
Belonging and Identification: Challenges and Negotiations in Refugee Children's Everyday Life in Norway

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Abstract

Settlement is a highly symbolic period of time for migrants who are granted the status of refugees and welcomed into their host society. Beyond what settlement represents for a state – its welfare system and its local communities that orchestrate the integration process for refugees – individuals are in the process of experiencing settlement. This chapter highlights the importance of identification in refugee children's life experience of settlement and sense of belonging. It shows that children's individual and collective identification, through their interactions with others, are key elements in achieving a positive experience of

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belonging. From a young age, children have insights into complex issues of both inclusion and exclusion as well as experiencing both similarities and differences. Children's experiences of belonging during the process of settlement are negotiated at multiple levels in their everyday life. Drawing on qualitative research conducted with refugee children in Norway, the findings show that children are active in exploring strategies to belong. However, the feeling of belonging to Norwegian society requires time and a fair number of good opportunities. Providing refugee children with opportunities that give them new experiences and positive social interactions during the process of settlement can help them figure out how best to negotiate the challenges they could encounter on their journeys in their new country.

Keywords

Belonging • Identity • Refugee children • Asylum-seekers • Settlement

1 Introduction

Settlement is the process during which refugees and asylum-seekers that have been granted residence permits are supported by their receiving country while settling down as new members of society. As much as the idea of settlement evokes the end of a difficult journey and the final point in a long period of movement, settlement involves, in most cases, other forms of mobility. For refugee families, settlement is a period of time filled with contrasts and new challenges in their lives.

Each year the number of applicants for asylum in receiving countries fluctuates according to the scale of crises in conflict areas in the world and also because of other influencing factors, including prevailing conditions in particular areas such as international politics, agreements, and asylum policies in receiving countries. In their report published in 2014 the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimated that with 11,470 asylum applications in 2013, Norway ranked 15th among the top receiving countries, representing 2 % of all applications among the main receiving countries (UNHCR 2014). Statistics produced by the Norwegian Directorate of immigration (UDI) show that from the year 2000, Norway has witnessed a sudden increase in the number of applications for asylum, increasing from 6,500 individuals in 2007 to 14,400 in 2008 (UDI 2009) stabilizing to 11,500 in 2014 (UDI 2015). Of the 11,500 individuals who applied for asylum in 2014, 2,600 were children (this number includes unaccompanied minors) and 1,425 were accompanied by at least one parent (UDI 2015). An absence of accurate statistics makes it difficult to assess how many family units these children represented at the time of application. However, it is known that in 2014 there were 2,223 children accompanied by their parents residing as 1,249 family units in Norwegian asylum centers (UDI 2015).

As a category of migrants, children are important actors in the portrait of international migration. They are important not only by their number but also because of the circumstances that children must face when escaping from injustices and conflicts. Ní Laoire et al. stated that: “[T]he powerful ideologies that place idealized childhoods in fixed and bounded spaces are challenged by the complex realities of the lives of many, or most, of the world’s children” (2010, p. 157). The increasing frequency of international migrations has generated greater numbers of published studies that explore childhood in international migration and also the childhood of transnational families. These include studies of: migrant children’s active engagement in the household’s integration through language skills (Orellana et al. 2003); children’s places of belonging in immigrant families and transnational communities (Olwig 2003); children’s experiences of identifying with two coexisting, culturally different ethnic groups (Jacobsen 2002; Knörr 2005; Schmitt 2010; Valentine et al. 2009) or facing social differences (Devine et al. 2008; Devine and Kelly 2006); and children’s negotiations of migration, homes, and belongings (Ní Laoire et al. 2010; Archambault 2012).

To settle is, by definition, to put an end to one’s displacements and to establish residence. For the majority of people, the experience of moving into a new house and a new neighborhood is a form of “settlement.” However, in the case of refugee families this concept takes on a much greater significance. For refugee children and their parents, the very moment of achieving settlement marks the beginning of new possibilities, such as: the acquisition of a “normal” status; the ending of a difficult experience of war or persecution; a form of success after a long period of waiting and insecurity during asylum; or the way out of an uncomfortable setting in asylum centers. For many, settling also means developing a sense of belonging in a foreign society and reestablishing contact with transnational relatives (Al-Ali and Koser 2002).

This chapter highlights how identification to a nation or a local community cannot be taken for granted when viewed from refugee children’s perspectives. Settlement, as an essential part of international migration of refugee children, gives insights into how questions of nation may arise and how belonging and identification are negotiated at different scales of interactions in the everyday lives of refugee children (Archambault 2012).

Drawing on a qualitative research project involving refugee children (aged 7–12 years), this chapter helps to shed light on processes that may contribute to understanding refugee children’s experience of identification, both as individuals from migrant families and as members of Norwegian society. Taking the onset of the process of settlement in Norwegian society as the point in time when children and their family are officially welcomed into the nation, this chapter explores how refugee children experience belonging at different levels. The chapter highlights refugee children’s perspectives on social life, which is central in the vast amount of work in the sociology of childhood and which emphasizes the value of studying children and children’s relations “in their own right” (for example, Alanen 1992; James and Prout 1997; Qvortrup 1997; Thorne 1987).

