a leading underlying driver that formed the vote on Brexit and has been one of the most important issues in public opinion since the early 2000s (although after the EU referendum, issues regarding Europe and health care have taken over that position to a certain extent) (Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017; Scott & Richards, 2018).

Migration scholars Catherine Hirst and Naures Atto (2018) argue in their extensive overview of the legal and policy framework of migration governance in the UK that this field is characterised by three different key themes. First, the migration governance system in the UK is very complex and the number of actors involved are numerous, including the subcontracting of different elements of the reception and detention systems to the private sector and the importance of the third sector when it comes to immigration support systems. With at least 10 Immigration Acts (the number is higher if you include all Acts relevant to immigration issues) introduced in the last 30 years and thousands of Immigration

Rules, the system is particularly difficult to navigate, not least for vulnerable immigrants (for an overview of the changes in immigration legislation, see Hirst and Atto, 2018, p. 61–2). Second, these laws and rules are constantly shifting, almost always in a more repressive direction, continuously making it harder to be recognised as in need of protection and to access support. The governmental institutions within the field of migration management have also been restructured and changed names several times over the last years, adding further confusion. Third, the strong position of the government in the UK political system in relation to the judiciary has made the ever tightening of migration policies further possible as well (Hirst & Atto, 2018).

Hirst and Atto's (2018) overview also highlights the little impact (at least compared to Sweden) the 2015 "long summer of migration" had on UK government policies. The schemes that were put in place as a response to the "crisis" have, up until late 2018, resulted in approximately 10,000 resettled refugees who had fled the war in Syria (through the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme), approximately 500 resettled vulnerable children from specific conflict zones in Africa and the Middle-East (through the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme) and around 200 unaccompanied children who have been relocated from the EU to the UK (through the "Dub's Amendment" to the 2016 Immigration Bill) (Hirst & Atto, 2018, p. 56–7). Rather, what is significant to how the UK authorities have dealt with the issue of migration in the last decade or so is how the hostile environment policies have developed and expanded across society.

Recent hostile policies in the UK

The policies that can be considered a part of the "hostile environment" are numerous. In a collaborative effort, migrant activist groups have suggested a number of key areas of the "hostile" policies (Corporate Watch, 2018), of which most are a result of the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts. I draw on their work below as I discuss some of the key "hostile" policies that had an impact on my participants' everyday lives. These policies have actual effects on undocumented migrants and are expressions of some of the ways migrants are being vulnerabilised in the

UK in practice (see *Article 3*). It should be pointed out that by the time this thesis is published some of the information below may have become out of date as changes in these policies often occur swiftly.

It has been mandatory since 2007 for hospitals to charge “Overseas visitors” for health care.²¹ This has moved much of the responsibility of identifying potentially chargeable patients to frontline staff, such as nurses and administrators, which has raised strong criticism from health professionals who have organised themselves in a campaign group called “Does not Cops”.²² Furthermore, the NHS and the Home Office set up a data sharing scheme so that they could share patient information more efficiently. However, this agreement was suspended in May 2018 after pressure from professionals and campaign groups. The suspension was also partly a response from the government to the emerging “Windrush” scandal in which migrants who had been living in the UK for decades were hounded for not having the right documents (Campbell, 2018; see more on the “Windrush” scandal below).

Data sharing is also an issue within the education system. Several times a year, schools collect the details of all their pupils for national censuses. In this way, schools have up-to-date address information on all of their pupils. This information is shared with the immigration authorities if requested. Children and parents can refuse to submit information but not everyone is aware that the information could be used for immigration enforcement purposes. Campaigners have managed to make the government back down on trying to add questions to the census about nationality and country of birth.²³

The police have collaborated on data sharing and referrals with Immigration Compliance and Enforcement (ICE) teams for many years but since the “hostile environment” was introduced their joint activities have increased and become more systematic. Under the “Operation Nexus” agreement (Vine, 2014), a journalistic investigation by the BBC found

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/nhs-visitor-and-migrant-cost-recovery-programme>

²² <http://www.doesnotcops.co.uk/>

²³ <https://www.schoolsabc.net/>

that out of 45 police forces, around half of them “referred victims and witnesses of crime to the Home Office for immigration enforcement” (Nye et al., 2018). This makes it increasingly difficult for undocumented migrants to approach the police when they are victims of crime. According to activist reports, more than 3,000 migrants have been deported through this scheme (Evans, 2018).

Also, some charities working with rough sleepers have cooperated with the Home Office through data sharing and referrals by locating and sharing information about undocumented migrants. The rationale behind this has been a perceived joint interest in reducing the number of homeless people on the streets. In relation to EU citizens with unclear immigration status in the UK (i.e. who lack a job or may have stayed for longer than three months in the UK), the Home Office has adjusted its rules so that sleeping rough for just one night is deemed enough to be arrested for deportation (Corporate Watch, 2017).

Related to the issue of homelessness is the issue of housing. During my fieldwork, the UK government rolled out a pilot project called “The Right to Rent” (see *Article 4*) that made it illegal for landlords to let housing to undocumented migrants. The policy puts responsibility on landlords to check the immigration status of potential tenants and has introduced heavy fines for those landlords who break the rules (Crawford et al., 2016). This makes the policy different from most other aspects of the “hostile environment”, since it relies on private citizens and not state agencies to conduct the controls of migrants’ legal status—something that is not always easy to do even for experienced migration lawyers because of the complicated UK immigration rules (as was highlighted in a critical report from the Residential Landlords Association, see Simcock, 2017). Similarly, the 2014 Immigration Act obliged banks to check the immigration status of new customers and the 2016 Immigration Act extended the obligation to also include regular checks on existing customers (Bolt, 2016). This extension was, however, temporarily halted in 2018, also as a result of the “Windrush” scandal (Grierson, 2018).

Employers are in a similar situation as landlords in that it is illegal to hire an undocumented migrant. Workplace raids have been conducted in

the UK long before the “hostile environment” policy was put in place but in recent years a number of new policies have been implemented that criminalised the hiring of undocumented migrants and increased the collaboration between ICE teams and local authority agencies as well as corporate companies themselves. Corporations that realise that they have been found out in hiring workers without working permits can have their fees reduced if they help the ICE teams arrest the workers (for an example of this, see O’Carroll, 2016). In 2016, the “Controlling Migration Fund” was initiated to provide “support to local communities facing pressures arising from migration” (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018, p. 24). This fund is interesting in how it points to a development in which local actors are identified by the government as crucial in the work of addressing irregular migration. Framed as a project that will help tackle problems impacting local authorities as a result of irregular migration, it focuses on issues of “rogue” employers and landlords in which the Home Office can work together with the local authorities to assure compliance. The project also frames immigration enforcement as if it were tackling “the exploitation of vulnerable migrants” and “identifying migrant victims of modern slavery offences” (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018, p. 24–5), which is one of a few examples of UK “hostile” policies that resemble the paternalistic discourse that is more prevalent in the language of Swedish state institutions and representatives (which I will discuss in more detail below) (cf. Mulinari, & Neergard 2014).

Apart from these concrete policy issues, one of the most tangible and visible expressions of the “hostile environment” were the Go Home Vans (*Figure 3*) that cruised the streets of six of the most diverse London boroughs in the summer of 2013. The Home Office released Twitter updates simultaneously with pictures of migrants arrested and put into ICE vans under the hashtag #immigrationoffender (Jones et al., 2017, p. 11).

Figure 3. "Go Home Van" (from Jones et al., 2017).

Some policy changes within the framework of the immigration application system have also amplified hostility in UK society, such as, for example, the withdrawal of publicly funded legal advice support for many categories of migrants applying for leave to remain. During my regular participation at a drop-in centre offering free legal advice, the stream of cases brought up in which the applicants had been "screwed over by their solicitors", as one of the volunteers put it, seemed never ending. All the families that had been referred to him from a local children's rights organisation had been exploited by their solicitors in some way, he explained. Furthermore, recent increases in the fees involved in applying for regularisation, also for those who have already been deemed eligible for citizenship, have gone up significantly, with the cost of registering a child as a British citizen according to the 10-year-rule (see *Article 1* and below) being £1,012 in 2018, even though the real administrative cost has been estimated at only £372. Campaigners are pointing to the fact that these fees are forcing people into destitution (Greenwood, 2018; Marsh, 2018).

Regularisation in the UK

In addition to hostile immigration policies, the complex legal framework of immigration law is a major source of stress in the everyday lives of undocumented migrants in the UK. Most likely (although it is not possible to say with certainty), a majority of undocumented migrants in the UK have overstayed their visa or lost their regular status through some kind of state bureaucratic failure in relation to processing their application for extending their stay (Vollmer & McNeil, 2011). A number of legal pathways exist in the UK for undocumented migrants to regulate their stay (Finch, 2013). The participants whom I met in the UK during the winter of 2014–15 who had applied for regularisation were all applying under one or the other of the paths described below (however, the rules may have changed since then). The list stated here is by no means exhaustive and the paths to regularisation are continuously changing, but these were the most common ones I experienced.

When a child who was born in the UK to undocumented migrant parents turns 10 years old, he or she can apply for British citizenship. You do not automatically become a citizen by birth in the UK (as, for example, is the case in the US where the *jus soli* principle applies) but this rule is a kind of extended version of the *jus soli* principle that comes into place at the age of 10. However, there are two main struggles for those who apply according to this rule: one has to be able to prove that one has stayed in the UK all of the 10 years (without leaving the country for more than 90 days at a time) and one must be able to afford the fees involved in the application (in 2018 it was £1,012, as mentioned above). The child also needs to prove to be “of good character” (!) (Finch, 2013).

Another pathway for children is to obtain citizenship through a parent who is or has become a citizen. It was a common issue, during my fieldwork in Birmingham, that undocumented single mothers had to struggle to get hold of a birth certificate from absent fathers who had gained leave to remain and thus could help their children become regularised. Applying for asylum or humanitarian protection is another path that many undocumented migrants take in order to regularise their stay in the UK. This is sometimes an option when families have already ap-

plied for asylum earlier but have been refused. If new circumstance relevant to their situation as refugees have occurred, they can then file a “fresh application” again.

Another path to regularisation is based on the possibility that an undocumented migrant will be considered as having “established a private life” in the UK (Finch, 2013). However, for adults, at least 20 years must have passed before a migrant resident in the UK can even be considered for such an application. (This used to be 14 years, but, as one of the pro bono lawyers I worked with suggested, the government made it longer when they realised that a lot of Jamaicans who came to the UK in the 1990s were getting close to having stayed for 14 years.) For children, a seven-year stay is needed for such an application to be submitted as long as they are still less than 18 years old. The applications for these kinds of stay are complicated and, during my fieldwork, I did not hear of any successful cases, but an application under the seven-year rule could still be useful to file in those cases in which a child born in the UK was getting close to his or her 10th birthday and the applicants needed to gain some more time. Once the child was able to gain leave to remain, this usually enabled the parents to apply for temporary leave to remain for 2.5 years, which could then be extended four times, at hefty costs, until they could apply for permanent stay. The fees included in various applications for leave to remain add significantly to the destitution many undocumented migrants face in the UK.

Social support in the UK

The debate around irregular migration in the UK is often included in a wider debate about the shared destitution among immigrants with various immigration statuses. Destitution among migrants in the UK has been a topic of discussion since at least the early 2000s (British Red Cross, 2013; Crawley et al., 2011; Smart, 2009). Philip Alston, *United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights*, noted that in the UK “destitution is built into the asylum system” (Alston, 2018). At a City of Sanctuary national network meeting I attended in Bristol in 2015, one of the speakers suggested that the widespread poverty could best be described as “enforced destitution”. However, during

the day-long meeting, with a broad range of speakers from different organisations and institutions, only one of the speakers referred to visa overstayers in their speech. The discourse of the network revolves around asylum seekers since that group is considered more deserving in public opinion. Still, visa overstayers make up a large part of the group called “destitute migrants” and are dependent on various kinds of social or NGO support. Many of the people I met in Birmingham had come to the UK from one of the British Empire’s former colonies. One explanation for this is that up until recently it was relatively easy to obtain a visa to the UK for citizens of these countries. At a gathering of migrant activist groups, an elderly woman with, as she described it herself, slave ancestors, complained half-jokingly, half-seriously about being accused of being a benefit-scrourer. She said: “I’ve come for the benefits you have taken from my country in Africa! You Europeans went and that is why we are here. We did not invite you. I just want a little bit, not all of it [laughter].”

Undocumented migrants are not able to access any kind of support from UK state institutions if they do not at the same time make efforts to regularise their situation. Social Services and other authorities have a duty to report anyone who is unlawfully present in the UK to the Home Office. In the context of this study, it is necessary to explain in more detail some kinds of support that are specifically relevant for my participants, especially those that are related to the rights of children. Destitution is widespread among migrants, with varying legal statuses, in the UK and one of the main causes of this is the condition of having No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), which applies to anyone in the UK who is “subject to immigration control”. This can include both undocumented migrants with no legal right to remain in the UK as well as migrants with several different kinds of statuses, such as those on a student or spouse visa or those who have been granted temporary leave to remain under family or private life rules (NRPF Network, 2018). Public funds in this context include most welfare benefits, but there are some exceptions. A person with NRPF is still entitled to support such as child maintenance, education, childcare, free school meals, health care (to a certain extent) and social service assistance, etc. The issue of destitution in the UK highlights the blurriness between different legal categories and migrant

experiences there. Large groups of migrants with temporary leave to remain based on a pending or successful application share the experience of increasing poverty as a result of years of austerity politics. 1.5 million people in the country, a quarter of whom were born outside of the UK, are estimated to be facing destitution, including 365,000 children (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018).

Some of the families I met in the UK had experienced living as undocumented migrants earlier but were, at the time I knew them, getting support from the Home Office as they were applying for asylum, or their application had been refused but there were temporary barriers to them leaving the UK—so-called section 95 or section 4 support (NRPF Network, 2018). For destitute undocumented migrant families in the process of filing some kind of application for leave to remain, social service support can be accessed on the basis that they have a child in need. This support is stated in section 17 of the Children’s Act from 1989 and applying for so-called “section 17” support was the most common way among the families I met to initiate contact with authorities again as they started to attempt to regularise their stay in the UK. Many of the support persons I met in Birmingham spent much of their time assisting families in their application for section 17 support. (In *Article 1*, the case of Andrea’s family exemplifies some of the struggles these families had to go through as they got back into the system by applying for section 17 support.) One initial struggle in this work was to convince the social services to conduct a human rights assessment that could enable the families to access support even if they had not yet formally submitted some sort of application for leave to remain with the Home Office but were in the initial stages of this process. Being considered destitute by the authorities was also important in relation to their applications since they then could potentially be eligible for a waiver of the hefty fees that the Home Office charged for their applications.

There are well known discrepancies and difficulties involved in applying for section 17 support (Jennings, 2014). One small study conducted by an NGO that supports destitute migrants in London (NELMA, 2017) found that a majority of the 50 families they studied received incorrect information about their rights in relation to Section 17 and a third of

them were told that their immigration status made them ineligible for support even though that was not the case. According to Ali Brunswick, who leads an agency focussing on supporting migrants who apply for section 17 support, the issue is “one of the battlegrounds on which the tensions between children’s rights and immigration control plays out” (Brunswick, 2017). Her organisation sees how many families are forced to sleep rough and mothers are forced into prostitution to buy food for their children as they have been rejected for section 17 support. As the cost of section 17 support is carried by local authorities, they try to avoid accepting claims. These limitations to the social welfare regime for migrants have been described by Guentner and colleagues (2016) as a kind of chauvinistic welfare bordering.

The “Windrush” scandal

In the spring of 2018, *The Guardian* and *The Observer* ran several stories about mainly elderly immigrants who had come to the UK as children in the 1950s and 60s, many on a passenger boat named “Windrush”, but who had suffered from the hostile environment policies with the result that many of them were never formally naturalised or they had not applied for a passport (Gentleman, 2018a). The narratives of how many, mainly Caribbean, migrants had been unable to regularise themselves as they were struck by “hostile environment” policies caused several Caribbean heads of government to demand a discussion about the issue with the UK government (Gentleman, 2018b). As the criticism towards the government grew in Parliament, the scandal led to the replacement of Amber Rudd with Sajid Javid as Home Secretary, who immediately apologised for the treatment of the so-called “Windrush” generation and promised to make the immigration system more “humane”. Javid suggested replacing, although only in name, not in content, the “hostile environment” with the “compliant environment” as a more correct term for the policies in place to tackle irregular migration (Crenar, 2018). Theresa May has been asked to apologise for the “hostile environment” policies but has refused to do so and has maintained that the “Windrush” scandal was an unfortunate side effect of policies necessary to tackle irregular migration (Sabbagh, 2018).

The “Windrush” scandal has had several different effects. Information sharing schemes between the NHS and the Home Office have been suspended, as well as other “pro-active data sharing” schemes between different departments (Gentleman, 2018c). Some airlines have chosen to stop taking part in deportations (Gentleman, 2018d). The government even responded with dedicating 22 of July to be “Windrush day” to “recognise and honour the enormous contribution” of the “Windrush” generation (Badshah, 2018). But most of the hostile policies described above are still in place. Even though the full impact the “Windrush” scandal remains to be seen, a key question begs to be answered: Why did this narrative, and not all the other countless stories over the last years of how people have suffered from the “hostile environment”, somewhat succeed in impacting overall UK migration policy? To a limited extent, campaigners have managed to halt specific hostile policies in recent years. For example, in 2015 the government first announced that they would lower the asylum support for children to 15 pounds a week, but three days later, after having received heavy criticism, they changed their mind, stating in a rather peculiar way that: “*On reflection*, the Government has decided that not all of these changes should be implemented” (Home Office, 2015, my emphasis). Still, this and similar events did not topple the Home Secretary or lead to any further changes. Recent research is pointing towards the historical legacy of the “Windrush Generation” (Wardle & Obermuller, 2019), but more research is needed to explain why this scandal had such a large impact on UK politics compared to other scandalous events. The full impact of the “Windrush” scandal is a question for future research to describe, and it remains yet to be seen if the impact is lasting. Furthermore, Brexit will also have an impact on British immigration policies and the map will most likely be completely redrawn again.

Sweden: “Shadow Society”

Brief history of migration policies in Sweden

For a long time, Sweden has been perceived, by itself and others, as a nation with generous migration policies and as a humanitarian super-

power (Abiri, 2000; Schierup, 2006). However, this position and perception has always been paralleled with less generous developments in terms of inhumane migration policies. The first immigration law came into being in Sweden in 1914 in relation to the culture of anti-Roma politics at the time (Hammar, 1964; Jansson, 2016). Before the Second World War, there were very few refugees in Sweden (around 5,000). However, during the war there was a radical shift in Sweden's refugee policies and by the end of the war the number of refugees had risen to 200,000. After the war, along with strong economic growth in Sweden, the focus of Swedish migration policies and regulations shifted again towards the increased need for migrant workers. Up until the economic crisis of 1972, foreign workers could almost freely migrate to Sweden (Byström & Frohnert, 2017). In the 1970s and 80s, focus shifted towards asylum and Sweden's self-image and reputation as a progressive country in relation to immigration grew around this time (Spång, 2008). From the 1990s onward, more restrictive policies were put into place, just like in the rest of Europe, and a migrant's rights movement emerged in parallel (Sager et al., 2016).

In 1988, the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*) were formed as a political party out of the remains of earlier racist organisations with several of its leading members having links to fascist and Nazi organisations (Widfeldt, 2018), though they would not enter into Parliament until 2010. Another populist right wing party, New Democracy (*Ny Demokrati*) did take places in Parliament between 1991 and 1994 and immigration issues became important for the first time in the campaigns leading up to the 1991 election (Spång, 2008). In December 1989, through the so-called "Lucia decision", the government decided that only those asylum seekers who fulfilled the requirements of the Geneva convention would be granted asylum, which was motivated by the increase in asylum seekers during the fall the same year (Spång, 2008). In later years, Sweden has more and more adapted its immigration policies to be in line with shared EU policies (Schierup & Ålund, 2011).

The restrictive developments since the end of 1980s have had a few notable exceptions. In the early 1990s and mid 2000s, a number of amnesties were put into place that granted certain asylum seekers leave to re-

main or the right to apply for asylum again (Nielsen, 2016, p. 115). The limited amnesty of 2006 came into place as a result of the new Aliens Act, which took effect in March 2006. The new law changed the procedures so that asylum claims from then on would be appealed in the courts, and the limited amnesty was motivated by arguments that a new chance should be granted to those who had been treated unfairly in the old system. Furthermore, since 2008, when new labour migration rules were adopted, Sweden have had the most open labour migration system of all OECD countries (OECD, 2011, quoted in Emilsson, 2016).

The amnesty debate that took place around 2005 was influenced by another debate about asylum seeking children with Pervasive refusal syndrome (Ascher & Hjern, 2013), so-called *apatiska barn* (Tamas, 2009). The debate concerning this issue is specifically interesting in relation to issues of agency and interdependence in migrant families, as parents were accused of forcing their children to simulate being sick. As I mention in *Article 2*, a highly contested state inquiry went so far as to imply, with no scientific basis, that parents were poisoning their children with chemical substances to make them seem “apathetic” (SOU 2006:49: 2006). Recently, the issue has come up on the political agenda again (Sandstig, 2019; SBU, 2020) and it remains to be seen what the outcome of the debate will be in the new political environment that has followed the 2015 repressive “turn”.

The process of EU policy harmonisation escalated in 2016 when a temporary migration law was put into place in response to the increase in the numbers of asylum seekers in Sweden in 2015. This temporary law aimed at harmonising Sweden’s immigration policies with the minimum requirements of EU law and international conventions (Regeringen, 2016a). Similar arguments were used in 2015 as with the Lucia decision in 1989, which suggested that the stress on the reception system and local authorities had to be relieved to avoid a crisis.

Recent hostile policies in Sweden

The temporary law of 2016 introduced a number of repressive reforms (see FARR, 2018) that led the Ombudsman for Children in Sweden to call it “hostile to children” (Barnombudsmannen, 2016), of which the

most important are the following: leave to remain based on humanitarian reasons (see Lundberg, 2016b) was more or less scrapped, permanent leave to remain is no longer possible for asylum seekers (they can receive permission to stay for either three years or 13 months depending on their status) and family reunification rules were severely restricted. The law was pushed through very quickly and was unique in that every single institution or organisation that commented on the proposed law, including the courts and the Migration Agency, had problems with some parts or the whole of it (Barnrättsbyrån, 2018). Importantly, however, it was not the temporary law that primarily caused the sharp decrease of asylum seekers to Sweden after 2015 but rather the closure of the “Balkan route” and the deal between the EU and Turkey (B. Weber, 2017). The temporary law, and the additional repressive migration policies that were put in place subsequently, may, however, have made Sweden less attractive as a destination country compared to other European states.

After the initial changes in Sweden that were a result of the temporary law, a number of policies have been continuously rolled out. In 2016, the government presented measures aimed at increasing the number of people who had been denied asylum who were returned to their assigned countries (Regeringen, 2016b). These included extended possibilities for the police to conduct workplace raids, collect fingerprints, ask for ID documents and passports at internal border controls and to collaborate with the Migration Agency, amongst other things.

In response to this, 42 scholars (including me) published a debate article in a national newspaper in which we argued that these new policies would not help get people out of irregular situations, but would rather only make their situation more vulnerable or, as we formulated it in the text: “The ‘shadows’ cast over the irregular situation will only become starker, colder and longer” (Lind et al., 2016, my translation).

These suggested policies have then been implemented over time (see Regeringen, 2017a; Regeringen, 2017b; Regeringen, 2018). Additionally, the government has completely cut economic and housing support to adult asylum seekers without children who have been refused asylum but who have not yet been deported to their assigned country of return (Regeringen, 2015). *Figure 4* shows a controversial advert run by the Social Democrats in social media depicting the passport controls for people entering Sweden from Denmark that were put into place in 2015, which visualises the change in discourse and tone in recent years in Sweden.

Figure 4. Advert for the Swedish Social Democratic party on Facebook in October 2017. Translation: “We guard the safety of Sweden. The Swedish model should be developed, not discontinued.”

In her research about the parliamentary debates around irregular migration in Sweden from 1999 to 2014, political scientist Amanda Nielsen (2016) concludes that during this period, Swedish policy took steps to-

wards increased toleration towards the presence of undocumented migrants. The decisions in 2013 to grant undocumented migrants the right to education and health care (to various extents) indicate this. However, the developments since 2015, i.e. after the period Nielsen studied, point in a different direction. The debate has shifted in Parliament, where several of the major parties have suggested that some of these rights should again be limited (see, for example, Holmqvist & Jeppsson, 2018). Yet, political scientists Jespers Strömbäck and Nora Theorin (2018) show that attitudes among the Swedish population towards immigration only changed slightly between 2014 and 2016 and, taken together, Swedes are positive about immigration. More significantly, the polarisation between those who are positive towards immigration and those who are negative has increased (Strömbäck & Theorin, 2018). This study goes somewhat against the commonly held belief that Swedes have become more critical of immigration.

