Doctoral Thesis

The (re)construction of home

Unaccompanied children's and youth's transition
out of care

Åsa Söderqvist

Abstract

This dissertation focuses on how perceptions of ethnicity and culture become meaningful in relation to the transition from care into independent living, studied from unaccompanied youths', professionals', and a methodological perspective. The findings from interviews with unaccompanied youth with experience of leaving care showed that thoughts about their ethnic minority background are constantly present in the young men's lives. Their stories about preparing to leave care show a continuous attempt to make adjustments in order to fit into the Swedish society (Study I). The results based on interviews with professionals and observations at two residential care units indicated that 'home' is sometimes used as a metaphor when describing the residential care units. The home metaphor affected the staff in ways that it sometimes became difficult to separate private and professional matters. The clash between the residential care unit and the desire to create a home environment highlights the issue that programs executed in Sweden for unaccompanied young people were originally not made for them (Study II). Study III emphasised how transnational relationships form the unaccompanied youths view of past, present, and future time. This study highlighted the importance of how the professionals need to understand the unaccompanied children and youth and their situation as flexible (Study III). Finally, methodological reflections about research concerning ethnicity indicated the importance of reflecting on one's own perceptions, the role as a researcher, and the benefits and limitations these different roles may have in the research process (Study IV).

The research was conducted using qualitative methods. The data collection methods entailed interviews with the youth (Study I), individual interviews, focus-groups, and observations with professionals (Study II and III), and discussions based on the data collected for study I-III (Study IV). Altogether, 11 youths (18-22 years) and about 20 professionals at the residential care units participated in the studies.

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the individual interviews and the focus-groups. All interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis. The empirical data from observations consisted

of notes taken during everyday situations, as well as from short conversations with the professionals. The notes were analysed using qualitative content analysis. The combined results of study I-III were used as empirical data for the analysis in study IV.

This dissertation shows that (re)constructing a home is a central part of the care-leaving process for a migrant about to resettle in a new country. The greatest challenge the unaccompanied youth have to conquer during the transition from care to independent living is to fight against exclusion. The main purpose in (re)constructing a home appears to be the same for the youth and the professionals, namely, to reach a sense of safety and belonging. However, different conditions and points of departure may make it hard to agree on details such as what the meaning of belonging actually is, and if it is possible to develop a tailor-made solution. Researching issues of ethnicity comes with the responsibility to avoid reinforcing an 'us' versus 'them' and, in so doing, reinforce stereotypes.

Original papers

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

Study I

Söderqvist, Å. (2014). Leaving Care with 'cultural baggage': The development of an identity within a transnational space. *Australian Social Work*, 67, 39–54. DOI: 10.1080/0312407X.2013.863955

Study II:

Söderqvist, Å., Sjöblom, Y., & Bülow, P. (2014). Home Sweet Home. Professionals´ understanding of ´home´ within residential care for unaccompanied youths in Sweden. *Child and Family Social Work*. DOI: 10.1111/cfs.12183

Study III:

Söderqvist, Å., Bülow, P. H. & Sjöblom, Y. (2015). "In Sweden work is more important than the culture, actually!". *Transnational Social Review*, 5:3, 241-257, DOI: 10.1080/21931674.2015.1082778

Study IV:

Söderqvist, Å., Bülow, P.H. & Sjöblom, Y. (submitted)."För att du vet hur det är här" – metodologiska implikationer vid forskning om ensamkommande barn. *Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift*, temanummer: Migration.

The articles have been reprinted with the kind permission of the respective journals.

Contents

Acknowledgements

I am not the first, and will most probably not be the last, person who describes the time as a doctorate candidate as a journey. For me this is true in both a symbolic and a concrete sense. Now in reaching the final destination it is time to look back and give my appreciation to all my patient travel companions.

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On a train somewhere between Gothenburg and Jönköping,

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Åsa Söderqvist

Preface

It's the 25th of May, 2007, and Rahim, 15 years old, is about to reach the end of a long journey that started three months ago. He is sitting in the back of a truck together with a couple of other youths he doesn't know very well, as they have been picked up at different places along the way. They are told not to speak to each other in order not to draw unnecessary attention to the vehicle. The truck stops suddenly, and the driver opens the back of the truck and asks Rahim and another boy to jump out. He points at a house 100 meters further ahead and says: "This is Sweden, the end of your journey. Go and talk to the people in that building and they will help you to find a place to stay."

The driver turns to the other boys in the car and explains that they will continue a little further. The driver closes the back of the car and mumbles "Good luck!" as he jumps into the driver's seat and leaves.

Rahim and the other youth look at each other. The other youth explains in broken English that he will contact a friend, then says he has to go and starts to walk in the opposite direction. Rahim takes a deep breath; he hasn't been alone since the day he left his parents' house in Afghanistan. He decides to go to the building the smuggler indicated. During the short walk he thinks about what the smuggler said. Sweden, what kind of a country is that? How to find a place to stay, with whom, and where? And why did the journey stop here, why couldn't he go further with the other boys in the truck? He knocks on the door and a tall man opens it and says something to Rahim in a language he's never heard before.