2 Collective Identification and Children's Identities as Migrants

Borrowing from Jenkins' perspective on social identity (2004), this chapter takes as a starting point the view that social identity is not limited to a feeling of belonging but can also be constituted by a series of contrasting social experiences. Jenkins' perspective is developed on the premise that identity finds its meaning in relation with others, within a group. Jenkins argues that with respect to identification, the individually unique and the collectively shared are routinely entangled with each other and that individual and collective identification only come into being within interaction (2004, pp. 15–16). The most significant contrast between individual and collective identification, as Jenkins points out, is that the former emphasizes *difference* and the latter *similarity*. In reference to the work of Goffman (1969) and Giddens (1991), Jenkins suggests that “the world as constructed and experienced by humans can be best understood as three distinct ‘orders’ (2004, p. 17)”: the individual, the interaction, and the institutional.

The **individual order** focuses on the identity of the self, both internal (as a self-definition) and external (as definitions of oneself offered by others). It is enacted in the way people think and “what-goes-on-in-their-heads” (Jenkins 2004, p. 17).

The **interaction order** is also a feature of what Jenkins calls the internal-external dialectic, namely, what others think about us is as significant as what we think about ourselves (p. 19). It is expressed in the way people interact, or in other words in “what-goes-on-between-people” (p. 17).

The **institutional order** is “the human world of pattern and organisation, of established-ways-of-doing-things” (p. 17). It refers to group identification. Groups are constituted of individuals who “realise that they share a similar situation and define themselves accordingly as members of a collectivity” (p. 21). One can identify with the collectivity, but the group must also identify that “one” individual as a part of the collectivity. There must exist both an internal and an external identification for an individual to experience belonging.

The group identity, as Isin and Wood (1999, p. 19) explain, is a process whereby individuals recognize in each other certain attributes that establish resemblance and affinity. Citizenship and national identity are examples of group identity. The experience of shared group identity generally brings an experience of being acknowledged which is not foreign to the concept of belonging. Probyn suggests to view belonging as “the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places or modes of being” (1996, p. 19).

Allison James (1993) sheds light on how children's identity constructs in conformity with what is perceived as a norm for a certain age group. For younger children, sameness can be interpreted as a positive aspect that confirms to children that they belong (*ibid.*, p. 141). Children's perceptions of conformities and norms are not foreign to Barth's (1969) work about ethnic groups and boundaries. He develops the notion of boundary as the tension point where one meets the differences between oneself and others; the point where one is faced with one's own self; and, often so, the point where others also make a decision as to whether to recognize

an individual as being a part of “us” or “others.” Boundaries are met when faced with differences.

Jenkins’ tripartite model as described above may appear as a straightforward process; however, social identity and interactions are rarely straightforward. Jenkins’ model is used throughout the chapter as a tool to visualize the multiple intersecting levels with which refugee children must deal with to reconcile both internal and external forms of identifications. The individual, interaction, and institutional orders meet in the spheres of children’s everyday life. But where they meet and how they meet may at times create great “borders” in children’s lives. Olwig (2003) makes a helpful analysis of how children in migration processes create their own understanding and interpretation of their everyday lives. In their own right, migrant children are capable of developing different ties and places of belonging connected with the various spheres of life. That is what Olwig (2003) describes as the creation of different social sites of belonging and what she calls the making of places of belonging.

3 Settlement of Refugees in Norway

This section presents the context of settlement in Norway and the research context and methodology, followed by a presentation of findings.

Being granted a residence permit as a refugee is a long process that requires many steps. Individuals who are persecuted or who fear inhumane treatment in their home country are entitled to apply for asylum in receiving countries. In Norway, depending on the case and the situation of the applicants, the treatment of asylum cases can take months or years from the start to the time when the final decision is reached. During the waiting period, asylum applicants to Norway are housed in asylum centers which are, variously, shelters such as decommissioned health establishments, old boarding schools, residence halls with common kitchens and restrooms, or modest apartments.

Asylum-seekers whose applications are approved are granted a residence permit and given the option to settle in a Norwegian town. Most families leave the municipality of the asylum center and settle in another municipality within the same administrative region; others might choose to stay in the same locality but reside outside of the shelter system. Not all asylum-seekers who are granted a residence permit are granted the status of refugee; however, the term refugee is used in this chapter in order to distinguish between asylum-seekers awaiting an answer from the authorities and those who have been granted a residence permit.

Settlement is a period of important life changes during which the Norwegian state supports adult refugees while they settle and learn to make a living as independent citizens. Refugees who need settlement assistance are entitled to be offered housing in a municipality. The Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi 2015) cooperates with the municipalities regarding settlement.

Since 2004, adult refugees who have settled as new residents have had to take part in a compulsory 2-year Introduction Program offered to people between 18 and

55 years of age. The program must be followed on a daily basis in order for them to qualify for monthly benefits. The objective is for adults to develop basic skills in the Norwegian language and gain a fundamental insight into Norwegian social conditions, with a particular focus on participating in paid work (Djuve 2011).