A key component of the irregular situation in Sweden is the widespread use of social security numbers, which makes it difficult to lead a “normal” life and access basic services without fearing that your lack of status will be exposed. Erica Sigvardsdotter (2012) suggests that this fact makes Sweden especially exclusionary in relation to undocumented persons. Up until 2013, Sweden was one of the countries in Europe with the fewest stated rights for undocumented migrants. The strong welfare state that is of great benefit to its citizens has, at the same time, had strongly exclusionary effects towards people resident in Sweden who are not citizens (Sager et al., 2016, see also Lundberg, 2017).

It is clear that also in Sweden, the irregular situation is constituted in such a way that it constructs additional vulnerabilities for those find themselves in it. In a recent report by a child rights organisation about what consequences the changes in policies since 2015 have had for unaccompanied minors, a border police officer describes how many of the young people they meet who are still in the process of appealing a negative asylum decision are in a very bad state. “If you did not already have poor mental health before you came, you will get it once you are here. That is how it feels”, he said (Barnrättsbyrån, 2018, p. 35, my translation). A survey study of more than 100 undocumented migrants across

Sweden performed during 2014–16 found that “68% of respondents were suffering from either moderate or severe anxiety, 71% from either moderate or severe depression and 58% from PTSD” (Andersson et al., 2018, p. 1).

Several examples from my interviews in Sweden detail how deportability involves the creation of vulnerabilities. Arash, a father from Afghanistan, explained how you only have two options when your asylum decision is negative. “Both are very hard”, he said.

Arash: No one knows what will happen. Either you go back and deal with the problems there or you become undocumented, which to some extent is even worse. If you go back, there is a risk that you die, but when you are undocumented you die a bit every day and every night. You are pressured all the time. Being undocumented gets you severe depression. [...] I have lost five teeth because of the stress.

Tony, the father from Kosovo mentioned above, described the situation in similar terms. He felt like a fish that had been taken out of the water for 20 minutes and then was put back into the water just before it would die. And then taken up again, and then down again. Up and down, on repeat. He was grateful to the support the family was getting at the time from the Social Services. If people did not receive that support, they would become desperate and start stealing, he explained. But the solution is not to get social support, he said, the solution is to get the papers that allow you to stay legally.

Regularisation in Sweden

Routes to regularisation for undocumented migrants in Sweden are less complex than in the UK and choices are fewer. As in the UK, refused asylum seekers can apply again for asylum if they have new circumstances in their case that they can present. Many refused asylum seekers wait for four years after they have been denied asylum as they then are entitled to apply again as the statute of limitations period on the old decision has passed. Before the temporary law, some families were given leave to remain on their second or third attempts based on humanitarian

grounds and most often on the basis of the length of their stay and the children's adaptation to Sweden. At that time, there was no clear definition of what length of stay was necessary (as with the seven- and 10-year-rules in the UK) and it always came down to the individual assessment of each case. However, under the temporary law, the possibilities of receiving leave to remain on these grounds have been severely limited (FARR, 2018), although there is still room for discretion in asylum assessments that could be utilised by asylum officers to grant asylum on the basis of "Sweden's international obligations", as stated in the temporary law.

Another route to regularisation that some undocumented migrants manage to pass through is to apply for a work permit in Sweden. To do this, they have to return to their country of origin, which, for many, is not an option since they fear going back too much, but for some groups, such as those originating from the Balkans, this has become a viable "solution". Several of my participants have managed to receive leave to remain in this way. But it hinges on your capacity to find an employer who is ready to support your application. Many people who have been traumatised and vulnerabilised for many years in their country of origin as well as during their time as undocumented migrants in Sweden find it very difficult to make this work out. In practice, this path only works for certain capable people from countries not too far away, and even then they are heavily dependent on the benevolence of their employers for their leave to remain to continue (Sager & Öberg, 2017). However, in relation to regularisation processes over all, it is important to highlight that room for discretion always exists when law is applied in individual cases, and when new rules are created it is never possible to know beforehand what the outcome will be over time as they are carried out.

Social support in Sweden

Support for undocumented migrants is formally the responsibility of local authorities who have a lot of autonomy in relation to the state (as

stated in the Swedish Constitution²⁴) to formulate their own policies and guidelines through local self-government. Thus, the scope of support from the Social Services for undocumented migrants varies across local authorities. All local authorities have the responsibility for everyone residing in their municipality according to the Social Service Act. Malmö²⁵ was one of the first local authorities to provide guidelines for social support to undocumented migrants (Nordling, 2017) and Stockholm has followed (Stockholms stad, 2017). Support is only given on the basis of the assessed needs, primarily of the children, and there is no need to apply for regularisation as is the case in the UK to be eligible for social support. However, the question has caused heated debate in recent years and some political parties have called for this practice to end. To enable a change, it seems as though the national law would need to be changed, since the Supreme Administrative Court clarified that it is the municipalities who have the uttermost responsibility for individuals, including those without legal right to reside in the country (Kjellbom & Lundberg, 2018). This issue is also still heavily debated in the local authorities, and the practices of individual case officers at the social services differ. NGOs have recently reported how the Social Services in Malmö has become more restrictive in their assessments and, just like in the UK, the increasing costs involved give the authorities incentives to interpret council guidelines restrictively.

The aftermath of the “long summer of migration”

An optimistic interpretation of migration policies in the UK in light of the “Windrush” scandal could suggest that certain migration policies are currently shifting towards a less repressive direction. In Sweden at the moment, however, there are very few, if any, developments that could be interpreted as moving in a less repressive direction. Rather, derogatory discourses regarding irregular migration have become more commonplace.

²⁴ <https://www.regeringen.se/informationmaterial/2013/08/the-constitution-of-sweden/>

²⁵ <https://malmo.se/Social---familjefragor/Nar-pengarna-inte-racker/Forsorjningsstod/Bistand-till-personer-med-utvisningsbeslut.html>

One person who has been getting a lot of attention in the local media since 2015 is Leif Fransson. He was the Chief Operating Officer of the Border Police in Southern Sweden during the events in 2016 and 2017 and explained in the media that the Border Police had been receiving a lot of new personnel and had more than 400 employees in Southern Sweden in 2017, compared to 80 in 2016 (Omar, 2016). This was the result of the clear signals the police have received from politicians that they are supposed to work harder on questions of irregular migration and increase the number of deportations. Fransson has made a number of controversial statements in the media in recent years. For example, he has criticised Malmö city council for working against the Border Police when they give undocumented migrants social financial support (Moreno, 2017) and argued in the newspapers that if the debate around undocumented migrants had been more balanced and opinions like his would have been more accepted, the terrorist attack in Stockholm on April 7 2017 (conducted by a person who had been refused asylum and was avoiding a deportation order²⁶) would not have happened. Fransson has also questioned the ability of politicians to take these issues seriously: “The question is how many more need to die before they put their foot down and dare to take tough decisions?” Furthermore, he has suggested that “we are incredibly naive in Sweden, we are damn credulous, and think the best of everyone” (Moreno, 2017, my translation). In response to the media criticism the Border Police received after the information sharing with the Social Services in 2016 and the raid on the camp in 2017, Fransson suggested that there are no “safe spaces” or “sanctuary zones” where the Border Police cannot look for undocumented migrants. “There are no exceptions if you are in a church, mosque, school or preschool. Perhaps I would hesitate to enter a hospital and pick someone up who is on the operating table. But the law does not have any restrictions” (Magnusson, 2017, my translation). A colleague of Fransson has similarly argued that the Border Police should be a “natural feature” of today’s society (Landelius, 2019, my translation).

²⁶ The police highlighted that it would have been difficult to deport the person to Uzbekistan at the time since there were practical impediments to enforcement. See: <https://www.svd.se/polisen-mycket-svart-att-utvisa-akilov> and SOU 2017:84 (2017).

The shift in the political landscape after 2015 has indeed impacted undocumented migrants' everyday lives in Sweden. It is rather remarkable that Fransson has been able to say all these things in the media without any repercussions from politicians. That his inflammatory language and reasoning as a public representative has been able to pass without any public outcry, apart from the criticism from churches and some activists and scholars, is telling about the current political situation in Sweden around the issue of irregular migration. These developments point to Sweden currently moving closer to the UK's overtly hostile approach towards irregular migration.

The "shadow society" discourse could arguably be understood as an expression of a kind of "reversed humanitarianism", where migration control is clothed in the humanitarian language of care; the state argues for the need to protect migrants from ending up in a shadow society by enabling their return to their countries of origin. In this way, the vulnerabilisation taking place in Sweden is arguably more refined than in the UK, since, in Sweden, the vulnerability of undocumented migrants (created by the state) is highlighted in arguments for why they should be deported *for their own good*. However, even if their practices are clothed in different language, both countries enact hostile policies towards undocumented migrants and the shadows of the "shadow society" in both countries are created by the state apparatus covering the "sources of light", such as human rights provisions, through its deportation regime.

I do not believe it would have made much difference to my fieldwork in the UK if I would have conducted it after 2015, whereas if I would have conducted my fieldwork in Sweden before 2015 it would have looked very different. In the UK, parallel to the events at the end of 2016 when the Social Services shared address information with the Border Police in Sweden, parliamentary politicians started criticising a leaked suggestion by the government to deprioritise undocumented migrant children in school enrolment. These leaked policy suggestions stirred up heated debate in defence of undocumented migrant children and their right to education (Kuenssberg, 2016). This was one of the first instances in which I started to realise that the UK is not only taking the lead on more and more repressive policies, which Sweden may then copy, but that the UK

can also move in a different direction, closer to what (at least used to be) standard policy in Sweden.

Still, far reaching changes to hostile policies are not likely to happen in the near future in the UK. The policies of both countries continue to contribute to the vulnerabilisation of undocumented migrants. In comparison, I argue that the UK approach of a “hostile environment” can be understood as more authoritarian whereas the Swedish talk of a “shadow society” could be described as an expression of a more paternalistic approach to irregular migration. However, there are examples in the UK of paternalistic immigration policies in which immigration enforcement is seen as harm prevention as well (B. Anderson, 2012) and right-wing populists' derogatory language on migration is increasingly influencing more mainstream politicians in Sweden. Based on the analysis in this study, I suggest that one can understand the general developments in both the UK and Sweden as moving closer to each other in their approach to irregular migration. Sweden is putting more openly hostile policies in place and mainstream politicians are less worried about sounding too harsh when they suggest that, for example, undocumented migrants should be deported at a higher rate. The UK government, on the other hand, seems to (in some contexts) have at least temporarily paused, or even reversed, the development of increasingly hostile policies. Too many “ordinary” Brits with migrant background are being affected by these policies and campaign groups seem to be able to somehow tap into this experience in their advocacy work. Drawing on the above analysis, for the rest of this background chapter I compare the impact the more practical circumstances in both sites had on my analysis in more detail.

Irregular migration in Malmö and Birmingham

Birmingham is the second largest city, and Greater Birmingham is the third largest urban area, in the UK.²⁷ Birmingham's city limits flow directly into adjacent urban areas and, during my fieldwork, I cycled

²⁷ <http://www.citypopulation.de/UK-UA.html>

around town (as one of the very few cyclists around) and seamlessly crossed the border into the “Black Country”, which includes the four Metropolitan Boroughs west of Birmingham. I often went to a worn-down hotel in Sandwell, just across the city border to the west of Birmingham, where the Social Services in Birmingham rented hotel rooms for families on section 17 support. One of the largest NGOs in the area, where most of my participants went to get legal advice at some point during my fieldwork, was also located in Sandwell. In my study, I talk about “Birmingham” as a way to name the space I found myself in as I conducted my fieldwork by following my participants around the local area, with Birmingham city centre as the focal point. In my fieldwork, I only occasionally heard people discuss the differences between different local authorities. At one point, I took two different families on a day out together who had never met before and they started discussing the differences they had experienced when approaching the local authorities of Birmingham compared to those in Sandwell. The differences they found were not significant and related mostly to how they had experienced the treatment from different individual social workers.

Malmö is Sweden’s third largest city and sometimes called “the Brooklyn of Copenhagen”. Even if it is connected with Copenhagen via a bridge and the university town of Lund is only 10 minutes away by train, it is still not as connected to the surrounding cities as Birmingham is (apart, perhaps, from the adjacent municipality of Burlöv located a short bus trip away from eastern Malmö). As the local saying goes: “The distance between Malmö and Lund equals the circumference of the earth minus 15 kilometres”. The border checks and the relatively costly train tickets make the commute between Malmö and Copenhagen mainly possible for middle- or upper-class citizens. All of my participants in Sweden lived in Malmö at some point during my research. The issue of actually living in Malmö was more important than the issue of actually living in Birmingham, since, at the time of my research, only Malmö municipality, and none of the surrounding cities, had guidelines for social support for undocumented migrants. Those guidelines only applied to people resident in Malmö, and thus an address in Malmö had to be provided to enable such support (I will return to this issue below).

Malmö and Birmingham share a number of characteristics. They are both post-industrial towns that are eager to transform themselves into more knowledge-driven cities. Birmingham is known for its car manufacturing, and the post-war brutalist planning of the city paved the way for cars and concrete buildings. In recent years, vast reforms²⁸ have been put in place to transform the city centre into a more pedestrian friendly urban space. Malmö has also gone through major transformations in recent years with the opening of the bridge to Copenhagen in 2000 and the City Tunnel that opened in 2010, which has enabled efficient train communications through the town and beyond. The old industrial area of the Western Harbour has been turned into an exclusive waterfront residential area and is hosting much of the new knowledge-intensive economy that the city aims to attract, including the university where I am located as I am writing this thesis. However, both cities are highly segregated in relation to ethnicity and class (Casey, 2016; Stigendal & Östergren, 2013) and are making efforts (see Birmingham City Council, 2018; Malmö Stad, 2019) to tackle this highly politicised issue (Mukhtar-Landgren, 2012).

A study from 2015 shows that 37% of children in Birmingham were living below the poverty line in 2013, which is significantly above the UK average of 25% (Birmingham Child Poverty Commission, 2015). Malmö has the highest rate of child poverty in Sweden, at 25.2%, whereas the national average is 9.3% (Rädda Barnen, 2018). Consequently, Malmö also spends the largest amount of money on social financial support in relation to its population of any city in Sweden (Magnusson, 2018b). The social challenges Malmö is facing are one reason why the local government of Malmö recently decided to limit the number of asylum seekers moving to Malmö by creating a local exception to the law that makes it possible for asylum seekers to move to any place in Sweden as long as they find their own accommodation (Fjellman, 2020).

²⁸ <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/bigcityplan>

Both cities are relatively diverse, and Birmingham is frequently related to as “super-diverse” (Vertovec, 2007) since 42% of the population is from an “ethnic minority background” and 60% of children are from a non-white British background (Birmingham City Council, 2018). In a recent Community Cohesion strategy report, it was stated that “Birmingham is soon to become a majority minority city”, meaning that people of an ethnic minority background are expected to soon exceed 50% of the total population (Birmingham City Council, 2018). The cohesion strategy suggests that the city of Birmingham cannot trust the national government to address the social issues that will have an impact on cohesion but needs to lead by example in taking on these challenges. As a result of the UK government’s no choice “dispersal policy”, introduced by the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, that aimed to relocate asylum seekers away from London to other parts of the country, asylum seekers have been forced, to an increasing extent, to locate themselves in Birmingham since 2000. Although some of these asylum seekers have stayed in Birmingham in an irregular situation after their applications have been refused, the majority of undocumented migrants in the UK consists of those who have overstayed some kind of visa, and there are no reasons to believe that Birmingham would be an exception to this. Rather, Birmingham’s history of being a hub for different minority populations²⁹ has had a significant impact on the cultural and social development of Birmingham. For example, the large Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani populations in Birmingham are famous for having transformed their own food culture into UK versions, which has then spread throughout the Western world, with the “Balti triangle” named as a highlight of the city in tourist brochures. In my research, the ethnic group I encountered the most was made up of people of Caribbean origin, or, more specifically, single mothers from Jamaica. The reason for this was that one of the key activists who helped me in my research had a reputation among this group as someone who could support them. The activist explained how he understood their situation: “They cannot deport Jamaicans because there is so many of them, if they go to their

²⁹ For population sizes of different ethnic groups in Birmingham, see:
https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20057/about_birmingham/1294/population_and_census/2

house, they will not know who is British and not!” This possibility to “blend in” among one’s ethnic peers in Birmingham is not possible in the same way for undocumented migrants in Malmö.

33.1% of Malmö’s population was born outside of Sweden according to the 2016 census.^{30,31} Both Malmö and Birmingham have a relatively high number of people with some kind of migrant background. Birmingham is often promoted as the youngest city in Europe³² and it does have a young population, with 22.8% of the population being children, although, upon closer look, it is not even the youngest city in the UK.³³ Malmö is also known as a very young city and has among the lowest median ages in Sweden³⁴ with 20% of the population being children (here understood as every person below 18 year of age).³⁵

The total population in Birmingham is approximately 1.13³⁶ million and in Malmö approximately 333,000,³⁷ meaning that Malmö has roughly 30% of the population of Birmingham. Birmingham is 267.8 km² and Malmö is 158.4 km². Consequently, Birmingham has a population density of approximately 4,200 people per km² and Malmö approximately 2,100 people per km². However, the southern parts of Malmö city are mainly open fields whereas Birmingham city is almost completely covered with buildings, so the experienced density is not as different as these numbers suggest. Still, Birmingham is a significantly larger city than Malmö both in area and population. Taking into consideration that Bir-

³⁰ <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/befolkning/befolkningens-sammansattning/befolkningsstatistik/pong/tabell-och-diagram/topplistor-kommuner/andel-utrikes-fodda/>

³¹ For information about the foreign-born population in Malmö, see: https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/befolkning/befolkningens-sammansattning/befolkningsstatistik/#_Fordjupadinformation

³² https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20102/jobs/490/working_in_birmingham

³³ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_European_cities#Population

³⁴ <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/befolkning/befolkningens-sammansattning/befolkningsstatistik/pong/tabell-och-diagram/topplistor-kommuner/kommuner-med-hogst-och-lagst-medelalder-31-december-2016-jamfort-med-31-december-2015/>

³⁵ <https://malmo.se/Fakta-och-statistik/Befolkning.html>

³⁶ https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20057/about_birmingham/1294/population_and_census/2

³⁷ <https://malmo.se/Redovisningar/Befolkningsprognos.html>

mingham is part of a connected cluster of cities where the exact borders of the municipalities were not always that relevant for my participants, the size of “Birmingham” as I talk about it in my study is even larger.

The impact of scale for everyday life

In my fieldwork, I saw some of the consequences that the sheer size of Birmingham had for my participants. At one meeting at a migrant women’s support group I was attending regularly, one of the leaders (a man who was the partner of a woman working for the NGO supporting the group) suggested that the women should put on a play about their situation and the women were really excited about the idea. The leader then suggested that they should occupy a church or a similar building for a week and everyone was even more excited! But then someone brought up the question of whether or not they would be getting bus passes to be able to go to the planning meetings, which made the leader a bit upset, and he asked them if it was not more important to stage a protest than to go to report at the Home Office, which they did not get any bus passes for either. A moment later, he grudgingly went to the manager of the NGO hosting the group to ask if bus tickets could be provided. When he came back and confirmed that this would be the case, all the women cheered happily in victory, joking with the leader. The incident highlighted how severe the economic hardship was among the group’s members and how dependent they were on even the smallest support (a bus ticket that lasted the day for the whole of West Midlands cost £4 at the time). Another participant told me how he went to a church drop-in for destitute migrants mostly to receive a daily bus pass that he saved for later since he already had a weekly bus pass at that time. The organisers at the local church told me that they gave out bus passes worth around £7,500 per year.

In Malmö, I did not encounter the problem of affording public transportation as much. People were definitely struggling to make ends meet, but at the time of my research, the support many received from the local authorities seemed to have made it possible for people to afford public transportation when necessary. Often, however, people who lived closer to the city centre were able to walk whenever they needed to go to dif-

ferent meetings, etc., as the distances in central Malmö are often walkable. In contrast, some of the NGO workers in Birmingham talked about how migrants had to spend hours walking through town to get to different meetings and drop-ins, and the size of Birmingham compared to Malmö made people more worn out just by the sheer magnitude of the city. In some cases, people also used bikes in Malmö, which has been named the most cycle-friendly city in Sweden for many years and has regularly been ranked among the five most cycle-friendly cities in the world.³⁸ However, police checks of cyclists are common and, if you are not equipped with the correct lights and reflectors, etc., you risk being asked for an identification document and can thus get caught.

Migrant support networks

Even though the size of the cities varies, my experience was that the size of the activist and support networks for vulnerable migrants, in terms of actual people involved and the number of organisations, are not too different in the two cities. At the time of my research, there were more resources, through networks and NGOs, in place for undocumented migrants to access in relation to the size of the undocumented population in Malmö than in Birmingham. Malmö is known in Sweden as a city with a vibrant activist community that is primarily present in the city area called Möllevången, or “Möllan”, which historically has been the part of the city where factory workers lived and organised themselves and has now become a place where migrants, young people from the majority population, activists and artists live next to each other. In her thesis, Christina Hansen (2019) maps some of the activist groups that organise around issues of migration. Other research has also highlighted the particularities of the migrant activist scene in Malmö (Nordling et al., 2017; Sager, 2011; Povrzanović Frykman, 2016; Povrzanović Frykman & Mäkelä, 2019; Schclarek Mulinari, 2015; Söderman 2019). In the UK, Malmö’s equivalent in this respect would perhaps be Glasgow (see Pia-

³⁸ <https://copenhagenizeindex.eu/>

centini, 2016) (not counting London, which is a city that does not easily lend itself to comparison).

Birmingham is not known for its migrant activism in the same way Malmö is. The support network I encountered was mostly connected with established NGOs, and autonomous migrant activism was not as prevalent there as in Malmö during the time of my study. Several of the NGO workers in Birmingham also considered themselves as part of the No Border movement but no such group was active at the time. In Malmö, the Asylum Group³⁹ is a central hub connecting the No Border movement and several other organisations related to it.

In Birmingham, several of the NGO workers I worked with expressed their frustration that the work they did in the NGOs was not contributing to political change to the extent they would have wished, but they were mainly occupied with alleviating immediate needs that arose as a result of the hostile environment policies. A study on three unspecified areas in the UK (Randall, 2015) maps how different kinds of networks and organisations typically interrelate in their support of destitute migrants and the relationship between informal and formal support (see *Figure 5* below). The uppermost right corner in *Figure 5* is where the activities of autonomous migrant activists could be placed, and the downmost left corner represents the social support from the Social Services. Most of the NGOs I worked with were positioned somewhere near the centre. The image captures some of the dynamics and tensions that exist in migrant support work where the borders between formal and informal work are often blurred. The dividing issue between different support groups relates primarily to the question of how closely organisations are willing to work with authorities and the risks they perceive are involved in such collaborations. This figure works well to describe the dynamics between different organisations and groups in Malmö as well.

³⁹ <http://asylgruppenimalmo.se/>

Figure 5. Referral pathways between migrant support networks in the UK (from Randall, 2015).

In Malmö, the Asylum Group and its related organisations are actively engaged in political activist work by organising demonstrations of different kinds and other public activities such as the No Border Musical and the Asylum Relay (Nordling et al., 2017; Spång & Lundberg, 2019; Söderman, 2019). Still, the everyday work of the members of the Asylum Group and similar organisations to a very large extent also centres around helping undocumented migrants in their everyday lives by assisting them in their contacts with the social services or finding a place to live, etc. Apart from the Asylum Group, several other organisations are involved in supporting undocumented migrants in Malmö. I will not specify these more closely for the sake of anonymity since representa-

tives from most of these organisations have supported me in my work as “gatekeepers”. However, these organisations consisted mostly of churches and established NGOs with a focus on human rights work and, in many cases, their direct counterparts could be identified in Birmingham where I was also mainly in contact with church organisations and more established NGOs.

In the UK, the network of food banks is growing rapidly (Loopstra et al., 2015) and a number of organisations in Birmingham, especially those related to churches, gave out food and necessities that most of my participants collected. In Malmö, food banks are not as prevalent, but with the increasing difficulty involved in receiving social support, the continued development of hostile policies and overall more restrictive policies in relation to homelessness, food banks are a growing phenomenon in Malmö as well (*Sydsvenskan*, 2019). Some of the organisations handing out food in Birmingham were also the places where migrants went for much needed legal advice. Those activists and support persons giving legal advice did not just help out with people’s immigration issues, but a large part of their work was also to help people approaching the social services. In both Malmö and Birmingham, NGO workers were very active in challenging and pushing the local authorities on how they attended the needs of people approaching them for social support.