At the same time a few miles away a group of professional social workers is about to end a meeting. The atmosphere is expectant; in a few days the first boys will arrive at The Sun, their newly-opened residential care unit for unaccompanied children and youths. They all have experience of working at residential care units before, but only for youths being brought up in Sweden. Due to the increased number of unaccompanied children and youths arriving in Sweden the municipality is required to open a residential care targeting this specific group. During this and other meetings the professionals have been discussing how they want to structure the unit. They all agree that this target group may have specific needs compared to those of

other children and youths placed in care, but it is difficult to define what the differences will be, except, as they say, that the youths will have other ethnic backgrounds than Swedish. The supervisor concludes the meeting by saying, "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it" The rest of the staff group agrees with this, and finds it to be one of the challenges they are looking forward to tackling in their new workplace.

The year is now 2010, and Rahim is sitting at a table in The Sun residential care unit talking to staff member Johan, who is his contact person. They are planning his transition out of care, as he turns 18 in a couple of days. He will be offered an apartment for training in independent living in the city centre. The staff group is happy with the progress they have made how far they think they have come since the opening in 2007. They have struggled a lot, but have found solutions to many of the problems along the way. However, a continual discussion revolves around whether or not the focus concerning the unaccompanied children and youths should primarily be on care, or on a more independent way to act in relation to the children and youths; how much support do they really need? And how much should they as staff members be involved personally in the youths' situation? Much emphasis in the discussions is also placed on the youths' ethnic minority background, which is seen as one of the major differences between this group of youths and other young people placed in care. The issue has been to distinguish possible specific needs based on their ethnic minority background from more universal kinds of needs applicable to anyone. This topic has often been touched upon when they were discussing how to support the youths' integration into society.

During his years in Sweden Rahim has been through a long asylum process, which finally resulted in a permanent residency permit. He started school and completed the Swedish classes, and is now integrated in an ordinary class. He has found some friends both at the residential care unit and in school, mostly people from his own country. In general he is happy with his stay in Sweden at the moment. But he is also worried. He is worried about not finding a job for the summer, and worried about now being expected to live on his own. Will he be all by himself from now on? He thinks it's difficult to get to know new people, especially what he calls 'Swedish friends'. But most of all he thinks about the family and friends that he left

behind – will he ever see them again? He looks at Johan sitting next to him and asks spontaneously, "After knowing me for almost three years, and now sitting here planning my future, how would you describe me? Will I ever fit into this country? Who have I become since I came to Sweden? And what will I have to do in order to be successful here in Sweden?"

1 Introduction

The story about Rahim presented in the preface represents one person among a large group of unaccompanied children and youths that have had the experience of being placed into care and then leaving care for an independent life in Sweden. Even though the story was fictitious it is based on issues that became visible during the collection of data during this research project. In order to be defined as belonging to this group you have to be under the age of 18 and come to Sweden without parents with the aim of finding a safe haven and possibly settling down, at least temporarily. Unaccompanied children arrived in Sweden both during the First and Second World Wars. But in our present time major changes have occurred within a relatively short period due to the unstable situation worldwide, for instance because of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Syria. The number of unaccompanied young people arriving in Sweden has increased during the last few years; in 2013 around 3000 applied for asylum, in 2014 that figure had risen to 7000, and in 2015 about 35 000 unaccompanied young people applied to stay in Sweden. A great proportion of this group were allowed to stay, about 75% (Migrationsverket, 2015, 2016a). That should be put in comparison to the around 2300 young people who arrived in 2010 the year before I started to collect data for this project (Barnombudsmannen, 2011). The number of unaccompanied children and youths applying for asylum today has diminished due to a new temporary migration law which was brought into effect last year. The conditions for both the young people as well as the system targeting the same group have therefore changed remarkably. This temporary migration law limited the possibility for both children and adults to enter the borders of Sweden (Migrationsverket, 2016b).

1.1 Child Welfare and the process of leaving care

The system being referred to when speaking of unaccompanied children and youths is the child welfare organizations. On arrival in Sweden all unaccompanied children and youths contact the migration board, which is responsible for the application for asylum. The municipality responsible for their reception will also contact them. The municipality is thus in charge of the care for the unaccompanied children and youths both during the asylum

processes but also after, if they get to stay in Sweden. Besides the care, the unaccompanied children and youths are assigned a trustee to deal with their financial, personal and juridical matters. The municipality opens a case at the child welfare office as everyone is supposed to have a social worker responsible for the placement in care. These placements are usually in residential care units, networks placements (staying with relatives), or foster families, and are for the exception of some rare cases done on voluntary basis.