Responsibility for the Introduction Program is assumed by the receiving municipality. Under Norwegian jurisdiction, municipalities have a right to self-determination and are not compelled to follow a specific plan unless it is stipulated under Norwegian law. However, the Introduction Program for adults is governed by national law, under which the state respects parents' responsibilities, rights, and duties (Archambault 2010).

When it comes to the integration of children, the national plan aims to facilitate Norwegian language acquisition (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion 2015). The plan is based on parental support, resource personnel in schools, and child care provision (Gran and Scoufia 2005 p. 66). A budget is planned by municipalities to cover the expenses incurred by the schools in the carrying out of statutory supportive measures in relation to children's introduction to school, language support, and the follow-up documentation of their progress. In cases where children have lived in asylum centers long enough to have already mastered the language, there is no need for them to follow a special program once settled. They are, however, offered mother-tongue classes to reinforce their acquisition of Norwegian skills.

While parents become involved in the Introduction Program aiming for their inclusion into paid work, the plan and guidelines of integration for refugee children in Norway are meant to encourage their participation in society, safeguard their best interests, and ensure they do not experience discrimination (Articles 2 and 3 of the UNCRC; Archambault 2010). It is believed that a successful integration for refugee adults and children should, ultimately, lead them to experience being active members of Norwegian society (The Labour Party et al. 2005).

4 Research Context

Twelve refugee families with 21 children aged between 7 and 12 years old (12 girls and 9 boys) participated in this research (Archambault 2011) between 2007 and 2008, which was the period before and after their official settlement in a municipality. Exchanges with younger and older siblings occurred at various times during fieldwork, but they are not included in the sample.

The refugee families originally came from eight war-torn or conflicted countries (Somalia, Eritrea, Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Kosovo, Albania, and Palestine). They stayed in seven different asylum centers located in central Norway. They then settled in seven new municipalities within or outside that region with only one family choosing to stay in the same town as the asylum center. Half of the participants stayed in Norwegian asylum centers for approximately 1 year, while the other half stayed between 2 and 5 years.

Fieldwork was carried out in two steps: a first meeting and interviews with the refugee parents and then with the children. The meetings with the parents took place in the asylum centers, where the families lived at the time of being granted their residence permit. The second meeting, involving interviews with the refugee children, took place 3–6 months after their official settlement in their new town and home. After the first meeting, contact with the refugee families was maintained by phone and instant messages to make sure the researcher would be informed of the time and the location of their settlement, in order to arrange the second meeting. The data collection methodology was inspired by the “mosaic approach” as set out by Clark et al. (2005), enabling children to express their views differently. Besides interviews with both refugee children and parents, various other methods of collecting data were used with the children (walks in the neighborhood, drawings, dialogues, and observations of daily activities in homes). Throughout, the research framework observed ethical guidelines (Alderson and Morrow 2004).

Before the first interview with each refugee child, an interview was conducted with the parent(s) while children were, typically, attending school. Then, a stroll from school to home with the refugee child/children, or a walk around the neighborhood, provided the opportunity to break the ice and get to know their interests. This was also an occasion for refugee children to get to know the researcher better (Fine and Sandstrom 1988). After the walk, a semistructured interview guide was used for the formal “one-to-one” interview with the refugee child, which was conducted in Norwegian. Finding an appropriate place to conduct the interviews with refugee children brought many challenges during the fieldwork (Ennew and Boyden 1997).

As a first step, refugee children were prompted to tell the story of their experience by starting from definite events such as: their daily routine; their arrival in Norway; their first day at school; the story of receiving the “positive” answer saying they could settle in Norway; their arrival in the new town; and home of settlement. By narrating such steps of their experiences, refugee children were encouraged to create narratives as a way to express their identity in terms of their self-conception of their lived-life (Rapport 1997). Through narratives, they selected the significant experiences about movement or meeting with new social spaces and relations. In so doing, refugee children expressed different processes of identity and belonging.

5 Refugee Children’s Experience of Identification

Jenkins argues that identification “is the basic cognitive mechanism that humans use to sort out themselves and their fellows, individually and collectively (...) it is how we know who’s who and what’s what” (Jenkins 2004, p. 13). The findings presented here relate to the following question: how do the realities that refugee children may face through settlement become part of their individual identification or the way that others identify them? Underneath this main question lie other questions that will be touched upon in this section: (1) What do refugee children identify with and how do they experience being identified by native Norwegian

children during settlement? (2) How do refugee children create places of belonging in their local Norwegian community and still identify with their own family?

During the fieldwork, important themes were covered with refugee children and families, but the subject taken up with each child varied according to their own interests, their age group and/or their gender. In a quest to explore how refugee children dealt with the process of identification (internal and external), subjects such as differences among the children at school, experiences of conformity, exclusion, inclusion, and discrimination were taken up with refugee children. The data provide insight into the ways that refugee children deal with individual and cultural differences and similarities.