Local struggles for social support

In my fieldwork, fighting for social support, both financial and housing, was the most central aspect of how the local struggle for migrant’s rights expressed itself in both cities. Here the connection between the everyday struggles of undocumented migrant families and children and the local conflicts around migrants’ rights and the national political debates were the clearest. When the Social Services shared address information about undocumented migrants with the Border Police in Malmö, these connections became national headline news (Mikkelsen, 2016a). An important similarity between Birmingham and Malmö is the struggle with the Social Services that migrants experienced and in which they were supported by local activists and NGO workers. As I have described above, an important difference between the two cities is that in the UK,

Social Services has a duty to report migrants who have no legal right to remain in the country when they meet them, whereas in Sweden, the Social Services are only obliged to report undocumented migrants if they are questioned by the Border Police for a specified person. This means that a person in Birmingham has to start a process of regularisation as they approach the Social Services, whereas in Malmö, undocumented migrants can receive support while they are waiting the four years until the statute of limitations period for their old asylum decision has passed. This fact is one reason why most of the participants in Birmingham, who had been in an irregular situation recently, had some kind of application pending with the Home Office by the time I met them. They had approached NGOs as their situation as undocumented migrants turned more and more desperate and the NGOs had helped them to get on a path where they could receive social support. NGO gatekeepers then referred the persons who were interested in taking part in my study to me. In Malmö, most of the participants were still in an irregular situation when I first met them, even if they had been referred to me by an NGO or a church. From my perspective, and in relation to my discussion on how I understand deportability in a wider sense as including anyone who fears deportation to some extent, the families applying for social support in Malmö and Birmingham who had experienced irregularity as some point in their lives were the two groups whose experiences could most fruitfully be compared for an understanding of the everyday struggles of undocumented families and children in both cities.

Birmingham City Council started an inquiry into the issue of social support to destitute migrants as they saw that the cost of this support was increasing (Birmingham City Council, 2013). The inquiry report includes evidence from some NGO actors who had supported destitute migrants in approaching the Social Services. The main problem the report identified was the long processing times of the Home Office, which caused families to be dependent on local social support for extended periods. The inquiry suggested that more close collaboration between local authorities and the third sector was needed to tackle the issue of destitute migrants in a cohesive way. The value of the third sector's work in this area was also acknowledged in the report. Arguably, this approach is in line with the "Big Society" policies introduced by David Cameron.

on's government, which promotes the role and responsibilities of communities (rather than the government) in tackling societal problems (Sokhi-Bulley, 2016, p. 83f). There was no central government guidance at the time on the levels of support local authorities would be obliged to give to destitute migrant families. Also, the issue of NRPF was identified as a way for the government to save money at the national level by restricting access to benefits, but the costs were then pushed down to the local level as the local authorities still have a duty to provide support to destitute migrants (Birmingham City Council, 2013). This is another aspect of how migration issues are negotiated between local and national levels. In Birmingham, NGO support workers have then pushed the local authorities to not be driven by economic concerns, but to focus on the rights of the families and to provide support while they are conducting human rights assessments in relation to section 17 applications so that the families are not without support for extended periods of time while they are waiting to be assessed.

Malmö was early among major cities in Sweden to formulate guidelines for social support to undocumented migrants. The first version of the guidelines (that were in force during my fieldwork) stated the following:

There are no special regulations for undocumented migrants; they should be treated in the same way as other persons residing in the municipality and applying for support from the social services. The ultimate responsibility of the municipality remains as long as the person resides in the municipality and does not get her/his need met in another way. (Cited in Nordling, 2017, p. 152, translation by Nordling)

The guidelines are an interpretation of the Social Service Act, which makes local authorities ultimately responsible for the wellbeing of anyone residing in the municipality. Nordling points out that Malmö could be understood as relatively open to undocumented migrants, since there are support networks in place and the city and region have a history of being at the forefront of formulating guidelines and policies in relation to undocumented migrants before they become national issues. The region already gave access to health care for undocumented migrants in

2008, five years before legislation came into place, and Malmö also gave undocumented migrant children access to childcare and school before the right to education came into place in 2013 (Nordling, 2017). Still, during my fieldwork the negotiations around the right to social support took new turns, where the sharing of address information between the Social Services and the Border Police could be understood as a turning point. This event drastically lowered the trust in the authorities among undocumented migrants and activist and support networks as well. It reinforced again the view among migrants and activists that authorities cannot be trusted and that undocumented migrants are always at risk of immigration enforcement whenever they are in contact with them.

As a result of the shift in migration policies in Sweden, social support for undocumented migrants in Malmö has been severely restricted in practice. The room for discretion among individual caseworkers has been expressed in the differences undocumented migrant families have experienced in how they have been assessed by the Social Services. Different Social Service offices in Malmö had a reputation of being more or less difficult to deal with and changes in attitudes among case workers that have been recorded by migrants, activists and support workers have correlated with changes in the debate on a local and national level (cf. Fassin, 2015). During my fieldwork, it was clear that the changing national discourse on migration had a direct impact on the assessments of undocumented migrant's access to social support in Malmö.

Comparing numbers

Throughout my work, I have been reluctant to talk about the number of undocumented migrants in each country since categorising and counting migrants is an activity central to migration control (Lundberg, 2020). Also, the estimations made are extremely unreliable. However, for this study, numbers are interesting as they say something about the differences between the contexts of irregular migration in Sweden and the UK. Also, these figures are easily accessible for anyone who is interested. So, with this reservation in mind, one can see that the most recent estimations in research put the number of undocumented migrants in the

UK somewhere between 417,000 and 863,000 (Gordon et al., 2009) and, of those, 120,000 are estimated to be children, of which roughly half were born in the UK (Sigona & Hughes, 2012). In 2020, the Mayor of London (2020) estimated the total undocumented population to be 674,000, including 215,000 children. The total population in the UK in late 2018 was estimated to be roughly 66 million.⁴⁰ Thus, undocumented migrants make up around 1% of the total population in the UK.

The most recent academic estimations of the number of undocumented migrants in Sweden are very rough and were also conducted during the 2000s. The numbers mentioned range from 10,000 to 50,000 individuals, of which children make up 1,000 to 3,000 (SOU 2010:5, 2010). With Sweden having 10 million inhabitants,⁴¹ the percentage of the total population is then somewhere between 0.1 and 0.5%. In Sweden, a large majority of undocumented migrants enter irregularly after having had their asylum application rejected and it is not as common that it is due to bureaucratic failures in relation to processing claims, as it is in the UK. In the aftermath of the 2015 “long summer of migration” the Swedish government and police authorities signalled that they believed that the number of undocumented migrants would go up. The number of warrants for people due to be deported that had been handed over by the Migration Agency to the Border Police was around 7,500 per year before 2015 and was expected to be around 11,000 to 12,000 in the years directly following 2015 (*Sydsvenskan*, 2017). In a recent government report, the number of warrants for deportation was estimated to be 20,000–50,000 and the relevant authorities are said to believe that this number will go up (SOU 2017:93, 2017), though no sources are cited to back this statement up. Again, all these estimations are extremely unreliable. At the moment in Sweden, it is clear how the question of counting undocumented migrants is very much a part of the logic of repressive policies that seek to limit these numbers. In January 2016, the Interior Minister signalled that 80,000 out of the 160,000 who had applied

⁴⁰ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates>

⁴¹ <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/befolkning/befolkningens-sammansattning/befolkningsstatistik>

for asylum in 2015 would probably need to be expelled in the coming years (Svensson et al., 2016). No source for this number was given (Hårdh, 2016) and it should be understood in the context of the ongoing political crisis at the time and as a way of motivating the repressive policies that were put in place in the aftermath of the increase of asylum seekers during 2015.

Still, perhaps the most significant difference between the irregular situation in the UK and Sweden is the sheer number of people living in it. The estimations of the undocumented populations are in relative numbers (percentage of the total population) around three times higher in the UK than in Sweden. One reason for this is the UK's history of immigration and the large numbers of citizens from Commonwealth countries who have been able to enter the UK at some point, in some cases decades ago, and have then stayed without proper documentation. Since the size of the general population as well as the population of people positioned as undocumented migrants in the UK is relatively big and regulations and control mechanisms are weaker, it is easier for many groups of undocumented migrants to blend into UK society and live a relatively "normal" life amongst peers. Cities offer anonymity and this is attractive for someone who is trying to avoid being caught by the Border Police. Birmingham and the surrounding region provide more anonymity than Malmö in this sense, even though Malmö seems to be perceived as anonymous enough for many undocumented migrants who have chosen to live there.

With these contextual reflections in mind, the remainder of the thesis is mainly dedicated to the articles that make out the key empirical contribution of this thesis. After the articles have been presented, the concluding chapter joins the articles together with the discussion in the chapters above to enable a reflection on the political and scholarly implications of this thesis.

5. SUMMARY OF THE ARTICLES

Article 1: The duality of children's political agency in deportability in Politics

Drawing on in-depth ethnographic observations among irregularised migrant families in Birmingham, UK, this article discusses how children's political agency manifests in everyday life. It shows how children who become aware of their legal status as deportable reject this subject position and offer their own definitions of who they are and where they belong. Simultaneously, it is argued that children with varying degrees of knowledge about their legal status also express political agency through their struggle to sustain the inclusion they experience. Such expressions highlight the duality of children's political agency in irregular situations.

Article 2: Sacrificing parents on the altar of children's rights: Inter-generational struggles and rights in deportability in Emotion, Space and Society

State actors arguing for the rights of undocumented children often attempt to strengthen children's deservingness by portraying their parents as bad parents who put their children at risk. Through ethnographic observations in Malmö, Sweden and Birmingham, UK, this article shows how such demonization of the parents by the state is not reflected in the everyday life experiences of undocumented families themselves. While the state views the parents as putting their children at risk by "hiding" them, the parents view the state as putting their children at risk by trying

to deport them. The article discusses how parents act as “humanitarian agents” responsible for caring for the children when state support to the deserving, rights-bearing child is limited by the notion of the deportable migrant child. These parental practices of unrecognized emotional labour are analysed as motherwork. The interdependent character of family life in deportability is highlighted through how children take on parental responsibilities as well and how stress and knowledge about their irregular situation is shared across generations. To conclude, the article argues that if one neglects the intergenerational context of undocumented children’s rights, one risks marginalising the human rights of both children as well as adults.

Article 3: Governing vulnerabilised migrant childhoods through children’s rights in *Childhood*

This article analyses four different contexts in Sweden where children’s rights have been mobilised to govern vulnerabilised migrant childhoods. The concept of “vulnerabilisation” is suggested to capture the political processes creating the conditions for, defining and attributing vulnerability. To enable children’s rights to be a productive tool for challenging the repressive governing of migrant families and children, the article argues for the need of a problematisation and contextualisation of both the children’s rights paradigm and the vulnerabilisation of migrant childhoods.

Article 4: The continuous spatial vulnerability of undocumented migrants: Connecting experiences of “displaceability” at different scales and sites in *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*

Undocumented migrants often experience how their spatial vulnerability continues across their life trajectories through different forms of displacements in the form of forced migration, being at risk of deportation and being victims of gentrification or policies that make it difficult to find a stable housing situation. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Sweden and the UK, the paper shows how weak the position of undoc-

umented migrants is on the housing market through recently established policies in the UK which criminalizes the letting of housing to undocumented migrants and the practice of sharing address information between the social services and the border police in Sweden. This intervention argues that these policies that construct spatial vulnerabilities locally are connected to national and transnational policies of displacement globally and suggest that “displaceability”, the potential of being displaced, is a strategy for governing vulnerable groups at every scale where governing takes place. Consequently, this intervention suggests that displaceability can help us capture the universal, interconnected experience of spatial vulnerability shared by many differently positioned groups in the world who are susceptible to forced mobility or removal.

6. ARTICLE 1

THE DUALITY OF CHILDREN'S POLITICAL AGENCY IN DEPORTABILITY⁴²

In this article, I discuss how the context of the irregular situation characterised by the “deportability” of the people who end up in it (De Genova, 2002) is a fruitful case to analyse for broadening our understanding of how children’s political agency comes about. Through ethnographic observations of the everyday lives of irregularised migrant children in Birmingham, UK, I highlight the duality of children’s political agency by focusing on what the children do rather than who they are (Bosco, 2010). I show how children can aim to sustain their social inclusion and resist their subject position of being “deportable” at the same time.

But why should one study children’s political agency to begin with? And why is the irregular situation interesting? According to Stuart Aitken et al. (2007, p. 3), children are an “important fulcrum of, and impetus for, change” in a globalised world. Furthermore, Anne McNevin (2011, p. 5) sees “irregular migrants” acts of contestation as a new frontier of the political. Inspired by this, I argue that studying what children do in an irregular situation may contribute to an understanding of

⁴² Article previously published in: Lind, J. (2017). The duality of children’s political agency in deportability. *Politics*, 37(3), 288–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395716665391>

how political agency is enacted by children even in, or perhaps especially in, the most vulnerable positions. Also, I aim to understand what change they themselves aspire for at this political frontier by acknowledging these children's struggles in their everyday lives.

Earlier research on the everyday lives of children and their families in an irregular situation has been conducted in Sweden (Ascher & Wahlström Smith, 2016), the United Kingdom (Sigona & Hughes, 2012), and more extensively in the United States (Abrego, 2006; Dreby, 2015; Gonzales, 2016; Menjivar, 2006). These studies discuss to varying extents the coping strategies, resilience, and agency of children. None of them engage in a discussion about how their struggles can be understood as contesting the irregular situation and thus serving as expressions of political agency. This article attempts to fill this gap and answer Fernando Bosco's (2010, p. 385) call for more explorations between "children, activism, and political work in more explicit ways".

The political agency that the children in this study express is, to a large extent, a reaction to finding themselves in a repressive situation where they can be deported. They would prefer not to have to contest it and to live their lives without being subject to migration control. I do not aim to idealise or romanticise actions by the children concerned. My point of departure is that since the children I met *are* living under these circumstances, it is important to recognise their struggles. I agree with Sana Nakata (2008, p. 23) who suggests (in this journal) that "an individual who has recognised political agency will be visible in political conflict, and his or her political actions will be recognised by others and become central to key debates". However, it is also important to remember that increased visibility can also lead to an increased risk of deportation. I have mitigated this risk through a thorough discussion with my participants about anonymisation, including ensuring that parents were aware of these risks and fully agreed on the family's participation in the study.

I begin by positioning this article within the literature on children's political agency and discussing in more detail why the irregular situation is a specifically interesting case for studying how this political agency comes about. After a brief methodological discussion on the implications of the call for more empirical studies within this field, I show,

through ethnographic observations, how children contest the “deportability” imposed on them. I then argue for the importance of children’s contextual knowledge for acts of contestation to occur and exemplify these contestations by highlighting the everyday struggles for these children to assert the right to decide on their own identity and belonging. Simultaneously, I highlight the duality of children’s political agency in the irregular situation by contrasting these explicit contestations of the subject positions imposed on them with examples of how children, with varying degrees of knowledge, struggle to sustain their experiences of societal inclusion.

Children’s political agency as it happens in the world

It is a well-established fact, or even a “mantra”, within childhood research that children are social actors who have agency of various kinds in different situations (Tisdall & Punch, 2012); however, there is no common understanding about what this agency actually implies. One could question whether agency is a useful theoretical concept for understanding anything at all if it potentially encompasses any action, enacted by any subject, in any situation. By narrowing down the discussion by adding a prefix such as *political* agency, this problem becomes less prevalent. In this vein, Lorenzo Bordonaro (2012) argues for an urgent need to bring political and rights discourses into the debate around agency. He remarks that children’s agency should be seen as a political project rather than an essentialised feature of individuals. I agree with Bordonaro, and in this article, I will specifically argue, drawing primarily on the work of Kirsi Pauliina Kallio and Jouni Häkli, for the need to study *how* children’s political agency *comes about* in the everyday lives of children. This differs from discussing *what it is* in an essentialised sense, since the *how* of political agency is possible to study empirically.

To understand what “the political”, or “politics”, is, Hannah Arendt (1958, Chapter 10) suggested that one need to focus on how political action happens “in the world”. Kallio and Häkli (2010) connect Arendt’s point with an argument (drawing on Flyvbjerg, 2001) that children are a “critical case” useful for furthering our understanding of how political action is expressed in everyday life. This means that studying children

can provide an understanding at a more general level of how the concepts of “agency” and “politics” are connected. To be able to study the critical case of children’s political agency, Häkli and Kallio (2014) then suggest that such research needs to be empirically informed so that “the meanings of the political” can be worked out in practice and not just in theory. They suggest that such empirical studies should focus on “lived childhoods” and their “political worlds” (i.e. contexts) and “what kinds of dynamisms uphold and transform the political worlds where children act as competent agents” (Kallio & Häkli, 2011a, p. 24).

What, though, from the perspective of political research is so special about children? To begin, even with signs of change, children are mostly invisible in research on political agency as well as in transnational migration since the subject in such research is usually implied to be an adult. Such “adulthood” leaves out half of the world’s population as irrelevant non-subjects (Marshall, 2015; A. White et al., 2011). This fundamental exclusion from the polity turns childhood into a useful conceptual lens through which traces of the political processes that control the direction of history can be tracked. Still, it is not useful to just include children into the realm of adulthood without making note of the specificities of children’s politics. Rather, by discussing those specificities, a contextualised understanding of how political agency is lived and experienced emerges. Kallio (2007, p. 124) separates children as political actors from adults by focusing on the everyday life experiences and practices of children rather than their “reflective contemplations or moral judgements”. As Kallio and Häkli (2010, p. 357) point out:

Children typically fail to measure up to adults’ and institutional actors’ rational argumentation and thus by necessity practice politics on other, often bodily, grounds [...] at the same time children are human beings thoroughly involved in meaning-making processes and identity construction, living their lives as actual members of institutions, communities and societies. This twofold position, resulting in a rather particular standpoint, forms the basis of children’s politics. (Kallio & Häkli, 2010, p. 357)

The specific “rationality” and more “embodied” character of children’s politics are a central aspect of the specificities that make children a criti-

cal case for deepening understandings of “the political”. Kallio and Häkli (2010, p. 357–358) further reserve the concept of children’s politics “to those situations where children as intentional social beings relate to subject positions offered by parental (peer) cultural or institutional forces of socialization”. The embodied response to the subject positions offered to children is then expressed in “a myriad of ways, performed in banal practices” (Kallio & Häkli, 2011a, p. 28, 31). Consequently, these “banal practices” should be at the centre of our attention since children’s mundane acts in their everyday lives always have the *potential* of being political (Kallio, 2009). To avoid this leading into a kind of “political everything” of children’s politics, Häkli and Kallio (2014, p. 183, 195) suggest that “in each case it is explicated why certain agencies are to be considered politically relevant, and how the polis in question shapes this relevance” – the “polis” here being defined as “the relational realm of everyday politics” – and that one should not ask “what is or is not political, but rather how things are political” (Kallio & Häkli, 2011a, p. 26). This focus on the *how* rather than the *what* emphasises that an analysis of children’s political agency should primarily be based on empirical observations of how children contest subject positions they have been offered in the context within which they exist.

One theme prevalent within the debate over children’s political agency that is of special interest to the study of deportability is children’s identity construction. Children’s identities and bodies are defined as a “battle-ground” where they contest borders in their everyday lives (Aitken & Plows, 2010) and in so doing become “actual members” of the polity (Kallio & Häkli, 2010). Aitken and Plows (2010, p. 329) further argue that identities are relational and at the same time differentiated, creating a “terrain for tension and antagonism”. It is out of these “everyday actions of living and surviving” that “revolutionary imaginations” as a “creative force” emerge (Aitken and Plows 2010, p. 329). Identity-forming processes are rooted in childhood experience and especially “younger migrants’ (i.e. teenager’s) identities can put into question the location of ‘home’ and ‘host’ nations” (Dobson, 2009, p. 358). However, discussions around individuals’ choices of how they wish to identify themselves ethnically are primarily concerned with how members within different ethnic groups can negotiate their ethnic affiliation (Song,

2003, p. 54). Such discussions are not connected with technologies of migration regulation where the adaptation of children to the host country, and consequently their ethnic affiliation with its culture, are central concepts. Similarly, Jonathan Scourfield et al. (2006, p. 1) have explained how historically education has been used by nations to instil “national consciousness” into children. Children in irregular situations go through this formation just like any citizen child. At the same time, they are also supposed to be prepared at any time to return to the country they and/or their parents migrated from. Such returns are at the demand and discretion of migration authorities. This is one example of *how* children in an irregular situation have to manage contradictory subject positions offered to them and consequently express political agency, which I will discuss in more detail below.

The political significance of the irregular situation

The above review of the literature on children’s political agency so far suggests that an analysis of the political agency of children should be empirically based and focus on how they contest the subject positions they are offered in their everyday contexts as it happens in the world. The literature emphasises the importance of acknowledging how the actions of children may not be as reflective and intentional as the political actions of adults but how they, at the same time, are still part of meaning-making processes and identity construction. What is so special then about the irregular situation compared to other politicised contexts where children express political agency? The irregular situation is a construction of the state, and there is a continuous growth of the “deportation regime” in our increasingly securitized world (De Genova & Peutz, 2010). One of the most important aspects of the irregular situation, in relation to political agency, is how the deportability of its inhabitants forces them to live camouflaged lives in society (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014). Other politicised positions of children discussed in the literature differ mainly from the irregular situation in that they are more visible. There are several examples. The Palestinian child is a strongly politicised visible figure (Marshall, 2015). Street children in Cape Verde are part of a visible urban group (Bordonaro, 2012). And

child soldiers have their own optional protocol in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Hyndman, 2010).

In contrast, children in an irregular situation blend in with their peers on the outside, but on the inside, their knowledge about their potential deportability leads to a discrepancy between their own self-image of being just like any other child and living under constant pressure from the threats of migration control (see Dreby, 2015; Young, 2013). The irregular situation is created by the polis as a kind of “accepted exclusion” of its non-members that still exists within its territory (Sager, 2011, p. 40). Children have to negotiate their position inside it as they are included in and excluded from society at the same time.

There are two main potential routes to regularisation, or out of “camouflage” into “visibility” and inclusion in the polity, for families who have not been granted, or are not eligible to apply for, asylum according to UK law. The first one is the “7 year rule”, which can give a child leave to remain if she “has lived continuously in the UK for at least 7 years (discounting any period of imprisonment) and it would not be reasonable to expect the applicant to leave the UK”.⁴³ The second is the right to register as a British citizen after residing in the United Kingdom for the first 10 years of a child’s life.⁴⁴ As I will show below, over such extended periods of time, children defined as “migrants” (although they may be born in the United Kingdom) go through a process of identifying themselves with the local culture; they do not understand the logic behind being classified as a deportable “alien” when all they know is the country they have lived in for all, or a large part, of their lives. This process was acknowledged by the UK Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) in a court ruling about a Nigerian family whose children had lived in the United Kingdom for several years. The court recognised that “in the course of such time roots are put down, personal

⁴³ Home Office Immigration Rules 276ADE(iv).

⁴⁴ Section 1(4) of the British Nationality Act 1981.

identities are developed, friendships are formed and links are made with the community outside the family unit”⁴⁵ (see Finch, 2013).

The fact that children’s identities and affiliation define their ability to stay in the society in which they have grown up is one way that the highly paradoxical nature of the irregular situation is expressed. Children in an irregular situation are – as children – seen as “citizens in the making” as well as “irregular migrants”. However, they are deportable first and foremost; they are migrants first and children second (Crawley, 2006). This occurs although children according to The Convention on the Rights of the Child are supposed to be persons under special protection with specific rights independent of their legal status.⁴⁶ The identity and belonging of children and their affiliation with the United Kingdom are the main path through which both the children and their parents eventually get regularised. For most of the families, this is the last resort. National, cultural, and ethnic identity processes then become the key to inclusion. In this way, the identity construction of irregularised migrant children is on-going everyday politics.

In irregular situations, the position of children as a key to inclusion for the whole family makes the question of their political subjectivity a question about their whole existence. This points to the embedded nature of children’s agency that I discuss further below. In most cases, the reason the family has not been granted, or is not at all in a position to claim, asylum is that they come from what are sometimes referred to as “safe countries of origin”,⁴⁷ such as Jamaica, Nigeria, and India. The general situation in these countries makes it very unlikely that applicants will be able to argue that their individual situation fits the narrow criteria of deservingness in the UK asylum process, however bad their personal circumstances may be. Since adults have to spend 20 years⁴⁸ in an

⁴⁵ http://www.bailii.org/uk/cases/UKUT/IAC/2011/00315_ukut_iac_2011_ea_others_nigeria.html

⁴⁶ Article 2.1

⁴⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2_eu_safe_countries_of_origin_en.pdf

⁴⁸ Home Office Immigration Rules 276ADE(iii).

irregular situation in the United Kingdom before they are eligible for regularisation, the hope of the family is that their children manage to perform the necessary deservingness. In this way, children in an irregular situation in the United Kingdom have to manage multiple subject positions such as deportable alien, citizen in the making, classmate, and provider of regularization for the family at the same time. Below I will describe how children themselves talk and act in this position and how children's political agency arises. First, I will briefly discuss the methodological consequences for my project of Kallio and Häkli's call for empirical studies of children's political agency.