The focuses in this dissertation, apart from the unaccompanied children and youths, are on the residential care units and the staff working there. This type of care unit is understood to be an example of a human service organization. To be placed in residential care means having daily interaction with professionals, with different educational and work life experiences, responsible for the everyday care. When later referring to the unaccompanied children and youths it is important to know that not all of them have a refugee status, and are therefore permitted residence on other grounds. However, the ones interviewed in study I had all been granted permanent residence. But among the young people staying at the residential care units where the professionals were interviewed and observed, there were some children and youths still waiting for a decision from the migration board. The difference in regard to having or waiting for a decision had of course an impact on both the children and youths but also on the professionals and the practices in general. For those having a permit to stay it was easier to start the leaving care and integration process, but for those waiting it was clearly more indefinite and a time filled with anxiety.

A significant part of the placement in care in focus in this study is the leaving care process. Leaving care and at the same time transit into adulthood entails specific conditions and a sometimes a complicated process. The period after a completed placement is an important stage and may have a great impact on the youth's future life (c.f. Stein, 2012; Höjer & Sjöblom, 2010; Wade & Dixon, 2006). The leaving care process therefore becomes an important part of the placement, both for the young people and for the professionals. So this process, together with other aspects of the placements, needs to be recognized in order to better understand what may be needed to prepare the youths for the transition from care.

1.2 The ethnic minority background

Before ending this section and presenting the overall aim of the dissertation, issues related to an ethnic minority background will be linked to child welfare in order to broaden the context. The ethnic minority background is not only stressed when discussing unaccompanied children and youths but also for other young people with experience of being placed in care as it touches upon issues such as identity and racism (Stein, 2012; Malek, 2011; Barn, Andrew & Mantovani, 2005; Biehal, Clayden, Stein, & Wade, 1992). So the fictitious story about Rahim is important in relation to the professionals' discussion concerning the difference between this group and other young people in care, but also in relation to Rahim's concerns about getting to know 'Swedish' friends and concerns about the possibility of fitting in.

These questions brought up by Rahim should be understood as related to broader issues of belonging and matters of resettlement. Resettlement is an inevitable consequence of the migration, involving activities and processes taking place after becoming established in a new country (Valtonen, 2008), while the concept of belonging highlights the issues of inclusion and exclusion but focuses also on connectedness (Gedalof, 2009). Thus, how to understand the ethnic and cultural background becomes crucial, not only from the youth perspective but also from the professionals' since the professionals are meeting the youths during a critical time in life as the young people are placed in care but also as they go through the transition process into adulthood (Höjer & Sjöblom, 2011; Stein, 2012; Biehal & Wade, 1996).

It would be difficult to discuss the concepts of ethnicity and culture without including the aspect of power and how that divides people into different groups. In this case, ethnicity and culture may work as subordinating categories that could have the effect that people with an ethnic minority background could be put in a disadvantage position (De los Reyes, Molina & Mulinari, 2005; Sandberg, 2010).

Not only including unaccompanied children and youths, migration processes takes place on a global level, but also affect the local level where they become an obvious part of the social work context as well as other arenas

such as the educational system (Sandberg, 2010; Gruber, 2007; Johansson, 2012). If focusing on the unaccompanied children and youths it seems important to also consider that group in relation to issues within child welfare in general, as they are part of that system. Social problems in relation to ethnic minority groups have been discussed earlier within the research field of child welfare. At one point, the discussion seemed to focus on why young people with an ethnic minority background were overrepresented within the child welfare care system (Lundström & Vinnerljung, 2001). However, it was claimed that the overrepresentation had less to do with the minority background itself but rather with other matters such as class (Vinnerljung et. al, 2008; Johansson, 2012). Still, ethnicity is a factory that has previously received less attention in the research field of child welfare compared for instance to class and gender (Lundström & Sallnäs, 2003).

Issues related to child welfare and leaving care, and the discussion concerning the ethnic minority background, ethnicity and culture should be understood as main themes in this dissertation. Of these ethnicity and culture are held as main concepts. The actual meaning of these, in this specific context, will be explained further below but it can already be said here that they operate both on a theoretical as well as on a more everyday practical level. Thus these concepts will in different ways be related to unaccompanied children and youths and the professionals at the residential care units, but will also be discussed from a methodological point of view. I suggest that ethnicity and culture have a crucial meaning in society in general as well as in the specific context of the practices targeting unaccompanied children and youths, which brings us to the overall aim.

1.3 Aim and research questions

The aim of this dissertation is to study how the perceptions of ethnicity and culture become meaningful in relation to the transition from care. This is studied both from the unaccompanied youth's perspective and from a professional perspective. One further aim is to reflect upon methodological challenges in research focusing on unaccompanied youths'. From this aim follow the main questions:

1. How do the unaccompanied youths understand and make sense of their experiences during their transition from care into independent living?

2. How do the professionals understand and make visible their perceptions of the children's and youths' cultural background and ethnicity during the transition from care to independent living?