The type of material collected – individuals' and families' narratives about experiences of settlement – does not allow for a generalization and categorization of the children as part of one collectivity. However, the refugee children and their parents participating in this research project have in common the experience of flight, of asylum, of settlement in Norway, and of belonging to a linguistic minority.

A significant aspect of integration and, more generally, of being part of a society, is found in the experience of "belonging." But, what gives refugee children a feeling of belonging? One question in particular that was put to the refugee children during the second interview – after settlement – helped to shape the analysis presented in this chapter. They were asked to write down (or draw and talk about for the youngest children) something that describes them; who they are and what is important to them. Refugee children were asked to present themselves in the way they would wish to present their "self" to a new person. Some wrote a couple of lines while others wrote a full page. In most cases, presentations included:

- Their name and age
- The name of their school and the grade they are in
- The name(s) of their sibling(s)
- The name(s) of good friend(s)
- A list of interests and/or special skills
- Where they (or their parents) originally came from or where they lived prior to their settlement (the town of their asylum center)

This seems to mark the elements that are most important in their life; namely, the elements children identify with and which identifies them. Many of these elements can be referred to as what Olwig (2003) calls "places of belonging." Most children showed in their self-presentation that they identify to local physical sites and social positions. When refugee children meet differences and similarities with other children, these elements of their individual identity take a central part in children's own analysis of how the boundaries they meet create challenges in their everyday life.

In terms of what Jenkins refers to as the individual order of life in collectivity, most children experienced being different and even identified themselves as such. These differences, or similarities, were not viewed as surprising by the children: they were part of who they are. The narrative of Zena (10 years of age from Eritrea)

may serve as a typical example in this respect. At the time of the first meeting, she had already perceived the similarities and differences, with which she identified personally and which others identified with her. Beyond the observed differences, she also expressed an example of boundaries she met. Thus, Zena's way of understanding the world, in contrast to the way others view it, appears to mark that boundary. And it is a boundary that she is not ready to cross in order to be like "them."

Jo Do you feel like you belong here in Norway now?

Zena Yes

Jo How then?

Zena I don't know, I just do. We have the same food, fashion and the same things. But many friends of mine ask me: how many boyfriends have you had? If I say none, in Eritrea it is not allowed to have boyfriends, then they ask: – are you going to have one now? Then I say no. – But if you see a cute guy then? No. – But why not? I am not allowed having a boyfriend. – But when you are in Norway you have to follow Norway's rules they say. So I say that it is just your imagination and that actually you don't have to have a boyfriend because you've turned 18! It does not mean it is a rule.

(Zena, 10)

Zena first mentions a series of similarities, or what she believes to be the same for herself and Norwegian girls, and refers to consumer goods. She associates with the food and what is regarded as the fashion and concludes they are the same, but that their cultural values are not the same. Between the collective values and her family values, she is confronted with a boundary she is unwilling to cross. In her narrative, Zena is looking more to the future or to the conceptual problem of eventually having boyfriends when she is older. There are two differences that separate her from her Norwegian friends. Firstly, her Norwegian friends like to speculate about future boyfriends – she does not. Secondly, the Norwegian friends are sure they will have boyfriends in the future, while, given cultural differences, Zena feels she might not. In fact, Zena expresses a difference that she suspects will persist between her and the Norwegian girls. Being a girl and the oldest child in the family, Zena may feel that her mother, a single parent, will be stricter with her than with her younger siblings.

As reflected in Zena's narrative, refugee children anticipated and accepted that their personal and cultural background, family experience and limited time in Norway in some ways made them different to Norwegian children. However, once refugee children come to terms with these elements, the next step is then to understand how they negotiate the interactions and their sense of belonging, which Jenkins refers to as "interaction order." The following examples are chosen in order to explore experiences that define children's processes of identification both as individuals and as members of Norwegian society.

5.1 The Meaning of Language: “I Could Never Feel Norwegian”

Initially, on the subject of belonging to Norwegian society, refugee children pointed to elements describing the established ways that Norwegians have of doing things. One example that illustrates Jenkins’ concept of “institutional order” is that Norwegians speak Norwegian. Betsy (8 years of age from Eritrea) explains it by pointing out that although some things are the same, and some things are different, she does not feel Norwegian, because she does not speak Norwegian well enough. Evaluating her own language abilities, she insisted that even in 5 more years she would still never speak Norwegian like “them” and, therefore, would never feel Norwegian. She believed that the language difference would always be maintained.

To explore refugee children’s identification with Norwegian society, beyond language differences, they were asked age-appropriate open questions such as, “do you feel like you are Norwegian?” or “do you feel like you belong here in Norway?” Ten year old Mila (from Serbia) underlines the same elements as Betsy but goes further in her explanation. She claims the linguistic differences will always persist despite personal beliefs and wishes. Mila pointed out an important issue: irrespective of your own views on difference – how you perceive yourself, and the way others perceive you, is different.

Jo You have been living in Norway for many years now, do you feel Norwegian?

Mila No, I am not Norwegian. I cannot be Norwegian. I cannot feel like I am Norwegian, because I am from Serbia. But after having lived in Norway so long I am a bit Norwegian. But I don’t feel Norwegian so much. I cannot be Norwegian. I don’t think of myself as Norwegian, but just that I have been living a long time in Norway and also that I have learned quite a lot of Norwegian. But you know, my friend, she believes she is Norwegian.