Methodology

This study draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted during 6 months in the winter of 2014–2015 in Birmingham, UK. Due to the limited time for fieldwork, I approached potential participants through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and various support networks who are working long term with destitute migrants. The Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) at the University of Birmingham generously shared many of their contacts with me around the city. Some of my key “gatekeepers” at the organisations told me at the end of my fieldwork that my connection with IRiS was crucial for them as they assessed my request. It took almost 3 months to negotiate how I could work together with the organisations, not because they were negative to my research but because I had to have my police records checked, go through volunteer training, and establish contact with all the different groups that I deemed relevant for my research.

During my research, I conducted interviews with members from 16 families with a total of 45 family members. To be able to observe as many nuances of these children's experiences as possible, I employed a combination of child interviews, including creative methods such as five-field mapping (see Samuelsson et al., 1996) and timelines to facilitate discussion, parent interviews and participant observation. I attempted to sit down and talk to, and do various exercises with, school-aged children

in six of these families. Four of these families had been receiving section 4⁴⁹ or section 17⁵⁰ support after having spent several years without the legal right to be in the United Kingdom. Some of them had periodically not been signing in with the Home Office as they were required to do, and some had been waiting for the Home Office to reply to their applications for several years only to be told that the application had never reached the Home Office due to the incompetence of the families' solicitors. One family did not receive any support, but had been living in legal limbo for more than 10 years, as they engaged with the Home Office through different application processes.

Some of the most interesting findings I made during my research did not happen during interview sessions with children but while spending social time with the families. I also experienced the importance of the "embeddedness" of children and their parents' agency, which recognises the importance of "parents as agents in children's lives" (Boehm, 2012, p. 120). It was particularly important to talk to the parents first to understand the context of the families' situations, and some of the children's everyday experiences I refer to were retold to me by the children's parents as they shared anecdotes of things their children had said and done that had surprised them or had just stuck in their memory. Gaining this kind of knowledge demanded that I took enough time to develop trust, first through piggybacking on the credibility that the support organisations had given me by granting me access and over time by showing my support for the families' situations.

A number of ethical issues like how to establish rapport emerged during my fieldwork. I had to explain my position of being involved in migrant justice work for many years and that I was supportive of their struggles

⁴⁹ Section 4 support is provided by the Home Office to, among others, refused asylum seekers who cannot yet be deported but who are 'taking all reasonable steps to leave the UK' or to whom 'provision of accommodation is necessary for the purpose of avoiding a breach of a person's Convention rights'. See https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/438472/asylum_support_section_4_policy_and_process_public_v5.pdf

⁵⁰ Section 17 support is given by local authorities to families with 'children in need', including children with no immigration status on humanitarian grounds. See <http://www.project17.org.uk/resources/guide-to-accessing-support/are-you-eligible-for-support>

in order to gain the trust of the families (see De Genova, 2005, Chapter 1; Hale, 2008). I have conducted member checks by showing the parents drafts of the article and engaging in discussions about my observations and how I could make sure all sensitive information was taken out. None of them disagreed with how I represented them in the text. However, I still do not claim to give a recollection of the children's everyday lives that is representative of their own perspectives. Rather, I acknowledge that the following ethnographic renderings consist of observations I made of the way I interpreted these events. I have chosen to recollect moments from my interactions with these children that illustrate the general argument about how children's political agency can come about in deportability.

Children's political agency: Knowledge instils anger

In my research, a basic premise became fundamental for understanding why, and how, the children acted and reacted in various ways. Namely, their experiences of living in an irregular situation are affected by what they know about the context in which they live. There seemed to be a correlation between how much they knew with how angry they were. Two cases, Andrea and Loreana, stood out as the ones who were the most openly frustrated and angry with how the Home Office treated them; their mothers both pointed out that the children had been reading letters from the Home Office in secret. Loreana, aged 12 years, had vented her frustration by composing a corresponding letter to the Home Office that she was planning on posting without telling her mother. However, her mother found out about it, and it was later included in the new application the family sent in, which she also shared with me as I accompanied her family to a meeting with their *pro bono* legal advisor. Loreana preferred to communicate in writing, and therefore, I did not attempt to interview her verbally. However, I argue that her letter to the Home Office is remarkable in the way it offers insight into the thoughts and feelings of a child expressing her own subjectivity while contesting the subject position of being deportable.

The opening line of the letter reads, "Dear Home Office, I am writing to you to tell you how angry and upset I am". She further writes that her

anger stems primarily from the fact that the Home Office in their letters questions whether she really is her mother's daughter and whether she really was born and had lived her whole life in the United Kingdom. She feels that they treat them as "animals" by unfairly making them wait for so long for the right to stay in the United Kingdom, and she accuses them of "not doing their job properly". She points out that being a child does not mean that she cannot speak up against injustices and be angry at adults who do not treat them well. No one needs to tell Loreana that she has agency, she knows it herself quite well. She argues that her young age does not mean that she should not be listened to.

Loreana's concluding message to the Home Office is that they should at least give her mother permission to work so that she can provide for her children. She has understood that she is depending on the Home Office for her "dreams to come true", and she appeals to them rhetorically by saying, "my life is in your hands". In this way, the letter is a political intervention by a child into the immigration process that will define the child's future. Loreana understands that the Home Office is the source of her problems and she does what is in her powers to affect their decision by highlighting what she sees as the unreasonableness of the situation for which they are largely responsible. Loreana is contesting her irregular situation by voicing her own concerns and arguing for the importance of her perspective as a child. In doing so, she is questioning the subject position she has been placed in as deportable, countering it with her own self-described position where her and her family's 12 years of living in the United Kingdom forms the basis of her claim to stay.

The other child who had also been reading letters from the Home Office is 7-year-old Andrea. We first met just before Christmas in 2014 in the garden of the Homelessness Association where she was furiously screaming and throwing things to the ground after someone ate her cookies (I thought they were for everybody). During the following 4 months, as I met the family on an almost weekly basis, Andrea and I became friends, and I got to follow a part of their on-going struggle as they went from living in hiding to being housed by the Children's Services while filing an asylum claim at the Home Office. We met over 15 times during my research, including several whole days at the Homelessness

Association or on daytrips. We have kept in touch through emails and phone calls since I left.

After getting permission from her parents, I made attempts to interview Andrea a few times. However, her young age and restless personality did not fit the interview format or the creative methods I had in mind, so most of the time we ended up playing hours and hours of the card game UNO in the office of the Homelessness Association, much to the relief of the weekly women's group her mother attended next door. Still, I got to experience her perspective through many other activities, like talking to her mother about their experiences – in particular of dealing with social services, watching her perform a monologue about her situation in a drama set up by the women's group, hanging out for hours in her home, or on different trips and days out. One day when we were on our way to visit Cadbury World, we stopped by a pond where some elderly English men were racing their radio-controlled sailing boats. Suddenly, out of nowhere, as a playful echo from her role in the drama group, Andrea stood up and exclaimed loudly, "Mr and Ms Duck, I hereby acknowledge to you that you have been accepted for support from the Migrant Support destitution fund!"

This awareness of the circumstances of her situation at the early age of 7 originates in a meeting that the Home Office set up for her and her family where the Home Office were very keen that Andrea took part so that they could explain to her that her parents' visa had run out and that they were going to send them to Senegal, a country Andrea has never visited. As a consequence of Andrea's knowledge about the "7 year rule", her mother Tabitha recalled, the first question she asked on her seventh birthday was, "Mummy, are they still going to ask me to leave even though I am seven now?" Her own thoughts about her situation are perhaps best expressed in the short monologue she performed in the women's group's drama at two different occasions during my fieldwork:

Andrea: I am seven, I look like a normal child but I know I am different. I move around with my parents, sleeping here today and there tomorrow. I don't have any friends in my age, I change schools all the time. I keep my parents happy. I was born in the UK and I have

been here all my life, all I know is this country, this is my country
why can't I live here?

Although the leader of the drama group wrote the exact words, Andrea explained to me that they were true – they are her own experiences. Her deportability is contrasted by the fact that she is a member of the children's parliament at her school, and her head teacher praises her for her learning outcomes and calls her “a credit to our school” in her yearly evaluation letter. Still, Andrea is very aware of her deportability, and she contests this subject position in every way she can imagine, which I will come back to below. First, I want to contrast Loreana's and Andrea's experience with a child who, according to her father, did not know anything about her deportability during my research.

Children's political agency: Ignorance is bliss?

The parents of Sunayah, a 14-year-old from Pakistan, had made every effort to keep their children unaware of the problems the family was facing. The immigration history of the family is complex. Fadi, Sunayah's father, came with his wife and, at the time, 2-year-old child Sunayah and applied for asylum in 2002. Their claim was rejected and they went back to Pakistan in 2004, only to come back again soon after with two children (now 4 and 1 year old). This time, they chose not to apply for asylum but to stay clandestine for 6 years. During this time, the father was able to find cash-in-hand jobs to keep the family afloat, but when he lost his job and things got harder, they decided to claim asylum again in 2010. As they did not hear anything from the Home Office for 2 years, they went to their member of the parliament (MP) in 2012 who found out that the Home Office had never received an application – the incompetency of their corrupt solicitor had initially wasted 2 years for them. When I first met them, they had been waiting for 3 years for an answer to their asylum claim.

Throughout this time, the parents had never talked to their children about their immigration status. I was also able to talk with Sunayah about the different phases they had gone through without mentioning their irregular immigration status by referring to the different houses

they had lived in. The moving of houses coincided with their changing of status from living clandestinely to applying for asylum and receiving section 4 support. She had noticed that her parents had become more stressed since they moved to the current house (after having their asylum application registered properly) and Fadi confirmed this, saying:

Fadi: When you live illegally [...] I have only one stress: how to live, how to earn money. [...] But when I am an asylum seeker, everyday I have a new stress. Is the postman coming or not coming? If he comes, what will he drop? Or the Home Office will deport me?

The change from living in their old house to moving into the new one was sudden and unexpected for Sunayah since no one really explained to her why they had to move. But she told me that she does not really ask her parents about those things; she has enough to worry about with school exams since she wants to get good grades so that she can be a paediatrician some day. The situation with the house and the long travel to school she cannot do anything about anyway. She said, “Yeah that’s not exactly in my power so if I can’t do anything about it there is no point worrying about it, that’s kind of what I go for”. She said that she is glad that she does not know much about the details about their situation since it would probably only make her more stressed and worried. The impeccably well-behaved and well-mannered daughter and the friendly and hospitable attitude of her parents gave me the impression that the unawareness that Sunayah possessed was favourable for her aim to focus on school and get on with life. I was perplexed by the fact that the parents had been able to keep this knowledge from her.

Before a return trip to Birmingham a few months after my initial fieldwork, I had sent a text to Fadi with reflections about the family’s situation. Fadi had then chosen to show this text to Sunayah since he felt that she was now old enough to know. I then asked Sunayah whether she had any thoughts about the text, but she only laughed nervously and said “no”. Before I left them, Fadi told me that he had not discussed the text with her either after she had read it. Sunayah kept her thoughts and feelings about their immigration status to herself, and she probably did the same before she read my text as well; after all, she has been brought up

in a family where certain things are not talked about. Since I did not want to reveal too much to her about her deportability during my initial fieldwork, I was not able to invest the time necessary to gain the trust needed for her to potentially reveal more of what she actually thought and felt about the family's situation. However much she may have known, it was still clear that her apparent lack of knowledge correlated with a lack of visible anger and, consequently, absence of action, as compared to Loreana and Andrea. But as I will discuss further in the conclusion, political agency can also be expressed through attempts to stabilise and protect one's everyday life as it is. Although the waiting has been hard to endure, in the end it turned out to be beneficial to them. After I finished my fieldwork, the family was granted asylum, and according to Fadi, the fact that Sunayah's 9-year-old brother in a few months would have been eligible for British citizenship probably had a strong influence on that decision.

Children's political agency: Identity struggles as everyday politics

I will now return to Andrea and show how her anger about her irregular situation is connected with the question of her national identity. Due to the complex and restrictive immigration rules, children in an irregular situation end up spending many years in the United Kingdom with varying legal statuses over time, during which they also go through a process of affiliating themselves with the UK context and increasingly identifying themselves as British. In my fieldwork, this was especially clear in the case of Andrea who was born in the United Kingdom and has never left its shores. Her skin is dark like her parents, but her childhood has mostly been spent in predominantly White areas. She does not speak her parents' Senegalese dialect and gets rather upset when they use a language she cannot understand. During one of the gatherings at the Homelessness Association, I watched a participant tease her: "You are African", he said with a smirk on his face. "No I am British!" Andrea replied angrily. "You are African", he repeated with his cheeks growing further apart. "No I am British!" Andrea exclaimed forcefully as she angrily started hitting and kicking him. Amused by the girl's increased fu-

ry, the man once again repeated, now laughing, “You are African!” and by now Andrea had forced herself on top of him in his chair. “NO I AM BRITISH!” she screamed in his face without any trace of fun in her voice, expressing a strong resentment of the experience of being teased.

Social services had grown increasingly concerned about Andrea’s “lack of acceptance of her African identity”. Her mother Tabitha recalled them saying, “if worse comes to worse and you were told you need to leave she’s going to really struggle with even the concept of going”. Tabitha believes that Andrea’s habit of secretly reading letters from the Home Office might be one explanation for her concern about her right to define her own identity and belonging:

Tabitha: She’s British, there is nothing African in her, NOTHING African in her [...] she just doesn’t want to hear the word black. [...] She says, “my mum can be an African but I’m not, I’m British” [...] “Mummy why are they trying to say we are not the same, they say we’re Africans, I wasn’t born in Africa, I was born here, I’m British, why do they say I’m African?” [...] She’s got this fear of living where she’s never been “cause she’s never been there and she keeps asking me “what’s your country like compared to where we are now?” [...] But I try to make her think positive that everything will be fine.

Tabitha recalled various interventions where social workers were trying to offer Andrea a complimentary subject position of being African as well as British to make Andrea think more positively about “Africa” and “Africans”. The politics of race and ethnicity and its connection to the bordering and formation practice of the United Kingdom as a nation cut right into Andrea’s irregular situation. The social workers’ ideas about the importance of an ethnic identity that is in line with blood ties and skin colour are connected with an idea that Andrea should be prepared for the worst case scenario of being deported to Senegal with her family. By reading the letters from the Home Office, Andrea has gotten the impression that they question her British identity. Neither Social Services nor her mother know exactly what Andrea’s ideas are about being “British” or “African”. For Andrea, the question about her identity and her right to live in the United Kingdom are tightly connected. It is not hard

to understand that she contests the notion of her being an African when she makes this connection. The threat of being deported to a place where she has never been has entered into her world, and as a young child, she reacts in the ways she can to show that she disagrees with the identity and subject position she is being offered.

Andrea's contestation of the irregular situation is a part of her everyday life, but it is also expressed on public political arenas, such as when she performs a monologue about her life on a church stage and stirs up reactions of repugnance in the audience towards the way children are being treated in the United Kingdom. My conviction that 7-year-old Andrea should be acknowledged as a political subject in her own right was fittingly further verified as I had finished my fieldwork. I received a photo from her mother of Andrea standing next to Natalie Bennet, the Green Party leader, outside Yarl's Wood detention centre as she took part in a demonstration to end the detention of women. Holding a bright yellow trumpet in her hand and looking into the camera with a cheeky smile, she reminds us of how even a 7-year-old can understand and contest the irregular situation and even rightly be called an activist in her own way.

Conclusion

In this article, I have shown how children in the irregular situation contest the subject positions they are put in, most centrally the position of being "deportable" but also the position of not being seen as "British", and how they suggest their own understandings of who they are and where they belong. Their liminal position of being deportable and at the same time "citizens in the making" makes these children's actions and perceptions a fruitful case for understanding how the political agency of children arises. I agree with Bosco (2010) that we should focus on what these children do rather than who they are. Andrea channels her frustration through happily engaging in her parents' creative activities of putting on dramas and taking part in demonstrations. She also consistently challenges anyone who questions her own perception of her identity. Loreana expresses her anger through writing letters to the Home Office, attacking their incompetency, and the unreasonableness of their decisions.

Both Andrea's and Loreana's contestations are connected to their relatively extensive knowledge about their immigration status, whereas Sunayah attempts to uphold a position of ignorance towards her legal status so that she does not waste her energy on worrying about things she feels she cannot change. She reminds us of Saba Mahmood's (2001, p. 212) point that "agential capacity is entailed not only in those acts that result in (progressive) change but also in those that aim toward continuity, stasis, and stability". The children's struggle for inclusion and "normality" are, in part, expressions of this longing for the continuity of the inclusion they experience in their everyday lives. This dual aspect of children's political agency is often overlooked in research where explicit examples of resistance by children, such as Andrea and Loreana, are the focus of attention. This effectively mutes the voices of children who try to make their life work in difficult circumstances in less audible ways, like Sunayah. Also, Andrea and Loreana point to their experience of being included when they define themselves and argue for their belonging – in this way, the duality of their political agency is not a contrasting phenomenon but rather complementary. The inclusion of most irregularised migrant children into society is the basis of their claims to belong. Their knowledge about the discrepancy between their inclusion and their deportability is the starting point for how they more actively contest the irregular situation.

In this article, I have not intended to idealise the political agency of these children. Rather, I want to emphasise that it comes about as a reaction to the repressive context of deportability that no one should have to experience. Thus, the point in highlighting how the political agency of children in an irregular situation comes about is not just to theorise the notion of irregularity and children as political subjects; it is also an opportunity to include their voices and acts of contestation in the public debate so that they can inform and affect the way the debate is formed, by challenging the very constitution and existence of the irregular situation. Politics takes place in children's everyday lives. Studying politicised positions, such as those created by deportability, recognises children's struggles as they happen in the world.

7. ARTICLE 2

SACRIFICING PARENTS ON THE ALTAR OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: INTERGENERATIONAL STRUGGLES AND RIGHTS IN DEPORTABILITY⁵¹

Children's rights can often appear as one of the few tools that may have some validity and leverage in the political struggles of vulnerable groups in society. However, as I will show in this article, when state actors argue for children's rights in the context of irregular migration, they often try to make the case of the children stronger by accusing their parents of putting the children at risk. This notion of undocumented parents as being bad parents is implied in state actors' arguments about how children should not have to suffer from the decisions of their parents. In this article, I will show how these arguments, that pit the positions of the children and their parents against each other, are not in tune with the experiences of undocumented children and their families themselves. While the state views the parents as putting their children at risk by "hiding" them, the parents view the state as putting their children at risk

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by trying to deport them. Through ethnographic observations of the everyday lives of undocumented families in Malmö, Sweden and Birmingham, UK, I paint a contrasting picture to that of undocumentedness as bad parenting and instead show how the everyday struggles of undocumented children and their parents are interdependent and intergenerational as they protect the whole family together by doing all they can to avoid deportation. In doing so, this article contributes to discussions within critical migration research and critical children's rights research about how the position and rights of undocumented migrant children can be understood.

The context of deportability in Sweden and the UK

Undocumented migration is a diverse phenomenon. Some migrants end up in an irregular situation after being refused asylum, others when their visas run out, and yet others as they enter a country illegally etc. Many children in the UK experience deportability, a state of being at constant risk of deportation (De Genova, 2002), without ever having migrated themselves since they were born in the host society to which their parents once migrated before their birth. These children are often unaware of their situation until later in life (Bloch et al., 2014) and their chances for regularisation often increases the longer they stay in the country (see Finch, 2013). In Sweden, most undocumented children are refused asylum seekers and their routes to regularisation have been severely limited in recent years because of hardened asylum policies. Recent reports of an expected growth in the numbers of undocumented migrants as a consequence of the so called “refugee crisis” in 2015 have led to increased calls from politicians on both sides of the political spectrum for tougher immigration policies rather than more protection for children (see Crouch, 2015).

In 2012, then Home Secretary Theresa May explained the government's explicit aim to create a “hostile environment” in the UK, which, according to Jonathan Price, is fundamentally about “denying basic rights and services to undocumented migrants” (Price, 2014). The list of recent hostile policy initiatives in the UK is long. For example, the government making it illegal to let apartments and houses to undocumented mi-

grants, the Home Office asking the health services to provide information on undocumented migrant patients and the Home Office asking banks to do immigration checks on millions of accounts to identify undocumented migrants (see Migrants' Rights Network, 2018). Even though Swedish government representatives have not (yet) expressed themselves in terms of creating a hostile environment, recent developments are pointing in the same direction. In August 2017, the police in Southern Sweden raided a summer camp hosted by the Church of Sweden, and as a result arrested five undocumented families. In the following debate, the regional police argued that "there are no protected zones" for undocumented migrants where police are not allowed to go in and arrest them (The Local, 2017). However, the Church and NGOs pointed out that traditional understandings of churches as sanctuaries, assessments of children's best interests and the principle of proportionality arguably imply that such zones do in fact exist (H. Scott, 2017) and they have filed a complaint against the police to the Swedish Parliamentary Ombudsman.

The altar of children's rights

In these grim circumstances, children's rights are one of few resources available for undocumented families that enable them to receive limited state support in their everyday lives. Undocumented children in both the UK and Sweden are entitled to free primary health care and in Sweden also free secondary health care. They are also both entitled to free compulsory education. However, obstacles to actually accessing these entitlements are manifold (Sigona & Hughes, 2012; Sigvardsdotter, 2012). Additionally, undocumented children in both Malmö and Birmingham are entitled to a certain extent of monetary and housing support from the social services. In both cities, access to social support is based on similar understandings that children's rights to survival are not dependent on their immigration status but that undocumented children's actual residence in the city is what entitles them to the same basic support as all other children living there. In the UK, this is expressed in section 17 of the Children Act of 1989, which states that all children "in need" are entitled to support (Project 17, 2013). The city of Malmö has, together

with approximately a tenth of all municipalities in Sweden (Mattsson, 2018), interpreted the Social Services Act from 2001 as that the municipality has a duty to supply all people living “within its domain” with emergency social support, including undocumented children (Nordling, 2017).

The narratives from undocumented families’ everyday lives, that this article presents, relate closely to their experiences of receiving monetary and housing support that is being provided on the basis of the rights of the children. Consequently, children’s rights offer a productive starting point for an analysis of the intergenerational aspects of undocumented families’ everyday experiences. At the same time, an intergenerational perspective can be employed for “a contextual approach” to children’s rights, which Ann Quennerstedt (2013) calls for. Contextual approaches to children’s rights is an expression of what Dider Reynaert et al. (2012) call critical children’s rights studies, which is a relatively new area of research. They suggest that the dominant (non-critical) paradigmatic understanding of children’s rights today – which I refer to as “the altar of children’s rights” – understand children’s rights as an “objective set of goals applicable for any context, and take the [Convention on the Rights of the Child] CRC as the key point of reference”. They argue that this is an approach that “does not sufficiently take account of the diversity of interpretations and meanings that children’s rights can have” (Reynaert et al., 2012, p. 2). Critical children’s rights research moves beyond studies of “implementation-gaps” of the CRC towards a study of “the underlying norms, values and logics that shape practices in children’s rights today” (Reynaert et al., 2012, p. 166; see also Vandenhoe et al., 2015). One such underlying norm or logic that I seek to engage with in this article is the “individualisation” (W. Brown, 2004) of children’s rights (as well as human rights in general) and how they, if their “collective dimension” is ignored, “risk to dichotomise social relations” (Reynaert et al., 2012, p. 162–3). By re-contextualising the rights of undocumented children into their familial milieu I aim to initiate a discussion on the intergenerational character of children’s rights.