3. What methodological challenges become visible between the researcher and the unaccompanied youths during the research process in this study?

1.4 Disposition

As the introduction and overall purpose of this work have now been presented, the following part will be a background. In the background some important contextual concepts and perspectives will be presented in order to get a better understanding of the four studies of this dissertation. Thereafter, previous research is presented that includes an historical angle concerning unaccompanied children and youths, and then research on present time about this group. Later the theoretical framework used in this dissertation will be presented. The section following that concerns the methods applied when collecting the empirical data, and includes ethical considerations. In the last part after the summaries of the four studies comes a discussion where the main results of the dissertation are described and reflected upon. The dissertation is concluded with a summary in Swedish.

2 Background

In this part some important concepts and perspectives will be discussed in order to create a contextual foundation for the understanding of the empirical studies. First a clarification is given regarding the concepts used to describe unaccompanied children and youth. Thereafter, the residential care units as human service organizations (HSOs) are discussed. To get a better insight into the residential care units we need to understand how these kinds of services work and under what conditions they operate. The last part of this section concerns the child welfare institutions and the concept of belonging that are current themes in the social work with unaccompanied young people.

2.1 Unaccompanied who?

When referring to young people coming to a country without a legal guardian, I have chosen to use the term 'unaccompanied children and youths' in most cases. It includes both the young people under the age of 18 who stayed at the residential care units being observed, but also the young adults interviewed in study I. However, when only focusing on study I the terms youth/young people are used as all of the participants were over the age of 18.

Exceptions are made when referring to other researchers' work as I have then tried to use the term they have chosen to apply based on their specific context. Thus text may seem to be a bit inconsistent on how to term the target group. However, this inconsistency might be understood to be a result of the target group in focus being heterogenetic and their being complex, not least when getting in contact with a bureaucratic welfare system.

2.2 The residential care unit as a HSO

I have chosen to understand the residential care units in the studies as examples of HSO. It becomes easier to say something about how the unaccompanied youths and the professionals comprehend the transition from care to independent living with some knowledge about how these organization function.

Social work is usually organized in what has been defined as human service organization (Hasenfield, 2010). A typical characteristic of this type of organization is that the service-users themselves provide the actual raw material. The service-users are the working material for the employees who aim to achieve the stated purpose of the organization, to define whether or not they are entitled to support by processing their status, changing them or their circumstances or sustaining these. When it comes to the aspect of people changing, the is an important aspect of the residential care units, the person is expected to go through a process of status changes with the aim of the client being better off when leaving than getting in contact with the organization.

The professionals in such work places have a particular role and are called street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980). For instance, a street-level bureaucrat is in direct contact with service-users on a day-to-day basis, and must in these meetings mediate between the regulations of the organizations and the needs and prerequisites of the specific client. A total rule obedient behaviour is impossible if to go on with the daily tasks, not at least since the variation of individual needs makes it impossible to regulate everything in detail. Because of this there must be some room for the professional's own discretion in order to make the organization to work.

Even if the client centred work often relates to one-to-one meetings, the issues in focus could be of great importance to the political debate and thus have an impact on larger parts of society. An example is the way the social welfare assistance is dealt with, which is related to greater concerns about how national resources should be divided among the citizens in our society. The street-level bureaucrats do not only appear within the frames of the social welfare organizations, but also in other sectors in occupations such as teachers, police officers, and court judges, to mention just a few, and many of them are employed within the public sector (Lipsky, 1980).

Hasenfeld (2010) argues that in this kind of organization the aspect of control is of great importance. The control becomes obvious in a context where the service-users are in need of something that can be provided by the professionals, such as welfare support. The first gate to pass is to fit the required qualifications of the specific context, meaning that the organization processes people in order to decide upon whether or not the applicants fulfil

the demands of behaviour and personal attributes to be accepted as a client and potentially get support. The ones not fitting within this framework are either directed to another place, or just informed that they do not meet the criteria. However, it is important to emphasize that the control of what groups are included takes place in interplay between the professionals and the service-users, as the service-users' have some agency by which their actions become relevant individually and also might have an impact on the development of the organizational structure and conditions.

An additional aspect of importance characterizing the human service organizations is the way the aim of the organization is formulated, which is often built on some kind of ambiguity (Hasenfeld 2010). This means that the stated aims are often in conflict with each other, which makes them hard to fulfil. According to Lipsky (1980), that kind of ambiguity is a result of an idealized picture, which often creates the basis for the overall objective in the organization. Thus, there is a discrepancy between what is desired to be done and what actually is possible to achieve. Such idealized images may contribute to a complex work situation as well as an experience of confusion in relation to the tasks the employees are expected to complete.