Jo Your friend from Serbia?

Mila Yes, that is what she believes I think. She speaks Norwegian and therefore she believes she is Norwegian. But she doesn’t pronounce (Norwegian) like them, I hear it. She believes she does, but I hear she pronounces (Norwegian) like a Serb. My sister is just the same. And she too believes she speaks like them. I cannot speak Norwegian like Norwegians do. Their pronunciation is much better because it is their mother tongue.

(Mila, 10)

Mila’s insightful analysis of her language skills and that of her friend and sister shows how speaking a language is not sufficient to be perceived as “Norwegian.” In the first interview with Mila, she spoke about how difficult it sometimes is for her to speak up and express herself and therefore she has only a few friends. She often feels judged and is afraid of being teased in school. She compares her situation with

that of her older sister with a tinge of irritation. Focusing on the fact that her sister does not worry about the same things, she underlines that her sister has many friends and does not seem to bother herself about using the right words.

What Mila describes is a similar experience to what Valentine et al. (2009) describe from their research conducted in Denmark. The Danish context of integration has focused on teaching Danish language, thus making language an important marker of identity among the young people interviewed for their study. Likewise, Norway also has an introduction program with a great focus on language acquisition. In contrast, Olwig (2003) explains in her work conducted in Canada among families with a Caribbean background that the awareness of “the importance of appearing different corresponds to the notion of ‘visible minorities’” (p. 223). In Canada, the official term of “visible minority” was introduced in the 1980s. This category includes persons who are non-Caucasian in race or nonwhite in color and who do not report being Aboriginal. Statistics Canada currently uses a complex classification that was approved as a departmental standard in 2009 (Statistics Canada 2015). Olwig explains further that ethnic categorization based on places of origin is occasioned by physical appearances. The young people interviewed in her research used, at different levels, the complex ethnic categorization system when asked about identification.

Similarly, the term “language minority” is the Norwegian state’s official term to refer to children, young people, and adults whose mother tongue is different than Norwegian, Sami, or other Scandinavian languages and who need special support to facilitate their integration to Norwegian society. It appears that the awareness of the importance of not “speaking Norwegian like Norwegians do” is central to the identification of the children interviewed in the research.

5.2 The Centrality of School as a Space for Social Interactions and Identification

Relationships are important in one’s identity. The conversation with refugee children led them to point out particular people or groups with whom they identify. School was seen as a significant place of identification based on their social interactions with other schoolmates. As a matter of fact, after settlement many refugee children commented that they missed their previous school, that is, the school they went to while living in asylum centers. They longed for their friends, their teachers, the activities, and various opportunities, such as having access to a piano, the proximity of a friend’s house, and one’s reputation as the fastest runner.

While for refugee parents the period of settlement represents the first possibility to become active in the receiving society by starting the program of integration, settlement for refugee children means being relocated in another community within the same country. Essentially, settlement for most refugee children bears the experience of moving out of a community and into a new one. Settlement also bears the risk of being once again perceived as a foreigner, rather than as “Ahmed, the best runner of the whole school.” In this re-migration, refugee children need

once again to prove their own similarities with the others, or their skills, which they know will be valued by their peers.

The school with which refugee children are affiliated forms a central part of their self-identification with the local community. This might not be surprising, as it is where children spend most of their time outside of their “home” (Olwig 2003). At first sight, the establishment of contact with schoolmates is facilitated by sharing common interests for activities and showing *savoir faire* among same aged children in those common fields of interests. Somali Abbas (10 years of age) left the town of his asylum center with the reputation of being an excellent football player. He moved to a new town and started school there during winter. In his narrative, he explains that he gathered potential friends around him during playtime at school by showing initiative and skills in a field of activities bringing about collaboration and friendship.

Abbas I have some friends, some kids I play with during break times.

Jo What do you talk about with them?

Abbas I don't talk much with them. We just play together. I started digging a tunnel, you know in the snow, and then they came and played with me.

Jo They thought it was a good idea!

Abbas Now that is what we do at break times.

(*Abbas, 10*)

Abbas' social and physical skills, together with his long experience of playing among Norwegian children in the town of his asylum center, gave him solid grounds to be acknowledged for his *savoir faire*. He had enough experience and confidence in himself to interact with the others by initiating an activity that brought out their collective similarities.

Contrasting with Abbas' experience, Iraqi Adan (10 years old) had difficult interactions with other boys of his age while staying in an asylum center. In the conversation with Adan, he gives the names of his friends in the new school. He explains that having had a difficult experience earlier, he wanted to develop friendships only with Norwegian boys in the new town. His immediate neighbors had an immigrant background and he had no intentions of getting acquainted with them. In order to help him develop his thoughts on what interests he believed to have in common with Norwegian boys, he was asked what he likes to talk about with them:

Jo Did you make friends at school?

Adan Yes, Bjarne, Håkon and Hans.