Sacrificing parents

What I mean when I say in the title that parents are being “sacrificed” on the altar of children’s rights is that often when state actors aim to strengthen the arguments for undocumented children’s rights, parents are being put at fault. State representatives and institutions in Sweden and in the UK have argued (in accordance with the CRC, article 2) that children should not be discriminated against because of the immigration or residence status of the parents. The UK Supreme Court argued for example that an undocumented mother was “demonstrably irresponsible” when she gave birth to another child “knowing that her immigration status was precarious”. Still, they argued, “the children were innocent of their parents’ shortcomings’ and “a child is not to be held responsible for the moral failures of either of his parents” (UK Supreme Court, 2011, §8, §35). In Sweden, the language of a 2010 Swedish Government Official Report (SOU) that proposed the legislation on undocumented children’s right to education, which came into force in 2013, implies a sense of responsibility on the parents for putting the children in a difficult situation: “Children who are staying in the country without permission have most often not chosen their situation themselves. Instead, it is the actions of the parents that have led to the often difficult situation of the children” (SOU 2010:5, 2010, my translation). Similar and even more bluntly patronising language towards parents can be found in other SOUs and propositions:

The assessment of the best interests of the child, in relation to the Aliens Act, must not be given such an extended meaning that being a child in itself becomes a criterion of its own for leave to remain. If that were the case, it would be tempting [for parents] to use children in situations where the wish to migrate is strong, but the reasons for being granted asylum are not strong enough. This can be a factor in cases when children are hidden [by their parents] from the migration authorities. (Regeringen, 1997, my translation and emphasis)

The latter message was also expressed in 2013 by the former conservative minister of migration Tobias Billström in different words as he described undocumented parents as taking their children as “hostages” (see Sager, 2014). In the debate in Sweden about children with pervasive

withdrawal syndrome (so called “apathetic children”) during the 2000s, parents were (with no scientific basis) accused in an SOU of manipulating their children psychologically and even poisoning them with chemical substances to make them seem “apathetic” (SOU 2006:49, 2006). Recently, another SOU highlighted the hardships of undocumented families, and suggested that it could actually be considered a “humane intervention” to try and catch these families as a way to “help them get their lives in order, even if it can lead to deportation” (SOU 2017:93, 2017, my translation). As I will show, this last quote is a clear example of how antithetical the perspectives of the state and the families themselves are on their situation. In the next section I present the theoretical framework of intergenerationality, “motherwork” and familial political agency that helps me analyse the families’ experiences of enacting shifting generational positions in stressful and violent emotional geographies, which I then build upon when I argue in the conclusion for an intergenerational perspective on children’s rights.

Intergenerationality, motherwork and familial political agency

There is no fixed definition of “intergenerationality”. Rather, the term highlights the intersecting character of different understandings of the concept of generation as life stages, birth cohort membership and positions within a family structure (Vanderbeck & Worth, 2015). Earlier research on intergenerationality and migration has focussed primarily on parent-child relationships in the US context. Menjívar et al. (2016) highlight the complexity of intergenerational relationships in mixed-status families, where one child may be a citizen and others not, and how legal status disrupts ordinary forms of generational orderings (see also Abrego, 2016; Foner & Dreby, 2011; Menjívar & Abrego, 2009). Deborah Boehm (2012) describes the actions of immigrant children and their parents as “embedded” and Laura E. Enriquez highlights one consequence of this in mixed-status families where US citizen children are negatively affected by sanctions towards their undocumented parents, experiencing what she calls “multigenerational punishment” (Enriquez, 2015). In relation to this, Berger Cardoso et al. (2018) show how shift-

ing intergenerational positions in undocumented families sometimes make children take on increased responsibilities to protect their parents and families from deportation. However, in some cases this made parents in mixed-status families feel disempowered when children took advantage of the reversed generational power structures that came with them being citizens and their parents not (see Ayón, 2016; Lykes et al., 2013; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Not all prolific research on the situation of undocumented children and families connect with scholarly debates around generation or intergenerationality as a complex, wide-reaching concept even though they discuss issues that relate to parent-child relationships (see Dreby, 2015; Gonzales, 2016; Sigona & Hughes, 2012). Overall, research about undocumented families has primarily been concerned with issues such as the health, coping strategies and development of children (see Hainmueller et al., 2017; Wahlström Smith, 2018; Yoshikawa, 2011). In Sweden and the UK, mixed-status families are not as common as in the US, since children of non-citizens do not immediately become citizens of the host country through their capacity of being born inside the territory (*jus soli*) as they do in the US. During my fieldwork all family members of the same family had a shared immigration status. This paper brings questions regarding intergenerationality and undocumented family life out of the US context and beyond discussions on mixed-status families. Also, this paper contributes to earlier research by connecting a discussion on intergenerationality with debates on children's rights in the context of undocumented migration.

In the following section I wish to further develop our understanding of the intergenerational character of the everyday lives of undocumented migrants by drawing on the feminist concept of “motherwork” (Collins, 1994; Sager, 2014) to theorize parental practices in deportability. Patricia Hill Collins argued in the early 1990s that discussions on motherhood were lacking perspectives of race and class and suggested using “motherwork” as a concept that “challenges social constructions of work and family as separate spheres” and highlights “racial ethnic mothers’ struggles” that “involves collaborating to empower mothers and children within structures that oppress” (Collins, 1994, p. 47, 56, 62). Later re-

search on migrant mothers have emphasised the importance of their care and cultural work for how “racialised citizenship can be challenged” (Erel & Reynolds, 2018) by “transcending boundaries of the private, public and the nation” (Longman et al., 2013) and have analysed migrant women’s mothering as a citizenship practice or “acts” of citizenship (Brouckaert & Longman, 2018; Erel, 2011). Sager develops Hill Collin’s conceptualisation of motherwork further to understand parenting and mothering as “situated practices in the intersections between class, gender, nation, “race”/ethnicity and, in a migration context, also citizenship/leave to remain” (Sager, 2014, p. 75, my translation). The concept of motherwork draws on the experiences of mothers but can be practiced by the whole family in the everyday life of deportability, according to Sager, and can open up our understanding of parenting in this situation as a potential for survival and resistance.

Research on undocumented families have emphasised the gendered aspects of immigration enforcement where fathers for example are often more at risk of deportation as they are more vulnerable to immigration raids at workplaces (Doering-White et al., 2016; Menjívar, et al., 2016). Among families I met during my research, the gendered aspects of parental positions were not significantly different, rather, what I want to show here is how parental practices were shared by all members of the families. “Parentwork” could potentially be a more precise word to describe the phenomenon while also avoiding gendered connotations, but I chose here to use “motherwork” to evade conceptual confusion and to connect with the feminist literature that has highlighted the plight of mother’s unrecognized domestic and emotional labour throughout history.

Sager further describes how activists in their 20s and 30s in Malmö, who opened up their homes to undocumented unaccompanied minors, found themselves suddenly in the position of parenting teenagers (which further highlights how intergenerational relationships are not limited to the family). While the actions of these activists are often understood as political, Sager argues that undocumented migrant’s own parental practices are not in the same way understood as acts of resistance, but are instead made invisible in the same way as the emotional labour of most-

ly mothers are made invisible in the patriarchy. Furthermore, Sager argues that the parenting of undocumented parents is not only made invisible but often stigmatized through narratives of failing parental responsibility, which has also been highlighted above. Similarly, Eithne Luibhéid argues that when migrants are being designated “illegal” they, at the same time, “become constructed as having caused their own vulnerability and exploitability” (Luibhéid, 2013, p. 2). In contrast, Sager describes the (what I would call intergenerational) motherwork of undocumented parents as well as activists as a “building of alternative rooms, communities and routes to social rights”; practices that have subversive potential to disrupt sovereign power (2014, p. 80, my translation).

I suggest that we could understand the parental practices, or motherwork, of undocumented parents as them being their own humanitarian agents, who care for their children when state support is lacking. The parents’ humanitarian agency is expressed as they protect their children from deportation and try to keep the family together by avoiding their own deportation, all for the well-being and future of the children. Motherwork then, understood as unrecognized parental practices of care, or humanitarian agency, is arguably an expression of parental political agency. However, as I will show later, motherwork can also be enacted by children and consequently, as Kirsi Pauliina Kallio puts it, “political agency” is an “intergenerational human condition” (Kallio, 2015a). In this special issue, Kallio develops an understanding of the concept of “familial political agency” and argues that this concept helps understand how “political agency is developed and practiced subjectively and through sharing, leaning on emotional bonds and affective relations” (Kallio, 2018). To apply an analytical lens of familial political agency is to acknowledge the interdependency of children’s (*Article 1*) and parent’s political agency. While agency has been a centrepiece concept for childhood studies in the last decades, “a curious effect of viewing children as independent “agents” has commonly been to efface the intergenerational relationships that not only constitute childhoods, but construct experiences of age-itself” as Peter Kraftl points out (2013). Recent debates on children’s agency have thus developed relational approaches to reconceptualise agency in childhood studies (Esser, 2016) highlighting

the interdependence between children and adults “yielding a structural understanding of reciprocity” (Wihstutz, 2016). Eberhard Raithelhuber offers a relational definition of agency where it “can be seen as a realised, situated and permuted capacity, which can be accomplished through the combination of various interconnected ‘persons’ and ‘things’” (Raithelhuber, 2016). In this sense, familial political agency is expressed through what is enacted at different generational positions (Vanderbeck, 2007). As I will show, both children and parents enact motherwork and know about and feel the effects of deportability. Therefore, I find it useful to connect discussions on intergenerationality and motherwork, defined as unrecognized emotional labour or “humanitarian agency”, to understand how families contest the position of deportability and express political agency together while doing so.

Methodology

For this study I conducted ethnographic fieldwork among undocumented families in Malmö, Sweden and Birmingham, UK between 2014 and 2017. I interviewed parents in 12 families in Sweden and 16 families in the UK who were, or had at some point experienced being, in an irregular situation, meaning that they were absconding from a deportation order. I conducted interviews and participant observation with children in 12 of these families, 6 in each country. The fieldwork drew upon the “activist research” approach (Hale, 2008) where my political standpoint as a researcher aligned with the struggles of the participants, which arguably enabled an ethically sound and empirically rich knowledge production of increased validity.⁵² This research joins recent shifts in children’s rights research by adapting a “bottom-up approach” of children’s rights (Vandenhoe et al., 2015), where I attempt to show the families’ own perspectives on the role of the parents and the whole family in relation to the rights of the children and the support this entitles the children to. In Sweden the parents originated from Afghanistan, Albania and Kosovo and in the UK the parents originated mainly from former colonies

⁵² For an extended account of my “activist” methodology, including delimitation of participants and reflections on how ethics in this kind of research can become a method in itself, see Lind (2017).

such as Jamaica, Nigeria and India. Participants' countries of origin mainly mattered in my study in relation to how the migration authorities in Sweden and the UK perceived the families' situation in each country of origin and what consequences that had for their chance of being granted asylum. However, in the UK some families, primarily from Jamaica, never claimed asylum. In Sweden almost all the participants from Afghanistan have been granted asylum at the time of writing whereas 6 out of 8 of the participating families, or at least part of the families, from Albania and Kosovo were deported during 2016 and 2017, but of which some have also returned again on a visiting visa or working permit.

I performed what has been described as a "cross-national comparative ethnography" (Jørgensen, 2015) but the limited sample does not allow for broader generalisations on the nature of deportability as it emerges in the different national contexts. However, by drawing on two ethnographic studies constructed to be as similar as possible I have experienced some of the benefits promised by comparative methods of seeing the particularities of both contexts more clearly by juxtaposing them against each other (see Bloemraad, 2013). Sweden and the UK have similar legislations in relation to undocumented migrants but they also have important differences in the social-historical developments that have shaped the way migration policies are being formed today. In this way they make up an interesting comparison for understanding the norms and values that shape state approaches to undocumented migration and what impact migration policies have for the everyday lives of undocumented migrants.

The context of Malmö was chosen because of its long history as an entry point for migration into Sweden and a site of migrant struggles (see Nordling et al., 2017). Birmingham was chosen as the comparative context, primarily since it, just like Malmö in Sweden, is the third largest metropolitan area in the UK (ESPON, 2007) and both cities are known for their diverse population and as sites of undocumented migration. Another aspect of choosing Birmingham was the extremely generous support I received from the Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) at University of Birmingham as they introduced me to their large

network among actors doing migrant support work in the city. This support was crucial for making possible the ethnographic approach in collaboration with NGOs and support networks that I had planned to employ over a time period of just six months. In Malmö, being my city of residence, I had the possibility to develop relationships with activists and support workers over a longer time.

Parents' sacrifice

I want to begin the following analysis of my ethnographic material by highlighting how the parents' and the children's experiences were the opposite of the state's discourse on their situation. As I stated in the introduction: The state viewed the parents as putting their children at risk by "hiding" them, but the parents viewed the state as putting their children at risk by trying to deport them. Even though the background and migration histories of the parents differed, they all sacrificed their own life-plans and futures for their children. As I formulated the above observations into an interview-question of how the parents felt about being positioned by the state as bad parents, the looks the parents gave me made it feel like a stupid question. One father in Malmö, Ivan from Kosovo, replied with a rhetorical question: "Wanting to protect your family is a crime?" Tony in Malmö, with a similar background, expressed another aspect of his sacrifice for his children, saying: "My best years were wasted on living clandestinely [...] I have spent 15 years in this hell. Is that not enough? Do I need to turn mad to be allowed to stay?" Another mother from Kosovo, Selena, agreed: "My life does not interest me that much, it is all about the children." This observation is in line with earlier research on migrant families where parents emphasise that their migration is driven by a strong wish to do what is best for their children (Boehm, 2012, ch. 6).

Many of the parents (in the UK) who had overstayed their visiting visas did not fear for their lives if they would return to their country of origin, while the asylum seekers (in both countries) in most cases did so. Several of the parents in Birmingham talked about how they might have returned to their country of origin if it were not for the children, who in many cases had been born in the UK and had never been to their par-

ents' countries of origin. Mickie, from Zambia, for example worried that his children would practically become stateless if they returned since they would have difficulties receiving any birth certificates there.

The children also defended the actions of their parents. 13-year-old Frans in Malmö, said that he is not angry at his parents. He understands them. "No-one would have stayed there with the problem we had", he said. Similarly, Niklas, a 16-year old in Malmö, explained to me how he thinks about his situation and the actions of his parents.

Niklas: I am thankful for the social support, I have a right to receive money to survive. If you help the children I will help my parents. It is not the parents' fault. [...] I understand, because they did it for me, not for themselves.

Also, 14-year-old Nadine in Malmö, had nothing bad to say about her mother, "my mother thinks about what is best for me and I would have done the same thing as she if I would have been in her situation," she said. The decision to stay was not only that of the parents, it was also a decision made by the children. Nadine's mother, Golnaz, described how if she would have told her daughter that they needed to return to Afghanistan, the daughter would have refused. It would not have been possible to convince the daughter to go back. Thus, the children acknowledged the sacrifices their parents had made, and kept making. None of the families recognized themselves in the State's arguments that suggest undocumented parents are putting their children at risk and are bad parents.

Shifting intergenerational positions in deportability

The overall message of the parents was that they want papers so that they can work and take care of their families. They do not want social financial assistance, but it is a last resort for them as a way to be able to give their children a more "normal" everyday life. A father from Kosovo, Tony, emphasised that he thinks Malmö is a good city since it, in comparison to most other Swedish cities, gives social financial assistance to undocumented children. The option for many would be to steal, he thought. But he was frustrated by the life he was left to live in limbo

as an adult, and he did not think there was any answer to this paradox: “But what is the point when life is hell anyway and you have to wait for 15 years and are still not allowed to stay?”

In Birmingham many participants were also getting temporary support from the Social Services through Section 17. Mickie, a father of three, was expressing similar resentment towards the system and not receiving the papers he needed to be able to work and live in the UK. He said: “I don’t want to live on benefits. They have stopped me from being able to provide for my children and that is not my fault, they are blaming the victim.” Here the conflict between the state and the parents are clearly played out and the paradoxical “solution” to their situation that the state offers the parents. All parents in both countries were clear on their suggestion for a solution: give us the papers we need so that we can work and provide for our children in safety.

Motherwork in deportability consists to a large degree of navigating an impenetrable immigration system so that the parents can get the papers they need to be allowed to stay and work so that they can protect and provide for their family. Many of the parents I met in both Sweden and UK who had been refused asylum were spending a lot of their time watching the news or searching for information on the internet that could be used to strengthen their asylum case. Especially in the UK, parents often sounded like immigration lawyers in training as they explained the most recent application they had filed with the immigration authorities. In both countries the parents carried around large folders – sometimes even cardboard boxes – with their documentation as lawyers consistently needed to see all the papers they had to be able to assess their cases. Much of the parent’s time and energy went into getting hold of letters and certificates from medical doctors, schools and other institutions that would support their cases. Some of the parents, in both countries, expressed that after a while they felt that people were getting tired of them and they became more and more ashamed and afraid to ask for additional help. The interpretation skills and general know-how of bureaucratic functions of older children were central in this legal struggle. As a consequence, children also performed “motherwork” for the

benefit of the whole family as they supported their parents in resolving their legal cases.

Child-interpreters are one example of children's capacity for agency that stems from an intergenerational interdependence where the parents are responsible for the family's wellbeing, but are also dependent on their children to help them fulfil this task. As brokers and interpreters, children are made aware of "adult" issues that they usually are not involved in (see Orellana et al., 2003; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Weisskirch, 2017). Nadine in Malmö often interpreted for her mother and at an asylum interview with the Swedish Migration Agency the interpreter was of such low quality that Nadine had to intervene and tell the migration officer that "my mother did not mean it that way, she meant it this way". Then the officer told the interpreter to leave and Nadine interpreted for the rest of the meeting. This interview resulted in a long awaited positive decision on their asylum application, and it is possible that Nadine's intervention had an impact on the migration officer's final decision.

Wouter Vandenhoe and colleagues define the shifting intergenerational positions of undocumented children interpreting for their parents as an "intergenerational rupture" (Vandenhoe et al., 2011) and a "parentification" of the children who take on responsibilities for their families. The shifting intergenerational positions in the context of deportability is highlighted by looking at the example of Niklas, who discussed how he took on different subject positions in relation to different people. He lived with his mother and 10-year-old brother in Malmö, while his father was travelling around and only sporadically got in touch with the family.

Niklas: I have to be a dad, I have to be a man, I have to be a child – I change all the time. With my brother I am a dad and a child. With my mother I have to be a man. When dad comes, then I can be a child again. I am thinking, "How did it happen that I have to be everything?" It makes me sad when I think about it.

In a similar vein, Nadine described her relationship with her mother and how she sometimes had to take the position of "the mother".

Nadine: Since I was 12, 13, 14 years old I started to take responsibility for our shared economy. I have received child allowance. If I wanted to buy a shirt we save up, we agree on it. We make a compromise. I have learnt that word in school from this book I am reading. I have a test on that word tomorrow. So I get to take care of a lot. I get to show her things on the computer, so we switch place, I get to be the mother sometimes. I feel that I have to take more responsibility. Show her the new school she is going to for Swedish classes. I get to help her with her homework. It is starting to be the other way around. [...] You learn from each other.

Both Niklas and Nadine are taking on shifting familial positions depending on what the situation requires from them. This shows how parental practices is not something that only parents can perform, but rather are performed by parents and children together with the aim of fulfilling the needs of the whole family.

This point, that chronological age is less relevant than intergenerational positionings, is also highlighted through two examples of families I met in Malmö. One family consisted of two 19-year-old parents, Alma and Donald, with a new-born baby, the other consisted of two middle-aged parents with three daughters, 19, 11 and 0,5 years old, where the 19-year-old, Lina, was the designated interpreter of her father. In all these cases, age is less relevant than the positions of the different people in relation to each other as families. The 19-year-olds were positioned mainly in relation to, in Alma and Donald's case, them having a child, and in Lina's case, her being the daughter of her parents. Alma and Donald were escaping from problematic family situations in their country of origin, whereas Lina was doing everything for and with her parents. She had a good relationship with her parents and they took responsibility together as a family. Her wish was to be a doctor; then she could help herself and the whole family: "I will do everything so that we can have a good life. If we get something good, everyone should get something good – we are a family." Hence, the interdependent character of family life in deportability is expressed through the interchanging positions of children and their parents.

Stress as intergenerational affect through knowledge-sharing

The emotional geographies of undocumented migrants have been explored in a number of studies. Alice Bloch (2013a) shows how the fear of being deported and the fear of what would happen on return to the country of origin influences decisions and permeates the everyday lives of refused asylum seekers in the UK; a fear that also has psychological effects such as panic attacks and nightmares. Similarly, according to a study conducted in Sweden by Åsa Wahlström Smith (2018), refused asylum seeking children in an irregular situation are in constant preparedness, without break, towards various threats. In school, for example, undocumented children develop different strategies for how to avoid talking about their legal status with their friends, and sometimes the threat intensifies when more acute or alarming situations occur, as when someone is knocking on their door or they think the police are following them (Wahlström Smith, 2018).

In line with the findings of earlier research, the overall emotional experience of the hostile environment the children as well as the parents in my study expressed was that of an ever-present stress in everyday life. “Stress” is spelled the same both in English and Swedish and it is the word that the participants most often used to express their regular emotional state of being. Stress appears to be the fundamental effect of the pressure of having an unresolved immigration relationship with the sovereign state. This stress of living with precarious immigration status has manifested itself physically for many of the parents through everything from increased acne, which made a mother in Birmingham, Julia, avoid seeing friends because of the shame she felt about her appearance, to developing schizophrenia, as a mother, Mina, in Malmö had experienced since arriving in Sweden. Alice in Malmö, was grateful that her son was still only three years old. But even though the child did not understand the situation, she experienced that he could feel that their parents were stressed. When she cried he sometimes asked her “why are you sad?” She could still lie to him and he would believe her “but when there is stress in the family he feels it”, she said. Similarly, Tony in Malmö described children’s emotions as “magnets”; they feel every-

thing the parents send out. Research has also shown that unborn babies are affected by the stress caused by their mothers' deportability (Reardon, 2017).

The everyday life of the families centred much on managing stress and psychological illness and the children were a source of worry and anxiety for the parents as they started to ask more questions about their situation the older they got. But the children were also a source of joy and relief. At one occasion I was discussing immigration issues with Tony at a family gathering at an NGO in Malmö and he was getting more and more upset. But suddenly his six-year-old son, Mikael, came up from behind and asked his father to play with him, joking and smiling to convince him to come, and Tony's face quickly lit up as he started laughing and cuddling with his child. Such mundane everyday affective interactions between parents and their children may seem a banal observation, but I argue they are central to an understanding of the intergenerational experience of living in an irregular situation. The importance of the children for the sanity of the parents was also highlighted by Arash in Malmö, a father from Afghanistan, who said: "The stress – every hour, every second is killing me, because I have small children and a wife and I am fully responsible for my family". He told me that he had decided four times that he would commit suicide since he thought that if he died perhaps the rest of the family would get leave to remain on humanitarian grounds. "But then when I thought about my little girl, when she laughs with me, then I could not do it," he said.

The violent nature of immigration control is felt by the whole family as an intergenerational, fundamentally affective, experience. These feelings, most explicitly expressed as stress, are then managed through the emotional labour, which Nicky James defines as "the labour involved in dealing with other peoples' feelings" (N. James, 1989), of both the parents and the children. But much of the motherwork the parents do is focused on making sure the children are not affected by this stress, and one strategy that some of the parents applied was to try hard to keep their children away from knowing too much. Karen in Birmingham said that her child did not know much about their immigration status. "It is the adults stuff," she said "the kids are not supposed to worry about it. I

cry when he has gone to bed.” I tried to talk with 14-year-old Sunayah in Birmingham about what she knew about the family’s problems without going into detail about what I knew (see *Article 1*), and she said that she was glad that the parents did not talk to her about it. “I think I would be more stressed out if I knew. It would just add extra worry and they want me to concentrate on my school more than that thing, because I cannot do anything about it, that is why.” However, later during my fieldwork her father, Fadi, showed her a text that I had written about their situation.

Fadi: She is a responsible girl. She knows everything but does not say anything. I can feel that she wants to pretend that she does not know. If she starts discussing I do not have an answer. If I say I am homeless she might be depressed [...] I gave her that text because we are stressed and our behaviour has changed. Maybe it would make her understand why we are stressed, maybe that was in the back of my head when I gave it to her.

Julia in Birmingham also ended up sharing a lot of information with her 12-year-old daughter Loreana. Not because she wanted to but as she said: “We live in such a compact space so she will hear and listen. She is not stupid, she will know. I do not want to lie to her, this is her country so she should know what is going on.” Diana in Birmingham, also 12 years old, talked about her ambivalence towards her talking about immigration issues with her mother: “I do want to know about our status, but at the same time I do not want to know. I do not want to bother about it. It makes it weird when you know stuff.” Both the children and their parents work hard to manage, or avoid being affected by, the emotional violence that the hostile society provides. Enduring stress is necessary for the families to make everyday life work. In this sense, the intergenerational motherwork of navigating the violently emotional geographies of deportability becomes expressions of everyday familial political agency.

Conclusion – Intergenerational struggles and rights in deportability

In this article I have drawn out the tension between how state actors frame parenthood in an irregular situation as “bad parenting” and the experiences of undocumented children and their parents’ everyday lives. That tension points to a political process important to understanding the contemporary situation of undocumented migrant families. The few resources that these families can draw upon for support from the host society derive primarily from legal provisions based on the deservingness and rights of the children. But the needs and struggles of the families are intergenerational, meaning that they are deeply connected and interdependent on every level, practically and emotionally. Parents as well as their children enact shifting intergenerational positions of care and responsibility through “motherwork”; a kind of emotional labour unrecognized by the state. The intensively emotional geographies of deportability that are imposed through living in societies hostile towards undocumented migrants express themselves through a constant stress and fear of deportation and are shared by the whole family. The stress of parents influences even younger children who at an early age start to understand that deportability is the root cause of this stress.