The role of a street-level bureaucrat includes a specific feature called discretion. Sosin (2010) refers to Jewell to define this concept. It is described as the employee's possibility to practice independency in relation to the demands from superiors. The opposite of discretion would be, according to Handler (1992), a situation where the employed would not have any possibility to choose and therefore would be controlled by already stated regulations. Hasenfield (2010) emphasizes the service-users' dependency in relation to the organization and the individual caseworker. He claims that the service-user is dependent on the professional's goodwill, which means that there is always a risk that the service-user is being exploited and is therefore defined as the most vulnerable element of this relationship. The institutions represented by the human service organizations are so complex that they are not possible to fully control by laws or other types of regulations. That depends, among other things, on the fact that the raw material consists of human beings, which means extensive variations to individual needs (Sosin, 2010).

Looking at the HSO from a general point of view it becomes clear that the level of discretion varies among the employees (Sosin, 2010). According to Johansson (2007), discretion appears in different ways in relation to the kind of bureaucracy, due to different kinds of regulations. Other aspects which may also have an impact on the level of discretion include the workload, the pace the employees are expected to keep, and if they meet with the service-users face-to-face on a daily basis.

2.2.1 HSO and structures of power

Power is a central part in the human service organization (Hasenfeld, 2010). Handler (1992) emphasizes the power imbalance between the employed and the service-user as something that has an impact on the social workers' discretion. The service-user's possibility to have an impact on the relation between him/herself and the professionals is generally more limited than vice versa. Handler claims that the service-users lack information and skills and the lack of power results in a significantly disadvantaged position.

In this type of organization there always seems to be anticipation concerning what the service-user should achieve. The aspect of normativity should also be highlighted, as this is always present when decisions are taken that have an impact on the service-user. This is something that may be related to Svensson's (2007) description of social work as a practice of normalization. In the theoretical framework for this dissertation where ethnicity and culture are understood as unfixed and constructed, normativity is important in relation to the meaning it has for the individual. Mattson (2010) emphasizes the relevance of making the structures of power within social work visible. Social work is a part of these structures of power but also constructs and maintains them. Forkby (2005) discusses social work practices as examples of an organizational field based on institutional power being expressed in different ways and at different levels. The field of youth care is one example of such an area where the distribution of power is visible and also makes certain requirements of the individuals involved. The agency and the possibility to have an impact on the practices are improved for those assigned a specific task, a title or educational training (Forkby, 2005). In this dissertation, the field of care of unaccompanied children and youths is another example of an arena within the social work practices where structures of power are significant and constantly present.

2.3 Issues of migration and belonging

Unaccompanied children and youths are among many groups of people involved in the great migration processes taking place worldwide. According to UNHCR, approximately 60 million people escaped from unstable situations around the world in 2015, a figure that is higher than ever before. Most of them are trying to find a safe haven somewhere close to where they used to live. But around one million applications for asylum were submitted in European countries during the first six months of 2015. A large proportion of those were from people on the run from war and disaster in Syria, a war that started in 2011. Other countries with a high number of migrants are Afghanistan, Somalia and South Sudan (UNHCR, 2015). Migration can be defined as a specific movement where people are going from one resettlement place to another. The migrant can be someone who moves across national borders, but someone who moves within the same national territories can still be a migrant. This definition includes thus both national and international migration, even though the international migration may be more commonly used when speaking of migration generally (Koser, 2007). The terms *migrant* and *refugee* are often used interchangeably but there is a specific definition of a refugee which is stated in the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. A refugee is, according to this document:

> A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees)

The trends in migration have changed historically; in the 40s more people emigrated from rather than to Sweden. In the 60s people came to Sweden to look for work while in the 70s, 80s and 90s it was refugees that dominated among immigrants. During the 00s, Sweden was one of the countries in Europe that received the largest number of people having need for protection

as the reason for applying for asylum. That means that Sweden has faced a greater challenge in terms of integration than many other countries in Europe. The reasons for coming to Sweden have an impact on the possibility to become integrated (SOU 2010:16). Unemployment is an issue that many immigrants have to struggle with as newcomers in Sweden. Bergnehr (2015) argues that the unemployment for refugees in Sweden lasts during several years. The social welfare allowance system has not a construction that helps individual mobility and agency.

Closely linked to the processes of migration is the concept and meaning of resettlement. Valtonen (2008) compare resettlement and integration. The meaning of resettlement is connected to certain activities and processes taking place after getting established in a new country, while integration is more focused on a specific goal, i.e. it is a goal-oriented dimension of settlement. Thus full participation in areas such as political, cultural, social and economic parts of the society seems to be the target for the migrant when speaking in terms of integration. The concept of integration thus becomes an outcome where the migrant has been capable of attaining a certain status or role in relation to both formal and informal institutions in the receiving society (Valtonen, 2008). The concept of resettlement seems therefore to be more applicable in the discussions in this dissertation, as focus will be put on actual processes rather than on goal-oriented activities for unaccompanied children and youths. However, the concept of integration will also be present, not least through how the professionals perceived their tasks at work with the unaccompanied children and youths at the residential care.