Jo They have Norwegian names.

Adan Yes, I don't like to play with those from other countries.

Jo Why is that?

Adan It is just like that, I prefer to play with Norwegians. It was the same in [town of asylum center]. (...)

- Jo* *What do you talk about with the boys at school?*
Adan *Computer games and that type of thing.*
 [...] -
Jo *Do you have computer games here?*
Adan *No, I don't. Not yet, but I know about them. I can talk about them. When I visit my best friend in Oslo [500 km away and of the same origin as Adan] then I can play games.*

(Adan, 10)

Later, Adan notes that he had no friends from school visiting him at home and mentions that there is “no point in inviting them here yet, I don’t have any Nintendo games here”. Showing, through conversations with other boys at school, that he shares common knowledge helped him create friendships. Although he keeps it to himself, his own knowledge is based on a limited experience while visiting a friend on holidays. The popular tendency of inviting friends over after school is not yet a possibility for him. Adan’s strategy is a very clear performance of what Allison Pugh (2009) calls “facework.” Pugh widely explores how the desire for consumer commodities, among children (aged 5–12) in California, is part of a deeply held need to belong. The children make connections with each other through values they share, by talking about things important to their lives. “Children use talk to establish who is part of their world” (p. 50). She explains that “when children find themselves without what they need to join the conversation, they perform (...) ‘facework’ to make up for the omission” (p. 7).

The experience of Biniam (7 years old and Zena’s younger brother) is another example of a young boy’s sense of nonbelonging. Lacking skills that are valued among his young schoolmates at break times, school appears in Biniam’s narrative as a critical arena for interplays that awaken differences instead of similarities.

- Jo* *How is it at your new school?*
Biniam *It is not good.*
Jo *Is it not?*
Biniam *They say I am black and I am not Norwegian. That I cannot do much, that I am not good. I have not come as long as them at school.*
Jo *That’s not good news.*
Biniam *They laugh at me. No one wants to play with me. No one in the class.*
Jo *What do you do then during play time?*
Biniam *I play football.*
Jo *Well, that is good.*
Biniam *Yes but, they do not want me to play with them. I am never chosen. If I play, my team loses and the other wins. If I play with the other then they lose and the other wins. They laugh at me.*

(Biniam, 7)

Biniam's mother overheard the conversation. Worried, she explained that there are only Norwegian children in his class and that there are hardly any "colored people" in the whole school. "Children are not used to that" she explained. "At the other school [referring to the town of their asylum center] it was rather different as the children were used to the foreigners from the asylum center." Exclusion in common activities at school gave Biniam a feeling of not being accepted – both because of his visible differences [darker skin] and his lack of skills in activities other boys his age appeared to master and value.

Research conducted in Ireland (Devine et al. 2008) shows that name-calling and racially motivated verbal abuse are a common form of expression of racism in school playgrounds. This was not expressed by the refugee children in this research as strongly as in the work of Devine's team. Some examples were mentioned by the refugee children, but judged by them as outside of the ordinary behavior. They referred to such events as a form of teasing. Aware that this is not tolerated within the school or classroom, refugee children who felt victimized by that form of verbal abuse knew they could call for help or report it when it happened. With the few cases of "teasing" that were reported, it was unclear what had triggered children's exclusion.

The experience of Biniam, as referred to above, shows how, at a young age, children develop insights in collective inclusion and can identify from where the struggles come, both individually and in their interactions with others. When positive experiences and skills are developed early on, during their process of integration, this may support a child's ability to negotiate the challenges being faced at different levels and in different spheres of their everyday life.

In research conducted with Norwegian school children, Lidén (2005) observed that children with a migrant background have different experiences of integration. Their abilities and their ways of dealing with their status differed according to various conditions. For instance, whether or not children participated in afterschool leisure activities – and the type of activities they were associated with – would inevitably lead to differences in the type of network and differences in the experience of participation that children would have. The participation in afterschool activities appeared to make inclusion at school easier because it gave children common experiences where they acquired common social and cultural codes. That type of network gave children extra opportunities to acquire the necessary knowledge and a variety of social codes that they could then reuse in other contexts.

The examples of Abbas, Adan, and Biniam, above, illustrate the significance of school contexts as a space for social interactions and identification. The sense of belonging is negotiated in the interplay of dynamics between individual, interaction, and institutional orders, where acquiring notions about the collective ways of doing things is central in children's making of places of belonging.

5.3 The Meaning of Hijab in Narratives of Nonbelonging

The following narrative expresses a number of differences/challenges that came up in another refugee child's life (Nadia, Iraqi, 13 years of age) because of her family's

integration strategy related to the hijab. Drawing on empirical findings, Furseth (2011) underlines how the hijab creates boundary work and identity negotiations among immigrant Muslim women in the Los Angeles area, and how the hijab is a contested symbol with multiple meanings. Nadia's narrative exemplifies both the complexity of the symbolic meaning of the hijab and also some unintended consequences of challenging her own tradition. At the time of the interview, Nadia communicates that she is struggling with her own identity, because of a strategy adopted by her family upon their arrival to Norway. Believing that the general perception of Norwegians was "no tolerance for the hijab" they protected their integration by choosing not to use it.