In the same way as the gendered, unpaid work performed by mothers in everyday family life is not recognized by the patriarchy, similar work among undocumented parents and children is being done which is not recognized by the state. Sager (2014) analyses the parental practices of undocumented migrants as motherwork and suggests that the parents are to a limited extent able to suspend the exclusionary effects of deportability, as trying to create “a kind of (temporary and limited) citizenship for their children” (Sager, 2014, my translation). These practices, she argues, can be interpreted as subversive in relation to the state’s attempt to regulate migration. In my research, the unrecognized motherwork of undocumented parents, both mothers and fathers, expressed itself through the parents acting as, what I call, their own “humanitarian agents” responsible for caring for the children when state support to the deserving, rights-bearing children is limited by the notion of the deportable migrant child. This humanitarian agency is expressed through motherwork and

all these practices of both parents and their children, which contest the image of the parents as putting their children at risk, can be understood as familial political agency. Put in other words: Intergenerational parental practices, or motherwork, in an irregular situation are expressions of “activism” or contestations against state understandings of undocumented parenthood as bad parenting through everyday life politics.

State actors argue for undocumented children’s rights through “sacrificing” parents on “the altar of children’s rights” at the same time as the parents themselves sacrifice their lives for their children’s rights. Children’s rights are often seen as one of few available resources to draw upon when doing activist work for undocumented families. But by putting all the emphasis on individual children’s rights, and neglecting their intergenerational context, we run a risk of marginalising the human rights of both children as well as adults. The intergenerational experiences and struggles of these families make it productive to think about children’s rights from an intergenerational perspective. In this sense, future research on both childhood and parenthood, as well as practice, policy and activist work for migrant rights, could benefit from an approach of further contextualising the intergenerational aspect of rights, by analysing the (lack of) rights of parents in the light of the (extended) rights of their children and vice versa.

8. *ARTICLE 3*

GOVERNING VULNERABILISED MIGRANT CHILDHOODS THROUGH CHILDREN'S RIGHTS⁵³

In this article, I put forward what might appear as a counterintuitive argument that in the deportation regime (De Genova & Peutz, 2010), children's rights are increasingly mobilised for governing and controlling, rather than enabling, vulnerabilised migrant children's territorial presence and mobility. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Sweden and the United Kingdom among undocumented migrant families and children, I have earlier shown how children's rights are one of few resources available for these families to look to in their everyday life struggles (*Article 2*). However, this fact does not do away with the possibility that these same rights also could be mobilised for controlling territorial presence and mobility, enabling problematic delimitations of migrant categorisations and defining what is considered appropriate and problematic types of childhoods and parenthoods. Central to these processes are the creation, defining and governing of migrant children's vulnerabilities.

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In the contexts of migration and childhood, “vulnerability” is mainly used as a descriptive term that evades problematisation. Many migrant children do experience vulnerabilities of different kinds and much earlier research has rightly argued for sensitive responses to these vulnerabilities (see for example Eastmond & Ascher, 2011; Liamputtong, 2007). However, several authors have pointed out the risks of essentialisation or determinism when speaking about “vulnerable groups” and suggested that vulnerability should be understood and analysed as a *process* of “vulnerabilisation” (Casalini, 2016; Sardadvar et al., 2012) and that research should focus on understanding the “dynamics, meanings and power relations underlying actual instances and processes of vulnerability and harm” (Zarowsky et al., 2013, p. 3).

Following this, the main interest of this article is to study how understandings of migrant children’s vulnerabilities, and their connections with children’s rights logics, are mobilised by states for agendas that aim to control and govern certain groups of migrant children. To enable a discussion on this issue, based on three different studies conducted in Sweden (by myself and together with colleagues Anna Lundberg and Maria Persdotter), the article will engage in a theoretical discussion about the role of “vulnerabilisation” in migration politics. Here, the concept is used to capture state practices that create the dire conditions out of which actual experiences of vulnerability originates. However, the concept also points at the state’s privilege to then define and attribute vulnerability to certain groups. Furthermore, it also highlights how this creation and labelling of vulnerability makes possible the governing of said groups. The article argues that the political process of vulnerabilisation is a crucial aspect of governing in the contexts of deportability, childhoods and human rights.

In Sweden, children’s rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which acknowledges children as both vulnerable and competent agents have gained a relatively strong position and children’s competencies have been emphasised in different national legislations since the creation of the convention (Sandin, 2012). Arguably, this fact makes Sweden specifically interesting to study in relation to what effects a strong children’s rights and agency discourse may have when

state sovereignty and the best interest of children are negotiated. Research on the situation of unaccompanied minors has shown how children's expressions of agency has sometimes been used as an argument against hospitality and for their deportation (Vacchiano & Jiménez, 2012) and can become a politicised public policy issue used against children (Terrio, 2010). Migrant children in families also express agency (*Article 1*), but it does not to the same extent appear to be seen as problematic.

The research projects that this article draws upon have all focused on children in families rather than children migrating alone. In this article, the groups mainly discussed under the label "vulnerabilised migrant children" includes but is not limited to asylum-seeking children from countries outside of the EU, Eastern European EU-citizen children (often Roma) migrating to other EU-countries (who in Swedish political discourse are called "vulnerable EU-citizen" children) and undocumented children who have no legal right to remain in the host country and who may or may not ever have migrated themselves. When talking about "undocumented children", the article refers to children who may have had their and their family's asylum application rejected and then stayed in the host country illegally, but they can also be EU-citizen children who have stayed in another EU-country for more than 3 months without permission and therefore become undocumented.

The article continues with a discussion about earlier research on humanitarian and affective forms of governing in the deportation regime and builds on this to create a theoretical framework around the concept of vulnerabilisation. After a discussion on methodology, a number of contexts in Sweden are analysed, where it is suggested that children's rights have been central for the governing of vulnerabilised migrant children's territorial presence and mobility and the defining of appropriate forms of childhoods and parenthoods.

Humanitarian governing through rights in the deportation regime

The focus of this article is governing (through rights [Sokhi-Bulley, 2016]) on a detailed level, often expressed through "indirect modes of

managing persons” (Hiemstra, 2010, p. 76) and therefore *governmentality* (Foucault, 1991) in its specific sense, rather than *governance* as the more “broadbrush, state-centered ways in which populations are controlled” (Hiemstra, 2010, p. 76). I take heed of William Walters’ (2015) warning that governmentality is such a dominant perspective in migration research that it risks becoming a filter rather than a lens, which instead of highlighting certain patterns, filters out other forms of perhaps unexpected aspects of the world. However, I also agree with Walters that governmentality is still useful, since it analytically focuses on “rationalities, technologies and subjectivities” (2015, p. 19). Inspired by this, I theoretically discuss how, in the context of undocumented migration, children’s and human rights can become entangled in humanitarian and affective governing in the deportation regime, which, according to De Genova and Peutz (2010), has recently achieved an unprecedented prominence globally.

Central to the position of migrant children is that their future is often undecided and open, as Seeberg and Goździak argue: “Although everyone seems to agree that “children are the future”, there is less consensus on whose future [migrant children] are” (2016, p. 5). Thus, state responses to migrant children are expressed primarily through paternalism, as an expression of governing and controlling the “becoming” child or future citizen (Arce, 2015, p. 13). Today’s society prefers to speak about suffering and compassion rather than about interests or justice, according to Fassin and the humanitarian responses to suffering primarily functions as legitimisations of the way these groups are being governed. “Humanitarian government is indeed a politics of precarious lives”, Fassin argues (2012, p. 4). Arguably then, positioning migrant children as innocent “becomings” enables their governing through “protection” (Nakata, 2015, p. 44), which usually is expressed through various forms of humanitarianism.

Children’s rights are a crucial part of how vulnerability and humanitarianism as well as agency are negotiated in migrant childhoods. However, children’s rights studies have mainly been preoccupied with questions regarding implementation of the CRC (Arce, 2015) rather than these negotiations. Didier Reynaert et al. problematises this approach and call

for more analysis of “the underlying norms, values and logics” shaping children’s rights practices today and “the diverse interpretations that are given to the underlying logics” (Reynaert et al., 2012, p. 196). Similarly, Ann Quennerstedt (2013) calls for the need to contextualise children’s rights and this text is a response to these calls (as well as an answer to the ambitions of this Special Issue of *Childhood*).

Earlier research has pointed out the complex position of undocumented migrant children as rights-holders and potential victims of harm in need of state support and simultaneously breaching immigration laws making them eligible for deportation, where protection from harm is used to motivate increased immigration controls (B. Anderson, 2012). Children’s rights are used both to motivate children’s right to stay as well as the opposite (Josefsson, 2017a). This article develops this discussion further by looking in detail into how children’s rights logics specifically are mobilised for increased control. Rightlessness is both a production of, and can be challenged within, the human rights paradigm (Douzinas, 2007). Wendy Brown argues that human rights are an “aspect of governmentality” and “a crucial aspect of power’s aperture” (2004, p. 459). Human rights in their contemporary dominant form are not only simply rules and defences against power, and their practice is not only responsible for de-politicisation, but they “can themselves be tactics and vehicles of governance and domination” and “produce and regulate the subjects to whom they are assigned” (W. Brown, 2004, p. 459). This gives rise to a paradoxical situation where the more specified rights are for a specific group, the more likely they are to cement the definition of said group as subordinate and vulnerable.

According to Fassin, the “governmentality of migration” is characterised by border policing, racialisation, surveillance, detention and deportation regimes, and the decline in the right to asylum that has been replaced by discretionary humanitarianism. These logics, he argues, “are embodied in the everyday work of bureaucracies as well as in the experience of immigrants” (Fassin, 2011, p. 213). Undocumented migrants live with an ever-present threat of deportation, in a state of “deportability” (De Genova, 2002), which can be understood as a technology that states have employed to an increasing extent in recent years to make irregular

migrants “govern themselves” into returning into their country of origin. Eithne Luibhéid argues that when migrants are being designated “illegal” they, at the same time, “become constructed as having caused their own vulnerability and exploitability” (Luibhéid, 2013, p. 2). This does not only apply to undocumented migrants who live with an ever-present threat of deportation, but also asylum seekers, mobile EU-citizens and other variously positioned migrants for whom deportation is also a threat, even though perhaps more distant. Self-governing is the primary goal of migration regulation that emphasises the need for “voluntary return” and the affective governing, through hostile policies that always remind migrants of the threat of deportation, is crucial in the logic of this self-governing.

The political process of “vulnerabilisation”

Earlier research has shown how the state is implicated in the construction of certain migrant children vulnerabilities, although the state’s role in producing vulnerability is “invisibilized in favour of its role as a protector” against harm (B. Anderson, 2012) and state policies aiming at ameliorating vulnerability *themselves* can be a risk to the targeted populations (K. Brown, 2015; Mackenzie, 2014). Arguably, affective governing in the deportation regime is a source of experienced vulnerability, and humanitarian governing is then rationalised as a response to this vulnerability first created by the state. This practice, of first creating vulnerability and then utilising this vulnerability to rationalise governing, I call “vulnerabilisation”. Through my discussion on this concept, I aim to contribute with a problematisation of the political and paternalistic character of the process of “vulnerabilisation” in migration politics to current debates on vulnerability as a key concept for protecting rights (Turner, 2006), accomplishing social change (Butler et al., 2016) and promoting justice in migration (Straehle, 2016).

Kate Brown argues that vulnerability has been advanced as a concept that can both potentially enable social justice as well as be stigmatising, psychologise and individualise social problems and invoke problematic paternalism (K. Brown, 2015, p. 3). Autonomy or agency is not always opposed to vulnerability. However, certain *situational* (in contrast to *in-*

herent) vulnerabilities (Mackenzie, 2014) can be expressions of abuse. What vulnerabilities that are to be considered problematic, or “surplus vulnerabilities” is a political question in any given situation (J. Anderson, 2014). The labelling or attributing of vulnerability by defining what is to be considered surplus, or “pathogenic” (Mackenzie, 2014) vulnerability is central to this process, since policies are embedded in discourses that define certain groups as more or less vulnerable. In this way, labelling certain groups as vulnerable becomes part of the governing of these groups. Nick Mai (2014) has suggested that being “vulnerabilised” is being “constructed and addressed as vulnerable”. In this article, I suggest a use of the word vulnerabilisation as relating to an analysis of how these processes, constructions and addressing of vulnerability are part of the governing of certain vulnerabilised groups through the political processes of creating the conditions for, defining and attributing vulnerability, which enables the governing of the “vulnerabilised”.

According to De Genova (2002), protracted vulnerability is a characteristic of the state of deportability. Deportability can then be understood as a form of “vulnerabilisation”. Central to vulnerabilisation through deportability is the way the state tries to put the blame on the migrants themselves for causing their own vulnerability and how the state consequently tries to make undocumented migrants “govern themselves” into so-called “self-return”. This process could be understood as the state suppressing the migrant through hostile policies and by shrinking its means and capacity for survival in an attempt to “squeeze out” or force out the agency that the state believes the migrant still possesses to enable its self-return. However, this suppression creates further vulnerabilities and most self-return that it accomplishes are the results of desperation and lack of alternatives, not a new-found capacity to return and dwell in one’s country of origin.

This process, I understand as an act of creating situational vulnerability, which the state then reacts to through governing by blaming the migrant for creating its own vulnerability and illegality. I argue that this is the privilege of the state, or the “vulnerabiliser”, to detach its creation of vulnerability from its definition and assignment of the label of vulnerability. In the analysis below, I explore empirically how governing takes

place in deportability through the process of vulnerabilisation. I enquire into how the state creates real and felt vulnerabilities by stripping migrants of rights and creating an affective state of fear and stress. I also look into how it assigns labels of vulnerability to certain groups to enable governing through practices concealed as protection. In this sense, I study how certain groups of migrant children are “vulnerabilised” in a similar way as they are *irregularised* or *undocumented*, meaning that vulnerability is something that has primarily been bestowed upon them, as structural limitations on their capacity and possibilities to live as full participants in the society. In the analysis below, I highlight a number of instances where practices put in place and arguments (seemingly) formulated to strengthen children’s rights, and consequently ameliorating their vulnerability, are mobilised by different state actors to instead govern migrant children’s territorial presence and mobility and become expressions of vulnerabilisation.

Methodology

In this article, I discuss and draw together findings from several different research projects. The primary source of knowledge is an ethnographic study I conducted in Sweden and the United Kingdom between 2014 and 2017, which consisted of participant observation and interviews with children as well as their parents. The creation of biographical timelines (Adriansen, 2012) together with the children enabled me to talk about their deportability without having to talk specifically about their legal status as their change in status often coincided with them moving houses for example (see Lind, 2017, for an in-depth discussion on the ethical considerations in this project). Through these methods, I identified intricate everyday examples of how children in an irregular situation negotiate being positioned as “deportable” and express political agency in the process (*Article 1*). However, the children and their families were not just managing to express agency in a hostile context, they were also constantly vulnerabilised by it. This prompted me to engage in additional studies focusing on the state.

In the article so far, the notion of “the state” has mainly been used to refer to the overall policies and practices of governments. In practice,

however, the state is constituted by many different parts, institutions and individuals and not all state representatives or state actors have the same power or authority in the governing of migrant childhoods. In the empirical analysis below, the article discusses different specific state institutions and actors with different responsibilities (such as the Migration Agency, the Social Services, the Border Police and Government-appointed commissions of inquiry) as well as the government itself and highlights how they separately seem to work in the same direction of increasingly mobilising rights and vulnerabilities in the governing of the mobility and territorial presence of migrant children in families.

This analysis of state practices and argumentative logics draws on two additional studies, apart from my ethnographic fieldwork, that I conducted together with Anna Lundberg and Maria Persdotter separately. The first additional study was performed by Lundberg and me in 2014 and concerned assessments of the asylum applications of children seeking asylum together with their families at the Swedish Migration Agency (Lundberg & Lind, 2017). It has been debated for many years whether the CRC should be incorporated into Swedish law, and a recent Swedish Government Official Report (SOU 2016:19, 2016) has suggested potential legislation for such an incorporation. Lundberg and my study was ordered by the inquiry responsible for the governmental report where we studied 100 asylum decisions of children seeking asylum together with their families and conducted 10 interviews with 20 asylum officers at the Swedish Migration agency. The asylum assessment is a very important aspect of the vulnerabilisation of migrant children in Sweden. Many children get their asylum applications rejected and live as undocumented migrants for 4 years until they again are allowed to submit a fresh asylum claim (however, if no new circumstances in their case can be presented, the likelihood of getting asylum is very low under current legislation). In this way, in Sweden, the children affected by the asylum assessments are to a very large extent the same children that later experience being positioned in an undocumented position.

In the second additional study, Persdotter and I carried out a critical comparative reading of two different sets of government reports (SOU) and how they argued around the right to education for different categori-

sations of vulnerabilised migrant children (Lind & Persdotter, 2017). SOUs are produced by Government-appointed commissions of inquiry⁵⁴ and often make suggestions for new laws or amendments in current legislation, such as SOU 2007:34 (2007) and SOU 2010:5 (2010) that we studied, which preceded the law from 2013 that established the right to education for “all children who reside in Sweden without permission”. The other SOU that we studied was published in 2016 as a response to the increased presence of Eastern European, mostly Roma, EU-citizens begging on the streets of Swedish cities. It argued that so-called “vulnerable EU-citizen” children should not have the right to education in Sweden (SOU 2016:6, 2016). I suggest that the mixed methods this article builds upon give it increased validity by employing a kind of triangulation where different aspects of governmentality in vulnerabilised migrant childhoods are studied from different perspectives and at different scales.

Vulnerabilisation through the implementation of vulnerability assessments

Asylum applications can be understood in terms of vulnerability as an asymmetric negotiation between the claimant and the state, represented by its asylum officers and court system, where, most often, the state representatives – more or less explicitly – acknowledge that the claimant would indeed be exposed to increased vulnerability if it would return to its country of origin compared to if it would be allowed to stay in the host country. The negotiation then centres around if this level of vulnerability could be tolerated or if the host state is obliged to supply protection. This negotiation around the level of vulnerability of individual cases sometimes also, in parallel, plays out in the media (Josefsson, 2017b). Jonathan Josefsson (2017a) has shown that, in the Swedish Migration court of Appeal, only in a small minority of cases, the best interest of the child has been used as the primary normative source to enable positive asylum decisions. My experience, based on my ethnographic study

⁵⁴ <http://www.riksdagen.se/en/documents-and-laws/docs-laws/commissions-of-inquiry>

with undocumented migrants, is that for those who are refused asylum, a choice between two evils, or vulnerabilities, then remains: to return to the country of origin and risk increased vulnerability (or even death) there or to remain clandestinely in the host country and endure the protracted vulnerability which is a characteristic of deportability. The asylum process is thus the entry point where the Migration Agency and the Migration Courts position some children as deportable and a place where some children who are already in a vulnerable position from having fled persecution are further vulnerabilised through an exclusionary system (Squire, 2009).

In our study of the Swedish asylum system, Lundberg and I identified how assessments of children's best interest were persistently addressed through negating formulations in negative asylum decisions, such as: "the decision is not in contradiction with the best interests of the child"; or "it would not contradict the best-interests principle to go back home"; or "it cannot be considered negative for the child to go back home with her or his parents". These formulations leave unanswered the question of what the best interests of the concerned child actually *are*. The logic behind these formulations is that children's rights are *primarily* used for defining the worst possible living conditions, or vulnerabilities, in the country of origin that can still be tolerable to return a child to, or what the lowest possible level of protection entails. Still, the official position of the Migration Agency is that children's rights are being properly assessed throughout the process⁵⁵. We did identify a very limited number of instances in the 100 asylum decisions where children's best interests were assessed in a positive manner (see also Josefsson, 2017a). However, in our study, Lundberg and I highlighted one intricate process of talking about children's best interests in a negating way that can explain in detail how children's rights, in the Swedish asylum system at the time of our study, were mainly used to enable the exclusion of children seeking asylum together with their families. The practices of mobilising

⁵⁵ For example, in their annual report from 2012, the Migration Agency states that 'children's best interests are considered in all parts of the [asylum] process' (my translation). [https:// www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Vart-uppdrag/Styrning-och-uppfoljning/](https://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Vart-uppdrag/Styrning-och-uppfoljning/)

children's rights logics for primarily defining the worst possible living conditions in the country of origin that can still be tolerable to return a child to, and ignoring the question of what the best interests of these children actually *are*, withhold a potential source for decreasing vulnerability (that children's rights were intended to be) from already vulnerabilised asylum-seeking children. By refusing asylum-seeking children a proper assessment of their rights, while claiming to do a proper assessment and as such invisibilising the problem, the children are further vulnerabilised by the asylum authorities.

Most undocumented migrant children in Sweden have at some point been refused asylum, and as they enter into irregularity, they fall outside of much of the Swedish welfare system, which is a key source of their increased vulnerabilisation. One exception to this is the fact that the municipality of Malmö has since 2013 put in place regulations that allow undocumented migrants to apply for social financial support at the Social Services (see Nordling, 2017). However, in November 2016, the border police in Southern Sweden took the unprecedented decision to request information about postal addresses of undocumented migrants from the Social Services in Malmö (Mikkelsen, 2016a). This forced many families, including many participants in my ethnographic study, to leave their homes. My participants explained to me that the actions of the police undermined the possibilities of the Social Services to provide support to undocumented migrants since it effectively scares people, who are afraid of having their information being shared with the police, away from seeking support. Less than a year later, in August 2017, the border police in Southern Sweden yet again provoked controversy as they entered a summer camp for migrant families organised by the Church of Sweden in Malmö (Mikkelsen, 2017). A total of 30 police officers and dogs surrounded a scenic hostel in a national park and as a result five families with children of different ages were deported (four of which were participants in my ethnographic study). Both the provision of social financial support by the Social Services and the organisation of summer camps by the church are based on fundamental children's rights principles. In this way, the border police utilised the possibilities "provided" for them through these enactments of undocumented children's rights; address information collected to ensure that undocumented chil-

dren's right to a reasonable living standard was secured and activities arranged to support the right to leisure and health for traumatised families and children were used by the police to enable efficient deportation work. Arguably then, in these cases, the information and the administration of children's rights were used by the border police to govern the territorial presence of undocumented migrant children and, as a consequence, their experience of vulnerability was further increased.

The border police act on the decisions made by the asylum system, and align with the assessments that the increased vulnerability caused by rejections is tolerable. A recent governmental inquiry suggested that it could actually be considered a "humane intervention" to try and catch these families as a way to "help them get their lives in order, even if it can lead to deportation" (SOU 2017:93, 2017, my translation). Such patronising language is indicative of the multifaceted character of vulnerabilisation where the government first creates vulnerability by stripping undocumented migrants of rights, then define what vulnerabilities are intolerable (staying illegally in Sweden rather than returning to one's country of origin and risk persecution) and finally rationalise and conceal its response of governing migrants' territorial presence and mobility in the form of humanitarian interventions. Similar exclusionary argumentative logic clothed in humanitarian language can be found in arguments for and against undocumented children's rights.

Vulnerabilisation through argumentative logics of children's rights

When different actors, state as well as civil society representatives, discuss undocumented children's rights, an argument based on the non-discrimination principle in article 2 of the CRC is often proposed: children should not be held responsible for the actions and decisions of their parents to stay clandestinely in a country and should therefore have a right to education and health care, for example. Even if this argument may be considered reasonable it is often taken further and turned into statements that pit undocumented parents and their children against each other. Arguments for the rights of undocumented children have been put forward that attempt to strengthen children's deservingness by portray-

ing their parents as *bad* parents who put their children at risk. For example, the language of SOU 2010:5 (2010), which proposed the legislation on undocumented children's right to education, implies a sense of responsibility on the parents for putting the children in a difficult situation: "Children who are staying in the country without permission have most often not chosen their situation themselves. Instead, it is the actions of the parents that have led to the often difficult situation of the children" (SOU 2010:5, 2010, p. 149, my translation). Similarly, but in a much more patronising manner, a former Swedish migration minister argued that undocumented parents take their children as "hostages" (see Sager, 2014) and a proposition suggested that "it would be tempting [for parents] to use children in situations where the wish to migrate is strong, but the reasons for being granted asylum are not strong enough" (Regeringen, 1997, p. 247, my translation).

However, the views of the families" participating in my ethnographic study (*Article 2*) were the complete opposite. While governmental representatives viewed the parents as putting their children at risk by "hiding" them, the parents viewed the government and its institutions as putting their children at risk by trying to deport them. In some cases, the parents expressed how it was not only up to them to decide if they should stay in the host country, the children would have refused to return if they would have suggested to them that the family should do so. In addition, some of the older children supported their parents in their parental duties, often through translating for them, but also by taking responsibility for the family economy etc. Therefore, one has to take the intergenerational context of undocumented children's rights into consideration when arguing for them, or one risks marginalising the human rights of both children as well as adults. The interdependence of these families can be understood as a result of their mutual work to decrease their shared vulnerability. In arguments that pit children and parents against each other, children's rights are utilised to demonise undocumented parents, and as such, specific understandings of what is to be considered proper migrant parenthoods are implied – that is, these parents should not subject their children to the protracted vulnerability that characterises the irregular situation. Hence, when children's rights arguments are framed by paternalistic and demonising logics, these same

arguments become part of the governing of these children's territorial presence and mobility and contribute to processes further vulnerabilising these families.