A natural concern as a consequence of migration and resettlement is how to feel comfortable and included in a new context, which here is discussed in terms of belonging. The concept of belonging is complex and works on different levels. When speaking of belonging or a notion of belonging the meaning of exclusion is always present (Yuval-Davis, 2006). When someone is being defined as belonging it is then at the same time said that someone else is not. The concept of belonging is sometimes used instead of inclusion and is closely related with connectedness, association and home (Gedalof, 2009). Sirriyeh (2013b:6) wrote: "*There has been a shift from a focus on the 'roots' of home to the 'routes' of home* (...)". Sirriyeh refers to Rapport &

Dawson and highlights further the movement in the creation of home, and claims that the movement itself also can be the actual home. Through the young migrant women taking part in Sirriyeh's research project the importance of flexibility and fluidity in the creation of home became visible. The women's agency in relation to more general structures in their social world was central to the processes of making home.

When discussing social work experiences from post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hessle (1998) stresses the importance of children's participation and making their voices heard. This is not at least important when it comes to expressing longing for parents and loss of close relationships. The requirements for placements out of home to have positive outcomes were based on three basic principles, all significant for child welfare placements in general: family continuity, some close emotional bonds and affirmation of one's person.

2.4 Child welfare

In Sweden, unaccompanied children and youths are included in child welfare. This has a vast responsibility reaching from outreach work, preventative measures to support children and families on voluntary grounds, to compulsory treatment of those at severe risk of maladjustment, lack of support, or abuse in the family (Blomberg, Corander, Kroll, Meeuwisse, Scaramuzzino, & Swärd, 2010). The child welfare system in Sweden is supposed to be based on collaboration between the social services and the client, and aims to help families to live and function together, and has been defined as family-oriented with a mandatory reporting system (Cameron & Freymond, 2006; Gilbert. Parton & Skivenes, 2011).

The first child care act was put into place 1902 in an attempt to gain more social control in the emerging industrial society (Swärd, 1993). Child welfare belongs to the specific section of the welfare office called care for individuals and families (IFO), which is a significant part of the Swedish welfare model. Its significance is that this part of the system covers needs that no other institution does (Bergmark & Lundström, 2008). The social service act (SoL) and the Law of Specific Care of Young people (LVU) are the basis for the acts regulating actions aimed at young people in danger. The difference between the two is that SoL is built on voluntariness towards

the individual and the family, unlike LVU which regulates compulsory measures, 1) if the child is in danger because of his or her own behaviour, or 2) because of lack of parental care (Sundell, Andrée-Löfholm, Kaunitz, 2007). The social investigation and assessment play an important part in placements in care. The meaning of the assessment within the frame of the child welfare may for some be related to something positive - the possibility to get help, while it for others rather is experienced as a threat linked to control, oppression and paternalism (Hessle, Stenström, Sundell & Wåhlander, 1996). To be placed outside the home is based on an idea that the care and upbringing with the parents is not sufficient and therefore the responsibility must be handed over to the state in order to make sure that these children and youths develop and get to grow up within safe conditions (Socialstyrelsen, 2010).

Lundström (2004) emphasizes the complexity in the concept of child welfare and claims that it includes much more than the social workers practices at the welfare offices. He extends the concept and includes the actors hired by the welfare office in order to undertake duties such as being contact persons, in foster homes and residential care units, and also some missions related to NGOs. In Swedish, the term "social" is put before child welfare in order to separate these specific tasks from the more medical-oriented services such as psychiatry for children and youths. Child welfare is a concept that focuses on children and youths at risk- or already defined as being in danger (Lundström, 2000).

Regarding placements in care with a specific focus on unaccompanied children and youths, some changes have taken place recently. Another alternative, namely supported living, was added in January 2016 besides residential care units, network placements and foster homes, which were the available alternatives for placements when data was collected for this study (Socialstyrelsen, 2016). The supported living is a kind of semi-independent living with individual-based support to those aged 16-20 years; such living may consist of separate apartments or a larger residence. The purpose of the support is to prepare the youths for later independent living and the transition into adulthood. These measures may also be used as a stage in a leaving care process. Support from professionals is supposed to be given in terms of care, and planning of daily activities, as well as advice on how to

take control of economic matters as a preparation for future independent life outside care (Socialstyrelsen, 2016).

SUMMARY

The above presented background touches upon several different areas, of importance when later on focusing on unaccompanied children and youth. The residential care units are here understood as HSOs according to Hasenfield's (2010) definition. But the residential care units are only one of many services within the child welfare system in Sweden and therefore a description of the system was presented above. The different services available and some of the ideas behind the system is of significance in order to show the unaccompanied children and youths presence in relation to the larger child welfare system in Sweden, that has an historical background that started before this group became part of the system. The ethnic minority background is connected to resettlement and belonging, which are processes that follow as a consequence of the migration of the unaccompanied children and youths. To ignore these processes means that a great part of who the unaccompanied children and youths are as individuals would be dismissed.