This strategy might be viewed as what Goffman (1968) labeled as "passing," mostly associated with strategies of trying to pass as "normal," a strategy also found to be evident in empirical studies of adult immigrants (Valenta 2009). To be seen as more similar, Nadia hid the truth about her practices around the use of hijab. Pointing out that she is the only Muslim girl in her school, she does not feel that she is accepted; she experiences Islam to be wrongly prejudged; she has no interests in common with the other girls. The following quotation captures the complex implications of a family decision which was made with the intention of favoring Nadia's settlement and integration process. In the exchange below, Nadia is visiting the researcher's town, where she has a conversation with the researcher.

- Jo* *So how have you been, how is life in [town A]?*
- Nadia* *It is not a life. I just hope we can move out of there. I do not have friends. They don't understand me. It would be much better in a bigger town.*
- (...)
- Jo* *I see you wear the hijab today; you did not wear it when I met you in [town A].*
- Nadia* *No, see that is a problem. I want to wear it but I can't there.*
- Jo* *Why can't you... what do you think?*
- Nadia* *Because I started there without it. I cannot change suddenly. Like wear it suddenly.*
- Jo* *Did you wear it in your country?*
- Nadia* *Yes I did since I was 9. But when we came here, we thought it was better if it was not worn. That we would not get a positive answer [asylum application] if we wore hijab, because here, people don't like people with hijab. At school, when I started, the other girls were asking where I was from and said they did not like people with hijab. I said: I did not like it either.*
- Jo* *Did you say the opposite of what you thought?*
- Nadia* *Yes, I said it because I know they don't like it, so I said I don't either.*
- Jo* *But now?*
- Nadia* *I do not feel right when I don't wear it, but there are no other Muslim girls there. Only me. That is why I think we will move to a bigger place. Soon, in a year or two. I hope.*

(Nadia, 13)

The changes that she is experiencing create a distance between how she presented herself to others and how she perceives herself. This affects her interactions with other girls her age and creates a greater distance between the collective identity she is parting from and the one she desires to be a part of.

Nadia is not comfortable in having friends over at home either, but mainly because she feels as though she does not share the same interests as the other girls of her age. Girls of her age are into athletic activities and they meet after school for training. Nadia has not yet found a field of similar interests that brings her closer to the other girls in her locality. While chatting in her bedroom, she showed the researcher pictures of her family back in her homeland and said that she has a collection of Bratz dolls she no longer associates with, because it is no longer for her age group. Faced with two spheres that do not seem to connect with each other, she appears to be trying to find something else that could help her belong to the girls in her age group. She mentions new interests about makeup, drawing, and playing the guitar.

Jo Did you make friends you can meet and do things with after school?

Nadia I don't meet others. I go home and see mom and dad and do my homework. All they do is sports: handball, football. . . I am not interested in that. After school I go home.

Jo What would you be interested in doing?

Nadia I don't know, like painting or music or maybe theatre. But they don't do that here. Just sports. They are athletic people.

(Nadia, 13)

Beyond her meeting with contrasting interests and cultural differences, Nadia is also forced into a new lifestyle. She grew up in a big city in a war zone where outdoor activities did not exist for girls of her age. Her intellectual skills and success in the Norwegian school system are solid, but apparently do not carry enough weight for her to experience belonging among other girls in her age group. A more natural decision for her family, when communicating their desires for settlement to the municipality in charge, would have been to wait for a place in a bigger city. However, Nadia's parents' situation and strategy for their career lead them to remain in the village of their asylum center. Nadia deeply questions the decision that was made. She wishes her family to be resettled so she could start all over again and maybe make friends somewhere else. She knows this will only last for a while, as soon as they have a possibility they will move again and resettle in a bigger town where belonging might be possible for her.

Developing a sense of belonging to the new society and to the society of origin is an important facet of integration. While casually talking about life with Nadia, she expressed how being a Muslim girl, in addition to not sharing the same interests as the other girls in her age group, made her life miserable in her town. She narrated her experience as multichallenges impossible to surmount in the Norwegian locality

in which she lives. Only a bigger town could allow her to be herself, meet people with similar cultural backgrounds and interests, and find someone willing to hear the story she wants to tell: in her case, having to deny her own cultural heritage and individual identity, and yet still not able to fit in. The new context in which she found herself appeared to create a situation of exclusion in the homogenous setting of the small town where, additionally, her personal interests are not being met.

Sana in the next section has many points in common with Nadia. She has the same background, age, and origins, and she had spent the same amount of time in Norway when the conversations took place. However, Sana's experience was different to Nadia's in many respects, as illustrated below.