An adjacent argumentative logic about vulnerabilised migrant children's territorial presence and the actions of their parents has been employed in governmental reports regarding their right to education in Sweden. Persdotter and I compared the arguments of one governmental report (SOU 2016:6, 2016) that argued *against* (what the report calls) "vulnerable EU-citizen" children's right to education, with that of two other SOUs that argued *for* the right to education for undocumented migrant children (SOU 2007:34, 2007; SOU 2010:5, 2010). Central in this discussion is the categorisation of different groups of migrant children and, arguably, the labelling of "vulnerable EU-citizens" in state discourse as such is part of a process that enables certain kinds of logics for this group of migrants in relation to others. The report from 2016 discussed whether so-called "vulnerable EU-citizen" children who overstayed their 3months right of residence in Sweden should be considered "undocumented migrants" or not and as such be entitled to education in line with the 2013 law. The report warned against an "all too extensive interpretation" of the universal right to education (SOU 2016:6, 2016, our translation) and suggested that if "vulnerable EU-citizen" children would be granted the right to education in Sweden, it would become a source of increased vulnerability, since the living conditions of most "vulnerable EU-citizens" in Sweden are so dire that these children would potentially be at risk of apprehension by the social services if they came here (SOU 2016:6, 2016, p. 51f). In this way, the 2016 report mobilised children's rights and children's potentially increased vulnerabilities to enable migration control.

Even though the different sets of reports came to different conclusions regarding different categorisations of vulnerabilised migrant children's right to education, they both shared a similar underlying logic. The 2016 report warned that if Sweden let "vulnerable EU-citizen" children go to school *here*, they would not go to school *there*, in Romania or Bulgaria, where it argued, from a perceived humanitarian, caring perspective, that it would be best for them to go to school. In the reports from 2007 and

2010, which suggested that undocumented children do have a right to education, the argument was somewhat similar although reversed. They argued that there is no perceived *there* for undocumented migrants where their right to education could be fulfilled and therefore, when they are in Sweden, no other country can supply education for them. It is their temporary presence *here* in Sweden that is the basis for why they should be entitled the right to education. Under the current regime of migration control, arguably, deportation and deportability are what makes it possible for the Swedish government to grant rights on the basis of territorial presence without abandoning its commitment to regulate residence. For undocumented migrant children, deportability means that they are held in a position of extended impermanence, and they can have the right to education, since it is only to be provided temporarily. For “vulnerable EU-citizen” children, the right to education is withheld in order to prevent their permanent settlement. In this way, children’s rights are integral to the governing of migrations to and through the European Union and defining and delimiting different categorisations of migrant children are central to this practice. Denying children education would generally be considered a fundamental source of vulnerability; however, in the negotiation between state sovereignty and migrant children’s rights, this principle can seemingly become questioned.

Conclusion

This article has put focus on examples in Sweden of how the vulnerabilities of migrant children in families have been mobilised for the governing of migrant children’s territorial presence and mobility through children’s rights logics. It has highlighted examples of where this governing takes place and is implied, including the Swedish asylum system, the collaboration between the Social Services and the Border Police and the argumentative logics expressed in Governmental reports and propositions. Arguably, these diverse sites where children’s rights are mobilised for the governing of vulnerabilised migrant childhoods all build, although more or less explicitly, upon a mutual logic of vulnerabilisation: the state is the creator of the administrative routines and conditions that lead to increased experienced, situational vulnerability, and then it uti-

lises children's rights logics to respond to this vulnerability it has itself created.

These logics build on a separation of parent's (perceived) problematic agency from the positioning of their children as vulnerable and not to be blamed for their parent's actions. In this way, (parental) agency and (child) vulnerability are linked in this process where the (perceived) problematic parental agency motivates hostile policies that then further increases child (and parental) vulnerability. Furthermore, by labelling migrant children as vulnerable the state rationalises its own response of governing by patronising and controlling practices cloaked as humanitarian interventions. Through this process, certain kinds of appropriate childhoods and parenthoods are implicitly defined where the fundamental problem is perceived to be the mobility and territorial presence of these families. However, I argue, as long as these families contest the territorial sovereignty of the state they will never be seen (at least in the eyes of the parts of the state engaged in migration control) as behaving appropriately no matter how "good" parents or children they are. Rather, what needs to be highlighted is how the vulnerability created by the state through hostile policies, makes parenting impossible and, consequently, childhood in this context unbearable. A potential difference between children migrating alone and those migrating with their families emerges through these conclusions: in comparison, there seems to be a tendency that unaccompanied migrant children are governed more often through arguments around their (problematic) agency, whereas children in families are more often governed through arguments mobilising their vulnerability, as their parents instead are the ones seen as expressing "problematic" agency. However, further research is needed on the topic as this is only a tentative observation based on a small number of studies with a limited scope.

Finally, I want to point out that I still believe that promoting human rights can be an expression of an active critical-democratic politics, founded in the activity of rightbearers themselves (I. R. Wall, 2012). Rights always hold political potential and are invented and reinvented by rights claimants (Ingram, 2008). What I want to highlight with this article however is that struggles for the human rights of vulnerabilised

migrant children and families need to be aware of this dual character of rights: They can both be vehicles for governing vulnerabilised migrant childhoods and at the same time hold a radical potential in the struggle for justice and equality for vulnerabilised migrant children and families here and now.

9. ARTICLE 4

THE CONTINUOUS SPATIAL VULNERABILITY OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS: CONNECTING EXPERIENCES OF “DISPLACEABILITY” AT DIFFERENT SCALES AND SITES⁵⁶

As a student in the PhD-program on Migration, Urbanisation and Societal change (MUSA) at Malmö University I have learned the benefits of thinking about and using the concepts of migration and geography research simultaneously. One central concept in both these fields is “displacement”, a word used to describe several different but interrelated phenomena in regard to forced mobility or removal. In migration studies, “displaced persons” primarily relates to the experience of fleeing from armed conflict (UNESCO, 2018). In gentrification studies, displacement is often understood as the “involuntary dislocation of households from city neighborhoods as more affluent households compete

⁵⁶ Article previously published in: Lind, J. (2020). The Continuous Spatial Vulnerability of Undocumented Migrants: Connecting Experiences of “Displaceability” at Different Scales and Sites. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 19(1), 385-96. <https://www.acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1814>

with them for the desirable older housing stock” (LeGates & Hartman, 1982, p. 31).

In this intervention I draw on my research on undocumented migration to suggest that these and other kinds of displacements are interconnected as they are expressions of various forms of spatial vulnerability at different scales and sites. I then attempt to connect this suggestion with a discussion about the potential usefulness of the concept “displaceability”, which has been briefly introduced in a blog post by Oren Yiftachel (2018) (as part of the “MIT Displacement Research & Action Network blog symposium”). Yiftachel (2018) suggests that displaceability can be understood as “the susceptibility of people, groups and developments to be removed, expelled or prevented from exercising their right to the city”. This understanding of displacement, Yiftachel argues, would potentially open up for a “new critical conceptualization of the contemporary city”. I argue that the concept can help us even further if it is connected to larger issues of transnational migration, but it also has to be discussed in relation to similar concepts such as “evictability” (van Baar, 2016) and “deportability” (De Genova, 2002).

This paper builds upon empirical observations made during ethnographic fieldwork among undocumented migrants in Malmö, Sweden and Birmingham, UK between 2014 and 2017 where I interviewed children and parents and took part in activities of NGOs and support networks that these families regularly attended (for more details on my methodology see Lind, 2017). In the UK it has become illegal for undocumented migrants to rent apartments and in Sweden the social services recently shared their address information with police authorities. Their extremely vulnerable position on the housing market often forces undocumented families to move to new apartments many times per year as they are constantly at risk of being evicted and thus are experiencing a state of “evictability” (van Baar, 2016). In my research, the participants highlighted how the continuous stress they felt in relation to their housing situation was one of the most significant aspects of their everyday lives of living in a state of constant fear of being deported, or in “deportability” (De Genova, 2002). This paper focuses on how the spatial vulnerability undocumented migrants experience in their country of origin, es-

pecially in the case of people fleeing war or violence, continues in their host societies both through the constant threat of deportation and through the fact that most of them experience difficulties finding stability in their housing situation.

Deportability, evictability and spatial vulnerability

In gentrification research, the position of undocumented migrants has been much neglected even though in the US, where much of this research takes place, the number of undocumented migrants is estimated to be 22.1 million people (Fazel-Zarandi, Feinstein, & Kaplan, 2018). However, recent studies have started to discuss the racialized character of gentrification processes and the way race, ethnicity and legal status intersect within them (Huse, 2018; Nelson, Trautman, & Nelson, 2015). In research on undocumented migration, the issue of housing security and its impact on wellbeing has been more thoroughly discussed (Burgers, 1998; Hall & Greenman, 2013; Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011). In his seminal work, Nicholas De Genova argued that the creation of deportability by the state is productive in the sense that it makes possible an exploitable and unregulated workforce through the legal production of a “spatialized and typically racialized social condition for undocumented migrants” and “provides an apparatus for sustaining their vulnerability and tractability as workers” (De Genova, 2002, 439). Building on De Genova’s work, Huub van Baar suggests that the concept of deportability should be de-nationalised to enable an analysis that avoids methodological nationalism. Analysing the situation of Roma minorities in Europe, van Baar introduces the concept of “evictability”, which is defined as “the possibility of being removed from a sheltering place” (van Baar, 2016, p. 214). Van Baar suggests that “contemporary forms of displacement are not limited to practices that are based on a rigid or crystal-clear distinction of border crossers along the (imagined) lines of the nation-state, state actors or political entities such as the EU and of those of ‘(il-)legalized’ ‘migrants’ and ‘citizens’” but that the securitization of migration has affected also how minorities are being governed as “inferior, evictable, and exploitable ‘European citizens’” (van Baar, 2016, pp. 214, 225). In this sense, evictability deconstructs binaries between ir-

regular/regular migrants as well as non-citizens/citizens and captures not only spatial but also political, economic and juridical forms of displacement.

Here I want to extend the discussions on deportability and evictability to thinking about the potential usefulness of viewing them as part of a more general phenomenon that relates to all different forms of spatial displacements that those positioned in deportability and/or evictability can experience along their life courses. Drawing on the experiences of undocumented migrants, I suggest various prolonged and connected experiences of displacement could be thought of in terms of spatial vulnerability. I draw on philosopher Catriona Mackenzie (2014) to argue for the usefulness of conceptualizing this phenomenon in terms of vulnerability. Mackenzie has made a distinction between inherent vulnerability and situational⁵⁷ vulnerability. Inherent vulnerability is universal and stems from our embodiment whereas situational vulnerability relates to contextual conditions caused by external social, political and environmental factors. A subset to situational vulnerability is what Mackenzie calls pathogenic vulnerability, which refers to what is seen as morally problematic or unacceptable vulnerabilities, or “surplus vulnerabilities” (J. Anderson, 2014, p. 154), that need to be eliminated. Forced displacement because of armed conflicts, deportations and displacement through gentrification are all examples of spatial vulnerability that is situational and pathogenic, meaning that this vulnerability is not embodied but contextual and considered problematic by various actors.

Experiences of displacements are wide ranging and interconnected, and I suggest that research on all issues relating to different forms of spatial displacements would benefit from thinking about them as interconnected forms of spatial vulnerability to better understand how the governing of local and territorial presence as well as mobility can take place at various scales and sites through the creation of pathogenic vulnerabilities.

⁵⁷ Sometimes “precarity” is used in a similar way as “situational vulnerability”. Clara Han interprets Judith Butler’s definition of the two terms as that “precarity is the differential distribution of a common human vulnerability” (Han, 2018) and in this way the two terms seem to be interchangeable. I use Mackenzie’s terminology here since I believe that it adds clarity to how different kinds of vulnerabilities can be conceptualized.

Importantly, as van Baar (2016) highlights, this governing is not only enacted by state actors, but displacement can be the result of practices by landlords, housing corporations or other forms of private capital actors, as well as different actors involved in the complex conflicts that cause forced displacements.

In the following section I will discuss the experiences of undocumented migrants in Sweden and the UK and show how context specific, structurally created spatial vulnerability “haunts” them through practically every stage of their life trajectories. Drawing on these cases, I then discuss the potential usefulness of connecting displacements at different scales and at different sites through the overarching concept of displaceability as the general experience of spatial vulnerability through potentially being at risk of displacement.

Experiences of spatial vulnerability

Undocumented migrant families in Sweden and the UK have often been forcibly displaced from their countries of origin because of armed conflict or them being at risk of persecution or violence. In Sweden, all the undocumented families from Afghanistan I met during my fieldwork were later granted asylum because of the ongoing conflict in the region whereas all the families from Balkan countries were refused asylum even though they all strongly believed they had strong grounds for protection because of their individual experiences of violence and threats in their countries of origin and the lack of protection they experienced by the authorities there. Many undocumented migrants in the UK have also had their claims for asylum rejected, but a larger part of the undocumented population (compared to Sweden) end up in an irregular situation by overstaying their visas. Not all of these people apply for asylum to regulate their legal status; in the UK public discourse those who do are often talked about in derogatory terms as “bogus asylum seekers” (Vollmer, 2014). As many of these applicants originate from former colonies of the Commonwealth, the chances of having their individual claims of persecution recognized by the UK authorities are most often slim. Still, many of the participants I met in the UK claimed that it

would be too dangerous for them to return to their country of origin and they saw no choice but to stay illegally in the UK.

In the host countries, undocumented migrants are not only susceptible to forced transnational displacement through deportation, but they are also often in an extremely vulnerable position on the housing market. Having to rely on second or third hand contracts, and/or having to share overcrowded apartments, many of the families and their children that I met were constantly looking for a more stable living situation. If they did find a place to live where the landlord offered a permanent contract this was still not enough to ensure permanency since many other factors played in to whether their living situation would work out long term. Thus, the question of housing is central to undocumented migrants and was perhaps the issue, apart from regularizing their legal status, that preoccupied my participants the most. It was highlighted by several participants during my research that the struggle to secure housing was the single most difficult issue they had to deal with in their everyday lives and the rent support the participants in Malmö received at the time from the social services were crucial for providing some security to their families.

Consequently, it was devastating to all of them when the border police in southern Sweden in late 2016 for the first time asked the social services for address information of undocumented migrants in Malmö – information that had been collected to make possible the provision of rent support on the basis of the rights of the children in these families. The border police suggested that these increased efforts to deport undocumented migrants were the result of direct orders from the government and their radical shift towards more restrictive and repressive migration policies after the so called “refugee crisis” in 2015 (Mikkelsen, 2016a). Several of the families I was in contact with in Malmö were on the list of names of “searched-for undocumented migrants” that the police sent to the social services. As a result, most of the families immediately moved out of the apartments they were living in at the time and for which they had often fought hard to find. Some had to stay in a homelessness shelter for several days with small children since they could not trust the social services and their offer of emergency housing. One of the

children I met in Malmö, a 16-year-old boy expressed how his spatial vulnerability affected him in the following words: “I am Albanian but I was born in Greece and I do not live anywhere. You cannot say that I live in Sweden because perhaps tomorrow I am not sure where I live, since I have been living in so many different places.”

Another family in Malmö had been living in the same place for a couple of years and managed to keep this address secret from the migration authorities. However, the school and social workers knew about their house so when the family was refused asylum again for the second time (after having waited four years since their last application was rejected) they moved houses out of fear that their address information, or information about where their child went to school, would somehow be shared with the migration authorities. The role of the quality of schools for families’ choices of where to locate oneself is hard to overestimate (Dobson & Stillwell, 2000). For undocumented migrants, this factor is amplified since a well-functioning school environment can be one of few safe spaces in undocumented children’s lives. The experience of having to change housing often meant that many families that I met in both countries were constantly struggling to limit the impact this could have on their children’s ability to safely attend school.

In Birmingham, UK, a couple and their 7-year-old daughter had been housed by a local housing organization while they were avoiding the authorities and preparing a new asylum claim. Once they were back “in the system” the organization helped them approach the social services who had a duty to assist the family with social housing. The parents were well prepared for this and understood that the housing organization needed to make space for those who were not eligible for housing support, but once they were relocated to an apartment by the council, the mother told me how they had been much better off at the housing organization. At the organization there was a real sense of support and community whereas she felt that the social services were constantly causing them problems and applying for asylum was in many ways more stressful than living as undocumented migrants since they were now more in direct contact with the effects of the “hostile environment” (Price, 2014) policies of the UK government. For several of the families in the UK,

moving house interacted with change of status (*Article 1*) as they were provided with some sort of social housing once they submitted a new application for regularization. The mother told me about how stressful it had been to approach the authorities again: “Yesterday it was me and my inhalers” she said, “I was really short on breath”.

Migrants in the UK are subjected to various hostile policies expressed through an increased pathological, spatial vulnerability created by the authorities. Many who had been living in an undocumented situation but entered the system again in the attempt to be regularized were offered housing far from the areas where they had established themselves and found a place for their children in school. For certain groups monetary support was put on so called “Azure cards” (see Carnet, Blanchard, & Ellis, 2014) that they could only use at specific supermarkets, often located several kilometres away, even if they had a local store in their neighbourhood. Asylum seekers have also been forced to travel to specific Home Office locations in cities far away from where they live to sign in regularly, even if there is such an office in the city/town they live in.

The structural construction of pathological spatial vulnerability for undocumented migrants and migrants in general, as expressed through the above examples, is made specifically clear if we look at the “Right to Rent” policy, put in place in the UK around 2014. During my fieldwork, the UK government rolled out a pilot project of introducing a rule that made it illegal for landlords to let housing to undocumented migrants. The policy puts responsibility on landlords to check the immigration status of potential tenants, introducing heavy fines for those who break the rules (Crawford, Leahy, & McKee, 2016). This makes the policy different from most other aspects of the “hostile environment”, since it relies on private citizens and not state agencies to conduct the controls of migrant’s legal status – something that is not always easy to do even for experienced migration lawyers (which was also highlighted in a critical report from the Residential Landlords Association, see Simcock, 2017).

The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants conducted a survey among more than 300 landlords and letting agents which showed that 51% of landlords surveyed said that the scheme would make them less

likely to consider letting to foreign nationals (JCWI, 2017). The UK parliament's own Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, David Bolt presented "An inspection of the 'Right to Rent' scheme" in early 2018 and concluded that it "is yet to demonstrate its worth as a tool to encourage immigration compliance (the number of voluntary returns has fallen)" (Bolt, 2018, p. 7). Bolt also pointed out that after three years there had not been any evaluation on the potential racial discriminatory effects of the policy, or the exploitation and homelessness it may have contributed to. Sharon Leahy, Kim McKee and Joe Crawford (2018) show how these policies amplify the precarious position of migrants and ethnic minority groups in general. They argue that the shared vulnerability of these groups caused by this policy is intensified as power is moved into "the hands of agents from the private rented sector to make decisions on the viability of renters' claims to belong" (Leahy, McKee, & Crawford, 2018, p. 608; see also Lukes, de Noronha, & Finney, 2018).

Connecting experiences of "displaceability"

The examples above show how spatial vulnerability on the housing market for undocumented migrants is produced through direct forms of governing in the UK, by making illegal to let apartments to undocumented migrants, and more indirect forms of governing in Sweden, by sharing of undocumented migrants' address information between the social services and the border police. The "Right to Rent" policy is a specifically clear example of how hostile policies towards undocumented migrants are expressed through spatial "vulnerabilisation", or the creation of pathological vulnerability as a form of governing (*Article 3*). I argue that it is necessary to analyse this spatial vulnerability on the housing market as connected to the spatial vulnerability many of these same people have experienced as they have been forcibly removed from their countries of origin because of armed conflict or them being at risk of persecution and violence, as well as their ongoing experience of living in a state of deportability. By connecting these forms of displacements, we can see how in western liberal states and regions (such as the EU) as well as in conflict-torn countries and regions from where refu-

gees originate, spatial vulnerabilisation is a tactic and a result of policies and practices by those in power at all sites at various scales simultaneously.

In this intervention I further suggest that these different forms of displacements could be better understood through the concept of “displaceability”, which I propose could be used as an overarching concept to capture the broader experiences of spatial vulnerabilisation shared by many different groups who are continuously living with an overshadowing threat of potential displacement. This paper points towards experiences of displaceability that undocumented migrants often experience both in their country of origin and in their host societies (as well as when they are transiting between these two sites). The concept of displaceability has the potential of connecting research areas, such as, for example, forced migration studies, studies on undocumented migration and gentrification studies. Migration researcher Stephen C. Lubkemann de-couples displacement from forced migration suggesting that displacement should be defined as “a disruption of key life projects (especially those involved with the navigation of the expected social life course), that is caused by an imposed interruption of the established baseline socio-spatial management strategies upon which those projects are premised” (Lubkemann, 2008, p. 468). This perspective of the “diffusing” of displacement is also important to bring into a discussion about displaceability; it does not necessarily imply the actual potential dislocation of a person but can also encompass the potential of losing a sense of home. The constant fear of having to change apartments or being deported is also detrimental to undocumented migrants’ (and not the least children’s) ability to make oneself feel at home. This is arguably a sought-after effect of most governing through displaceability (see *Article 3*).

De Genova and van Baar have both highlighted the broader socioeconomic and political contexts of contemporary mobilities and how relationships between capital and labour, and the maintenance of a racialised and precarious workforce tend to be made invisible through processes involved in the creation and reproduction of deportability and evictability. Displaceability involves these processes too, but further in-

cludes experiences of forced displacement resulting from persecution and protracted violence. This connection is the main reason why I suggest that displaceability is a useful addition to the conceptual toolbox of migration and gentrification studies as well as any other subject area in the social sciences that engages with different forms of displacements.

Finally, a discussion on displaceability needs to connect also to migrant's responses to potential spatial vulnerabilities so that people at risk of being displaced are not positioned as only vulnerable, passive agents without capacity to affect one's situation. People at risk of displacement are often the ones who take action in relation to their situation and become politically engaged as a result of the politicisation of their current context (for an example of how this also relates to children, see *Article 1*). In this paper however I have chosen to focus on the structural limitations and threats to the self-chosen emplacement of groups positioned as vulnerable to enable a discussion of how these various threats are connected and continuous on different scales. Future research and debates are welcomed to discuss the potentially agentic characteristics of displaceability.

Conclusion

The examples in this paper are limited in scope and do not represent a comprehensive list of experiences that could be categorised as expressions of "displaceability". More research is needed to establish which additional phenomena the concept potentially could help us understand better. However, my main reason for suggesting that this neologism could be useful is that I believe that research more generally would benefit from looking into how policies and practices that construct spatial vulnerabilities locally are connected to national and transnational policies and practices that construct them globally. The concept could help to capture the spatial character of the experiences of vulnerablised groups: their potential displacement and being denied of a sense of home are central techniques through which vulnerablised groups are being governed globally today. I suggest that spatial vulnerability and displaceability as concepts could potentially be useful as "new keywords" for "rethinking the conceptual and discursive categories that govern

borders, migration, and asylum” (New Keywords Collective, 2016), and to talk about how vulnerable groups are governed continuously and simultaneously at various scales and at various sites.

10. THESIS CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I first summarise the thesis by connecting the articles that make up its main empirical contribution through the conceptual lens of vulnerabilisation expanded upon in chapter 2 and *Article 3*. Returning to my ontological starting point of paradoxes, dilemmas and ambiguities, I reflect on how the articles, together with the rest of this thesis, answer the research questions and help fulfil my aim *to investigate, across different scales, the politics of undocumented migrant childhoods and family life in the UK and Sweden through a critical engagement with the concepts of agency, rights and vulnerability*. In the later parts of this final chapter, I reflect upon the wider relevance and implications that my findings may have for political work and activism as well as future research.

Overall summary

All of the children I met during my fieldwork in Birmingham, UK and Malmö, Sweden struggled to make their lives as “normal” and similar to their peers as possible. They did not want to stick out or to be perceived as different or vulnerable. In this way, part of how they expressed agency was through trying to arrange their lives so that the vulnerability that followed from their deportability would have as little impact as possible on their everyday lives. One can read their struggles as an active contestation of the vulnerabilisation by the state. They may be vulnerabilised, which they can do nothing about, but they can resist the vulnerability bestowed upon them with help from family, friends and support networks by focusing on school and helping their families stay afloat.

Vulnerability and agency are not mutually exclusive. The children may be considered pathologically vulnerable (meaning that their vulnerability is not inherent but contextually created and seen as problematic) by the state since the state's primary concern is that they should leave the state territory, but they resist this positionality by placing themselves in an everyday context of pursued "normality". These actions by the children, primarily highlighted in *Article 1* (corresponding to research question 1), are important for an understanding of how the paradoxical positionality of undocumented migrant children as both rights-holders and perceived transgressors of immigration law at the same time is navigated by the children themselves.