3 Previous research

Below, a presentation of previous research will be outlined. This section is divided into three parts with a concluding summary. The three parts include an historical perspective, some recent research concerning unaccompanied children and youths, and the last part concerns care-leavers.

3.1 An historical perspective

This review will take its point of departure in a brief historical perspective in order to show that receiving unaccompanied children and youths in Sweden is nothing new. Groups of children arriving during wartime without parents can be recognized in different historical periods. The main sources discussed here will be three dissertations, emphasizing unaccompanied children and the refugee reception of people coming from Hungary (Svensson, 1992), Jewish children arriving during the First World War (Lomfors, 1996), as well as the children arriving from Finland, escaping the Second World War (Lagnebro, 1994). However, it is recognized that despite these studies, there has not been much research regarding these children's situations and conditions during that time (Hessle, 2009). Even though the studies all seem to have in common a focus on the children's social situations and conditions during the time of escaping from danger and finding another place to live, certain aspects connected to issues of ethnicity and culture also become visible.

The Finnish children became part of one of the greatest transferring processes of children in the world. Seventy thousand children were moved from Finland to Sweden during the Second World War, most of them younger than ten. During this period, 1939-1945, some of the children were moved back and forth between Finland and Sweden based on the current situation in Finland and on the biological parents' wishes concerning care for their own child. It was a situation that caused traumatic memories for some of the children due to difficulties in settling down, and the continuous exchange of people that cared for them. It should also be mentioned that

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around 1500 children never moved back to Finland after the war ended (Lagnebro, 1994).

Lagnebro (1994) exemplifies narrative accounts revealing experienced feelings of lack of belonging. In a specific theme called 'Where do I belong?' Lagnebro emphasizes how the children asked themselves if the parents in the new country were supposed to replace their biological parents. They thought about matters related to incorporating a Swedish identity in contrast to holding on to their Finnish origins. Based on such concerns, it is also important to point out the experiences of feeling discriminated based on their Finnish heritage. Such experiences meant that issues of identity became central aspects for many of the children that have followed them throughout their lives. Lagnebro (1994) introduced a concept that may be translated as 'surface adaption' (Swedish: ytanpassning). The meaning of this concept is that the children, who by the time they took part in the study were adults, had a certain feeling of belonging in relation to the Swedish society. Yet the actual emotional feeling of belonging was more connected to the birth country, which in this case was Finland, where they felt they had their ethnic identification; this was true even though life in Sweden on the surface seemed to work properly.

Between 1938-1939 about 19,000 children under the age of 16 years were evacuated in the so-called "Kindertransport" from Nazi Germany, mainly to the UK. About 500-700 were sent to Sweden. Most of the children who came to Sweden during this time were placed in foster homes. By focusing on different documents from that specific time from organizations involved in the reception of the Jewish children, and saved documents from private persons, the focus in Lomfors' (1996) dissertation has been on the children's life stories.

Similar issues, as Lagnebro points at are to be found concerning the Jewish children, where matters of their preferred contact with biological parents in respect to the children's well-being were important questions (Lomfors, 1996). The children's concerns about their parents' destinies were also of great importance in influencing their well-being. The Swedish government's inability to help and have an impact on the biological parents' situation in Germany became an obstacle for the Jewish children. This caused difficulties for their integration into the Swedish society, as their worries

concerning their parents preoccupied them. However, an important difference between the Finnish and the Jewish children was that most of the Finnish children had the possibility to return back home after the war was over, which was not the case for the Jewish children due to the persecution of the Jewish population during the war.

Svensson (1992) focuses in his dissertation on the people coming to Sweden from Hungary after the Second World War in 1956–1958, claiming that this reception was one of the first properly organized in Sweden after the world wars. Among other things, Svensson (1992) tries to sort out whether or not all of them could be defined as refugees, and he seems to conclude that this was not the case. The reason for receiving this group of people was not only connected to the individuals but also towards the Hungarian nation as a way of showing solidarity, but the immigrants from Hungary also met the Swedish labour market's need to reinforce the work force. However, the main focus in this dissertation is rather on the political processes politics related to the refugees. Among the population coming to Sweden there were an unknown number of unaccompanied youths of high school age. Due to their needs, high schools were established in order to allow them to finish school. Issues concerning assimilation versus integration were raised in relation to the immigrants coming from Hungary. However, the questions here were not only emphasized in relation to the youths coming to Sweden on their own, but rather as a common discourse in the debate regarding policies towards immigrants. Overall, the Swedish government and the media had a positive attitude towards the people coming from Hungary, which then also had a positive impact on the rest of the Swedish population. The positive attitude contributed to the fact that the Hungarian people were relatively well received (Svensson, 1992).