5.4 The Acceptance of Difference in Narratives of Belonging

Sana's point of departure at school was that she simply presented herself as a Muslim girl wearing the hijab with pride and style. Her teacher in culture and religious studies asked if she could inform her classmates about Islam. She agreed and became the specialist of Islam in her class. Sana spoke about the experience of difference and of acceptance in the following way:

When I came to Norway, I felt many people were laughing at people who wore hijab or scarves. I noticed that some were looking at me in a weird way, but when I went to school they were actually very nice to me. All the teachers were nice to me. So I moved here [town B after settlement], and at school, when we had culture and religious studies, the teacher started asking me about my scarf and so on while in class. Then I started to tell everyone in the class about it. That I put the scarf on like this. I told them about it, and about Ramadan and those types of things. I am the only Muslim girl in the class, so I tell them about it.
(Sana, 13)

In contrast to Sana, Nadia settled in the same little, remote town and stayed in the same school as when she lived in the asylum center. Beside her family's strategy of integration, Nadia was experiencing difficulties in making friends with the local girls and mentioned no supportive adult helping her cope with the cultural and religious differences. For Sana on the other hand, the settlement phase included moving to a much bigger town and starting in a new school. Also, even in the remote village of her asylum center, Sana had felt at ease with her teachers and students in the class.

Sana's narrative about her life in Norway expressed a sense of general well-being while Nadia raised many issues and discomforts rooted in the multiple intersecting elements of her identification: individual, in interaction, and collective. Sana was living her differences in an open way, and telling people about it. By fear of exclusion, Nadia denied her personal values and practices. She felt uncomfortable about it when realizing that after all, with or without hijab, she was still different to the other girls. She felt both different and perceived herself as different.

Sana, on the other hand, managed to create an interaction by bringing some important elements that belong to her institutional sphere of origin and create a

place of belonging for that part of her identity in her interactions with her school-mates. She met important cultural boundaries but because of her social position at school (being the specialist of Islam), she was able to explain the sources of her differences; she managed to lower these borders and made it possible for others to also see similarities.

6 Conclusion: Belonging and the Interplay Between Individual, Interaction, and Institutional Orders

This chapter highlights the importance of refugee children's experience during the process of identification as individuals and as members of Norwegian society and how they negotiate their belonging during the period of settlement.

Previous research on long-term experiences of immigration and similar issues in Norway have shown parallel conclusions: individuals feel they belong partly to the receiving society and partly to their society of origin – that they are part of both, without being perceived as full members in either one of them (Jacobsen 2002). Despite the short journey that settlement represents, new elements are brought forward in this chapter with regard to the transitions that refugee children experience: a transition in the formal status (from asylum-seeker to legal resident of Norway); a geographical transition (from asylum centers to regular housing in a locality); and a transition in networks (from a local community to an unknown community). Settlement also bears the risk of being once again perceived as a foreigner, rather than as a close friend with similar interests. In order to experience belonging in this re-migration, refugee children need once again to prove their own similarities with the others, or their skills which they know will be valued by their peers.

Olwig (2003) underlines how belonging connects with various spheres of children's everyday lives. In this chapter, the different spheres embedded in refugee children's processes of settlement are illustrated by the importance of everyday practice, daily routines, and schedules of people and institutions (for example, family, school, and official language). Olwig (2012) has also emphasized how family relations play a central role in immigrants' and refugees' establishment of a new life in the receiving society, a point that is clearly illustrated by Nadia's narrative. This shows that refugee children continually need to negotiate on different spheres/spaces.

By drawing on the concept of *sense of belonging* it becomes possible to reflect on how the dynamics of different aspects of everyday life – for instance language and the symbolic meaning of the hijab embedded in the *institutional* order – influence refugee children in their individual process of identification and processes of settlement. Refugee children's longings for their former school or another geographical context (for example a larger city with better chances to meet people with similar interests/background) are in fact longings for a sense of belonging.

While adjusting to the culture of the receiving country, refugee children do not just meet a series of differences; there are also many areas of common ground in

children's interests (from football, to consumer goods, to a passion for horses) that allow them to keep a foothold in both cultures. The language one speaks but does not master, what one eats or how one dresses for religious purposes, may create boundaries and may become basic elements for exclusion or feelings of nonbelonging. This chapter demonstrates some of the ways in which refugee children negotiate these boundaries, in order to navigate within the range of what is acceptable in the different spheres of their lives.

Results in this chapter show, through the narratives of refugee children, that positive experiences occur when children find places of belonging in their everyday lives in their Norwegian local community. Experiences of nonbelonging are expressed by children who face the situation of being excluded because of too few experiences of similarities with the collectivity. They either perceive themselves different or are perceived as different or unfit, which either way makes interaction with the others difficult. Earlier research (Lidén 2005) has shown that the participation in afterschool activities appeared to make inclusion at school easier because it gave children common experiences where they acquired common social and cultural codes. Taking part in leisure activities, for instance, is an "established way of doing things" for school-age children in Norway and several of the narratives demonstrated important effects (positive or negative) relating to being part of such networks.

The narratives also illustrate how skills which are developed early in refugee children's experience of immigration can have positive impacts on a child's ability to negotiate belonging during settlement. Providing refugee children with opportunities that give them new experiences and positive social interactions early on in the settlement process can therefore be of critical importance in helping refugee children to find good tools that can help them figure out how best to negotiate the boundaries they encounter on their "journeys" in their new country.

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