The concept of parents as "humanitarian agents", briefly discussed in *Article 2*, is central to the overall argument of this thesis (and for answering research question 2). I suggest that parents are forced to be a substitute for the lack of institutional support that creates their children's increased vulnerabilities in the irregular situation. The state apparatus provides fundamental support to children to protect them from potential vulnerability through the rights-paradigm. However, it does not reach out to fully protect undocumented migrant children in the same way as citizen children. To complement the lack of support from state institutions, the parents act out parental practices of physical and emotional labour (what I refer to as motherwork). Also, because of the interconnected character of family ties in deportability, undocumented migrant children act out motherwork to different extents as well, as they take on responsibilities for the whole family.

In the eyes of the state, however, the parents are rather exposing the children to more vulnerability, as the most important vulnerability in the eyes of the state is that of living in an irregular situation. This vulnerability trumps families' own perceptions of the situation in their country of origin as a much more critical source of vulnerability. However, in my research I also saw how some families expressed how the everyday experience of deportability is sometimes worse, or equally bad but in a different way, than the everyday situation in the assigned country of return—the crucial difference being that they did not fear for their lives or severe persecution in the host country. When the states then make it im-

possible for the parents to fulfil their parental duties of care and providing for their children's fundamental needs because of the pathological vulnerabilities that the state exposes them to, the families become vulnerabilised. Because of this, I argue that the rights of undocumented migrant children need to be understood in their intergenerational context.

The fundamental problem is perceived by the states to be the mobility and territorial presence of these families. Certain kinds of (in)appropriate childhoods and parenthoods are implicitly defined in this process. I argue that the families are caught in a paradoxical double-bind situation—a trauma-inducing and vulnerabilising, implicit form of control performed by paternalistic states: as long as they contest the territorial sovereignty of the state they will never be seen as behaving appropriately no matter how “good” parents they are. This could also be understood as a catch-22 situation: they can only *be considered good parents* if they *provide security from harm for their children*, but they cannot *provide security from harm for their children* since they are *not considered good parents*. What needs to be highlighted is how the vulnerability created by the state through draconian policies towards vulnerabilised migrant families and children makes parenting impossible and, consequently, childhood in this context unbearable.

Even though *Article 1* does not include much discussion of rights, the perspectives of the children themselves discussed therein are important for an understanding of the paradoxical positionality of undocumented migrant children. This paradoxicality is important to keep in mind when one discusses the issue of what the human rights paradigm can potentially do to protect and attend to the interests of these children. For example, the use of the legal category of “deportability” in Swedish law as a basis for the right to health care and education is problematic. The legislation retains the link between rights and territorial residence criteria as the law extends the right to health care (Lundberg & Spång, 2017) as well as education (Lind & Persdotter, 2017). Hence, the laws that extend the right to health care and education, at the same time, both reproduce and cement the categorisation of undocumented migrants as deportable *and* their rights as being based on their temporary territorial presence, i.e. their constant possibility of being deported (*Article 3*). In this way,

these rights produce and regulate “the subjects to whom they are assigned” (W. Brown, 2004, p. 459).

The understanding that vulnerability is a universal experience and that human rights institutions were put in place to ameliorate human vulnerability (Turner, 2006) can help bridge the analytical connection between vulnerability and rights. Such an approach may be useful if utilised as a strategic choice, but when one studies this relationship in more detail (as is needed to respond to research question 3 of this thesis), one also sees that there is a flip-side to it—a result of the dangerousness of rights; the vulnerability that is created by the state through deportability and the positioning of undocumented migrant children as vulnerable is sometimes responded to with rights arguments that are mobilised to enable migration control and to patronise and demonise the acts of undocumented migrant parents. In *Article 3*, I show how children’s rights logic, as well as the practices and activities put into place to provide rights, are at times utilised to govern undocumented migrant childhoods and to control their mobility as well as their territorial presence. In this sense, children’s rights are dangerous (Sokhi-Bulley, 2016) and in need of constant problematisation (W. Brown, 2004; Douzinas, 2007; McNeilly, 2018; I. R. Wall 2012, 2014) especially in the context of irregular migration.

Article 4 extends this argument and shows (and thus responds to research question 4) how undocumented migrants have often been spatially vulnerabilised through different forms of spatial governing across different scales all through their life courses; their experiences of fleeing from war and violence, living under the threat of deportability and being unable to find stable housing arrangements in the host country are connected as different forms of spatial vulnerabilisation. Altogether, this thesis highlights, and attempts to understand, how expressions and understandings of agency, rights and vulnerability shape, and are shaped by, central political and paradoxical processes that characterise the everyday lives of undocumented childhoods.

Implications for political work

A central focus of this thesis has been to problematise how policies and practices in relation to undocumented migrant childhoods relate to children's rights logic. This problematisation has pointed at how we cannot take for granted that policies formulated with the stated aim of considering undocumented migrant children's best interests are not primarily operationalised through logic and practices that stem and control their mobility and territorial presence. In light of this, one could say that if human rights are *dangerous*, policy recommendations are *very dangerous*. Any attempt to suggest and improve actual policies (in the contemporary, mainstream understanding of the concept) on the basis of the work of this thesis risks feeding into the same "machine" that, in the end, often produces outcomes of the same kind that have been problematised in the thesis. Rather, I hope that my research can primarily be of *political* relevance for migration struggles focussing on acts, rights claims and contestations by and on behalf of vulnerabilised migrants. The ambition in this concluding chapter is thus to make suggestions for how political work and future research can be politically aware when engaging with the logic and processes that shape the future of vulnerabilised migrant childhoods.

Earlier research has called for a more "robust deployment of vulnerability" and a "consideration of the potentially pathological implications" of responses to vulnerability, which highlights the risks involved with the increasing use of vulnerability discourses and interventions to motivate human rights work (K. Brown et al., 2017, p. 499). Similarly, Gündoğdu (2015) argues that Arendt's critique of human rights foregrounds the risks and possibilities involved in human rights-based work that comes from the inherent perplexities of human rights (p. 47). The political implications of the analysis in this thesis for human rights work includes an attentiveness to the risks involved in engaging in dangerous (Sokhi-Bulley, 2016) human rights arguments and practices. Such work needs to be aware of the possibility that human rights discourse can be appropriated by actors who primarily have the interest of sovereign states in mind. There is neither use for "reckless optimism" nor "reckless despair" regarding the possibilities of human rights work with migrants

(Gündoğdu, 2015, p. 211, referring to Arendt, 1951, p. vii). Rather, there is a need for politically aware constructive thinking about the risks involved as well as the radical potential of human rights. It is difficult to conduct political work in general, and perhaps in relation to human rights in particular. Below, I elaborate on a few key risks and potentials that I find central for future political and academic work.

Risks

This study has highlighted the risks involved in humanitarian work responding to understandings of innocence and vulnerability, and how it can easily be mobilised for the governing of undocumented migrant children's mobility and territorial presence. Gündoğdu (2015) warns that humanitarianism tends to "mobilise a moral economy of compassion, which can end up undermining the political agency of subjects who are represented as suffering victims" (p. 57). To be reminded of the political agency of vulnerabilised migrant children can thus help when thinking critically and create more political awareness in efforts to reinvent human rights. Only a politics of human rights that focuses on the political agency of rightsholders themselves can withstand the pacification of humanitarianism (Gündoğdu, 2015, p. 17).

Rights claiming by undocumented migrants who try to avoid deportation involves the risk of visibility (Sager, 2018; Villegas, 2010). To be able to position themselves as subjects of rights they must in some way expose themselves to the view of surrounding society and potentially also the police. This risk that visibility brings with it is perhaps the primary reason for why it is so problematic to idealise the struggle of undocumented migrants themselves. And it is perhaps also the main reason for why the political potential of human rights for the struggles of undocumented migrants is limited, as rights claiming in its political sense is most often a visible act. The constraint that fearing visibility puts on one's political capacity is related to what Balibar (2014) (referring to Arendt) sees as the "true right to have rights", namely the right to insubordination. This is a right "that is not granted but is taken or exercised at the risk and danger of its bearers, and that is for this very reason the true right to have rights, in a way the right of rights" (Balibar, 2014, p. 285).

If one fears deportation too much to make visible insubordination possible, that in itself can be understood as the most central lack of the right of rights. Struggles for undocumented migrants' rights must therefore always be sensitive to, and politically aware of, the issue of visibility.

Furthermore, there is a risk that the category of "the undocumented migrant" is essentialised through human rights work. Arendt (1951) points to the development in post-war Europe in which the increase in the number of rightless people contributed to a shift in attention away from the responsibilities of persecuting governments and, instead, towards the status of the persecuted (p. 294). This observation relates to the point that Brown (2004) makes about how rights "produce and regulate the subjects to whom they are assigned", a process by which the more rights a group is perceived as having simultaneously corresponds with the cementing of its positioning as vulnerable and subordinate (p. 459). It is important to note, as Krause (2008) does, that undocumented migrants are not best understood in terms of identity politics, since their status is imposed by the state in the form of a legal status (p. 342). However, political issues of race and coloniality, for example, that relate to questions of identity, are also part of the intersecting struggles by and for undocumented migrants. Still, politically aware human rights work for undocumented migrants must consider the position of rights claimants and think creatively about whether or not there are ways to claim rights that do not reaffirm the current system in which different categorisations cement exclusion.

Potentials

Whatever potential one can find in mobilising vulnerability for undocumented migrant children's rights, I argue, one will find through staying aware of the fundamentally political character of how childhoods, vulnerability and human/children's rights are constructed and understood. Vulnerabilised migrant children are "multipositional subjects" who engage in ever-changing struggles of political identities and positionalities (Smith & Bakker, 2008). Balibar (2014) suggests that exclusion is the other side of inclusion, and that equality and freedom can only be imposed through the "revolt of the excluded" and take place on several

scales and levels at the same time (p. 207). Children are arguably in a unique position when it comes to struggles over inclusion and exclusion. They transgress boundaries and borders in their everyday lives as well as in regulations, and these transgressions can expose the “fragility” of adult power (Jenks, 2005, p. 145). Childhood researcher Chris Jenks (2005) concludes his seminal book about childhood with a reflection on how children’s challenges can be understood as critiques of the current order. He does not suggest that one should romanticise children’s innocence, but their disruptions could be “a source of critical examination of our dominant means of control” (Jenks, 2005, p. 150). Children can be an inspiration for our reflective criticism of the dominant order and the need for transgression to understand how, for example, hegemonic systems of morality and ethics, including the human rights paradigm, can limit the imaginable political possibilities.

One researcher who studies undocumented migrant childhoods, Catherine Allerton (2018), highlights that children’s unauthorised status is not produced in the same way as it is for adults, since children’s status is usually dependent on the status of their parents. She draws on the work of Mae Ngai (2004) who views undocumented migrants as “impossible subjects, persons whose presence is a social reality yet a legal impossibility [...] a person who cannot be and a problem that cannot be solved” (p. xxv, 52). In relation to children, this impossibility could be read as yet another expression of the child migrant paradox; if adult undocumented migrants are impossible subjects, then undocumented migrant children push this “impossibility” to its limits.

Could this position of impossibility, even though it may seem detrimental to one’s political standing, perhaps be an opening for contestation? Perhaps it is more productive to think of undocumented migration as a problem that cannot *not* be solved (to paraphrase W. Brown, 2002 and Spivak, 1993). The absurdity and paradoxicality of undocumented migration were some aspects that made me interested and engaged in political issues concerning migrants’ justice a decade ago. The Kafkaesque everyday reality of undocumented migrants that I got to know made me question my view of the Swedish welfare state, but it also fascinated me in some sense. As I discuss in chapter two, Fassin (2012,

referencing Saint Augustine) points to the fact that the suffering of others instils both horror and pleasure in the viewer: “one feels sadness when one sees the misfortune of others, but cannot detach oneself from this vision” (p. 251). This “ugly” aspect of human nature that fetishizes the “vulnerable other” is perhaps best processed by channelling it into political action; one must never “get used to” or be complacent in regard to the fact that undocumented migration as a phenomenon will most probably continue to exist for the unforeseeable future. By persistently understanding undocumented migrants, and perhaps even more specifically undocumented migrant children, as “impossible subjects”, one can also persist in framing undocumented migration as a problem that cannot *not* be solved. One key argument of this thesis is that humanitarian, de-politicised approaches to issues such as undocumented migration easily become contra-productive. One possible way forward is to channel and mobilise tendencies of well-meaning humanitarian organisations and individuals by problematising and, *at the same time*, mobilising their empathy to enable a struggle that is both politically aware and persists in the long run (see Povrzanović Frykman & Mäkelä, 2020).

I argue that undocumented migrant children are in a special position of creating ruptures in the human rights paradigm that both excludes and includes them at the same time. Earlier research points in the same direction. Childhood researcher Jonathan Josefsson (2016) suggests, in his study of asylum seeking children, that studying the rights claims of this group as “a socio-political practice” can be useful because of their ambiguous status: “they are effectively non-citizens, making claims from the margins or from outside the political community, and they are children, ‘citizens in the making’ with limited political and legal rights” (p. 29). Geographer Erika Sigvardsdotter (2012), in her study on irregular migration and the right to health care in Sweden, argues for a similar approach, in which it is the flaws of law-implementation, the material practices of rights providers and the existence of loopholes and openings for resistance that provide a basis for how the relationship between undocumented migrants and the state can be understood (p. 30). Also, Krause (2008) highlights the success of the “sans papier” movement in France as an effect of the movement’s ability to politicise their situation,

which also inspired others to “rethink their own citizenship practices in a democratic way” (p. 345).

It is also possible to imagine that vulnerability can be disconnected from paternalism and victimisation and be a source of contestation. Butler and colleagues (2016) argue for this and suggest that vulnerability is part of resistance through the embodied character of political interventions and interdependencies, and the acceptance of its universal character holds the potential to inspire collective agency in the struggle for equality and freedom (p. 7). Butler (2009) calls for political work that focuses less on identity politics and more on shared precarity or vulnerability, as it can form a basis for a shared opposition to state violence “and its capacity to produce, exploit, and distribute precarity for the purposes of profit and territorial defence” (p. 32).

One approach to the concept of vulnerability, in relation to irregular migration, argued for by Fabio Macioce (2017), who draws on the work of legal scholars Lourdes Peroni and Alexandra Timmer (2013), is that it could also be used in a legal context to put pressure on states to respond to the specific vulnerabilities produced by irregularity. Macioce takes the European Court of Human Rights as an example of a court that has reasoned around vulnerability in different cases in which the concept has been taken into consideration to hold states accountable. In these court cases, states have been requested to consider the proportionality and reasonability of their actions towards undocumented migrants and they have been asked to “provide proof that migrants’ specific conditions and vulnerabilities have been considered” (Macioce, 2017, p. 12). A further discussion of the possible legal arguments that could be constructed for undocumented migrants on the basis of vulnerability is beyond the scope of this thesis, but in such kind of work it is also necessary to be reflexive and politically aware of the reproductions of categories and concepts that one becomes implied in. Courts can be as much a part of the problem as the solution when it comes to protecting undocumented migrants, as they practice within the human rights paradigm and the nation state order. A recent court decision by the European Court of Human Rights in which it was decided that Spain was within its rights to expel two migrants who had entered the country irregularly without giv-

ing them the opportunity to seek asylum is a case in point (Amnesty, 2020).

In my understanding, not even the more constructive thinkers out of those who consider the political character of rights are hopeful that rights claims, or practices of so-called “right-ing” (I. R. Wall, 2014), can evade the limitation of rights in our contemporary world, which is completely immersed in the nation state system. Any suggestion on how rights could create ruptures in this order are still on a visionary or utopian level, focussing on the future-oriented and unfixed character of rights (McNeilly, 2018), even though any practices or acts that start moving in that direction are useful and important to encourage and support. However, it is important that any such projects do not yet again individualise the struggles of the actors who engage in such practices, and thus repeat the consistent problem characterising the human rights paradigm in which effective struggles aiming for change to eliminate injustices and inequalities on a structural level are undermined. Perhaps, at the moment, in the context of undocumented migrant childhoods, the most we can hope for (to return to W. Brown’s [2004] question) is a politically aware rights struggle that becomes part of dissensual politics in creating torsions both in the fabric of the nation state system that reproduces vulnerabilities such as deportability, as well as in the fabric of the dominant, de-politicised human rights paradigm itself.

I believe there is a radical potential in thinking critically about the agency, rights and vulnerabilities of undocumented migrant childhoods. By pointing out how the state produces child vulnerabilities through the creation of the state of deportability one can construct arguments regarding the created torsions in perceived “child-friendly” states such as Sweden and the UK. A specific radical potential lies in the *doing* of children’s rights, what could potentially be called child-right-ing; every time one invokes children’s rights, one also takes part in a political act—rights claims and political action should never be separated, which would be a good place to start. As researchers and activists, we need to understand the claims by and on behalf of undocumented migrant children as part of an on-going political struggle over what is being taken for granted, a struggle to re-politicise childhoods and migrant children’s

rights and, as such, give them renewed political meaning. I believe that through unveiling taken-for-granted understandings of undocumented migrant children's vulnerabilities and innocence, covert paternalising practices and the logic of the state can be brought out in the open and thus more effectively resisted.

Most importantly, however, we need to remember that children's rights or rights for every person can never completely fix the fundamental problem of deportability, namely that it is productive of vulnerability in itself. The currently paradigmatic approach to rights as a matter of implementation will never do more than, to a larger or lesser extent, alleviate the suffering produced by state-induced vulnerability caused by the structural limitations and deprivations inherent to the state of deportability. Only by disrupting the continuous production of deportability and engaging in universal and perpetual programmes of regularisation of undocumented migrants, or the complete termination of borders themselves, can we create a world in which the institutionalised racism concealed as migration policies is a memory of the past.

Implications for future research

In relation to the overall issue of human rights and vulnerabilisation, future research needs to keep a reflexive approach to issues of migration in general (Dahinden, 2016) and migrant childhoods in particular. Inspired by the approach of Carol Lee Bacchi (2009) one could ask: "What's the problem [of vulnerability] represented to be?" This question could be broken down into a number of sub-questions that need to be asked when analysing different actors' use of vulnerability to describe and name different groups and phenomena. For example:

- What are the actual material, corporeal and pathological (etc.) experiences and risks of harm that are being referred to as expressions of vulnerability in each situation?
- What is the political context in which the identification of specific vulnerabilities takes place?
- What different, and perhaps contrasting, kinds of politics can definitions and labelling of vulnerability mobilise or justify?

The questions could be rephrased in a very similar way in relation to the taken-for-grantedness of the human rights paradigm.

- What interests are at stakes in struggles over the human rights of migrant children?
- What is the political context in which the negotiations around specific rights takes place?
- What different, and perhaps contrasting, kinds of politics can rights-arguments mobilise or justify?

I argue that the implications for future political and scholarly work somewhat overlap since, in both contexts, one of the key issues at stake are our taken-for-granted ideas about how human rights and vulnerability can be understood in relation to migrant childhoods. In both political work as well as future research there is a need for further reflexion and political awareness, and questions like those suggested above can help activists as well as researchers better understand the prerequisites and presuppositions that condition political and scholarly work in this field.

One issue that holds potential for both future research and political work regarding irregular migration on a relatively pragmatic level is the issue of “firewalls” (Carens, 2008; Crépeau & Hastie, 2015; Hermansson et al., 2020, see also ECRI, 2016). A firewall is the principle that rights provisions for undocumented migrants should be separated from border control. Rights-providing institutions and agencies should not be allowed to share information about undocumented migrants with the Border Police and the Border Police should not be allowed to arrest migrants on the basis of their immigration status inside or in the vicinity of rights-providing institutions and agencies. Both aspects of the firewall principle were violated in Sweden during my research when the Social Services started sharing information with the Border Police in 2016 and when the Border Police entered the camp organised by the Church of Sweden in 2017. In the UK, no firewalls exist in practice between the Social Services and the Police, but some firewalls have been re-erected between the Home Office and the NHS, in which the latter will no longer have to share information on patients’ immigration statuses if they have not committed serious crimes, which was a result of the backlash

that the “Windrush” scandal caused for UK politicians (Campbell, 2018). The lack of firewalls decreases trust in public institutions among undocumented migrants but also in terms of the role of democratic institutions and it makes many undocumented migrants hesitant to access rights that they are legally entitled to. In Malmö, for example, after the Social Services shared information with the Border Police, many children and youths stopped going to school (at least for a while) and delved further into poverty as they no longer dared to access social financial support.

I have, together with several colleagues, worked on a theoretical development of the firewall principle (Hermansson et al., 2020) in which we discuss how firewalls are constructed and negotiated at different scales, from personal attitudes among social rights providers, via informal and formal policies at NGOs and institutions to firewalls inscribed into national and international law. Firewalls are not an answer to the question of what rights undocumented migrants should be entitled to. Rather, they are an answer to the question of how these rights can be protected and how access to them can be sustained. The constructing and defending of firewalls through political work, as well as the practicing of them in human rights work, are all political practices that can be part of human rights work for undocumented migrants in a very practical way. In a sense, firewalls enable the initial *right* to have rights (Arendt, 1951), as they protect undocumented migrants’ right to claim rights safely. They are also part of a solution in relation to issues of visibility as, to a certain extent, they protect rights claiming and political work for undocumented migrants from the Border Police. Through these processes, firewalls remind us of the political character of human rights.

Also, firewalls are not just necessary for the everyday provision of undocumented migrants’ rights; they can also be pivotal to processes of regularisation. Legal support is necessary for migrants who try to regularise their stay in the host country, and much of the legal support for undocumented migrants is provided by NGOs and pro bono lawyers. If the physical spaces where this kind of legal support takes place are not protected from immigration raids, people run a greater risk of becoming stuck in a state of deportability (Hermansson, Lind & Scott, 2019). Also,

many of the activities that make up the organised political work of undocumented migrants takes place in similar kinds of spaces. Therefore, firewalls can provide the necessary protection that makes rights claims and political struggles possible. In this way, constructing, defending and practising firewalls is a crucial part of politically aware human rights work for undocumented migrants. Discussions around issues like these mainly take place within the literature on Sanctuary Cities (see Bauder, 2017; Bauder & Gonzalez, 2018; Darling, 2010; Ibrahim & Howarth, 2018; Lundberg & Strange, 2016; Mancina, 2016), but the concept of firewalls could productively be incorporated into these debates about sanctuary to conceptualise many of the practices of protection that are already discussed in the sanctuary literature.

Finally, I suggest that children's rights call for a rethinking of rights in future research and political work in relation to futurity. Following Bhabha (2014), I believe one has to have a forward-looking approach to insisting on the human rights of migrant children. Their rights are not just about protection on the basis of compassion, but they are also central for "building just foundations for an inclusive, diverse, and globally mobile future society" (Bhabha, 2014, p. 16). Wall (2008) argues that children's rights should be understood as "pressing for a new conception of human rights as such" (p. 538). In a similar vein, political scientist Sana Nakata (2015) argues that since children are perceived of as mainly "future-beings" in society, it is not surprising that children are governed beings. For her, the politics of childhood primarily emerges in the exclusion of children through this conception of them as future citizens (Nakata, 2015, p. 12). These arguments speak to McNeilly's (2018) futurity approach as well as Seeberg and Goździak's (2016) observation of how migrant children's futures are a central question in political struggles around migrants' rights. Future research about the human rights of undocumented migrant children would benefit from keeping a close eye on issues regarding futurity, since undocumented migrant children's future is central to both the governing of children and for thinking constructively about the unfixed sense of human rights politics. If struggles about children mainly concern their future and the future of human rights are open, an approach to rights as something always yet to come creates possibilities for thinking openly about how justice and equality

for undocumented migrant children can be achieved here and now. Societies can be judged in relation to how they treat those who are in the least privileged position in society, such as undocumented migrant children. Thinking about what societies we want to build together in the future, in which everyone's current needs and abilities are taken seriously, can help us to start organising those societies already now—both in state practices and in the everyday lives of all the differently positioned members of society. By organising our current societies in a more just and equal way, especially for children, we create a more hopeful future for all.

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Children's rights are crucial in the everyday struggles of undocumented migrant children and families, yet rights are also mobilised for migration control. Equally, whilst undocumented migrant children are labelled as vulnerable, often their parents are demonized. A central cause of undocumented migrant children's vulnerability are the hostile policies created by states who, in turn, use that vulnerability to rationalise the governing of their mobility and territorial presence. The paradoxical politics of undocumented migrant childhoods are examined in this thesis, through an analysis that contrasts the arguments and practices of state actors with the experiences of undocumented migrant children and families in Sweden and the UK. Through this analysis, the political character of agency, rights and vulnerability emerges, and the limitations and opportunities for change are revealed.

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