3.2 Recent research on unaccompanied children

The research below is presented in different categories as a way to give a structure to how to understand the research conducted within this field. Some of the studies are appropriate to these categories and others not. However, like Eide (2005), I will argue that it is important to also discuss previous studies within this field, outside of the given categorization, as the chosen categories might result in limitations. Many studies, including the

ones presented in this dissertation, overlap in several areas. Thus, I would claim that for instance study II in this dissertation is an example of such cross over, being a study that can be related both to organizational and psychosocial matters.

In a dissertation about unaccompanied children in Norway Eide (2005) suggests that the research conducted in the field could be divided into categories, as such a division makes it easier to obtain an overview. These categories are:

- Organization studies which relate to concerns about policy for practice regarding unaccompanied minors.
- Children's rights in relation to the human rights perspective.
- Psychosocial studies, emphasizing the children's experienced situation when on the move and entering the new countries for settlement.

Eide (2005) stresses however that such categories sometimes tend to overlap each other. Other researchers have elaborated on these categories and have also suggested additional categories, such as the pre-flight experiences (Wernesjö, 2012). An example of such a study is Thomas, Nafees, & Bhugra (2004), emphasizing the experiences of unaccompanied minors before coming to the UK. Another recurrent category is related to health and well-being and may be understood as belonging more to what might be called a medical perspective, which is quite a large area within this field, with much attention on mental health issues (Oppedal & Thormod, 2015; Groark, Sclare, & Rawal, 2010).

Some reports have been published about unaccompanied children and youths. These have been put together by authorities engaged in work with unaccompanied children and youths on a more structural level, such as the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Migration Board, and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, as well as non-governmental organizations such as the Red Cross and Save the Children (Ayotte 1999; Stretmo & Melander, 2013; Socialstyrelsen, 2013; Zetterqvist Nelson & Hagström, 2015; Backlund, Eriksson, von Greiff & Åkerlund, 2012; Backlund, Eriksson, von Greiff, Nyberg,& Åkerlund, 2014). Together, they emphasize issues related to unaccompanied children and youths, both

on individual levels (Stretmo & Melander, 2013), and on a more structural level, discussing guidelines and principles that have a great impact on the target group, such as in Socialstyrelsens (2013; 2016) reports. These kind of document constitutes an important contribution to the field, not least because of the, until recently, limited access to research about unaccompanied children and youths in a Swedish context.

Until a few years ago only Hessle's (2009) longitudinal study was one of few available in this research field. In her dissertation she emphasized the unaccompanied youth's situation in Sweden during a 10-year period of time. The results of that study showed, among other things, that the youth's social network was very important in regard to the possibility to become integrated in the society. When the children and youths in her study arrived in Sweden their social network was limited both in terms of contacts in Sweden but also concerning contacts in the country of origin or with relatives and friends worldwide. However, the 10-year follow-up showed that many of them established more contacts in Sweden and also succeeded with the re-establishment of contact with people in other countries. These transnational relations and the relations in Sweden were very important for the experienced feeling of well being (Hessle, 2009). Other research that has highlighted the voices of unaccompanied children and youths includes for instance Wernesjö (2014) who discusses the concept of belonging and the concept of home. Wernesjö also points out the difficulties when researching the topics of racism, discrimination and negative experiences in general since her participants seemed to want to focus on positive experiences. Other research focusing on the children's perspective by letting them express their mind includes Åkerlund (2016), Lundberg & Dahlquist (2012) and Malmsten (2014). It should be mentioned that in the research concerning this group, some involves children and youths in the asylum-seeking process, while other focus on life after the resident permit has been issued. In a quite early study by Wallin & Ahlström (2005), interviews were carried out with youths seven years after they were granted permission to stay in Sweden. As in other studies, it is also here concluded that issues related to the first years in Sweden, e.g. language barriers and lack of a social network, diminished over time, even if there were greater challenges for those who had severe traumatic and/or stress related experiences, such as in cases with PTSD.

By shifting focus towards other type of studies it is possible to see that some of the studies are related to more structural issues and also that some studies are quantitative. There is, for instance, a longitudinal register study following the children over time with the aim of seeing how they succeed with integration (Celikaksoy & Wadensjö, 2016). Engebrigtsen (2003) presented a study with a focus on the practices of an authority targeting unaccompanied children and youths. Brunnberg (2011) presented a literature review covering the research published to 2010. The discussion related to the lack of research within the field, showed that at the time no research had been conducted within the field of social work, a remarkable fact since social work practice is one of the greatest actors targeting unaccompanied children and youths in Sweden. Stretmo (2014) highlighted in her dissertation discourses of the unaccompanied children in Sweden and Norway. From an analysis of policy documents the construction of the unaccompanied child was made visible. A central aspect of this construction was that these children were different and should therefore also be more controlled. The focus on differences also reinforced the image of the unaccompanied child and youths as "the other", not quite belonging.

Much research on the topic seems to focus on aspects of health and well-being (for example: Huemer J et al. 2009; Seglem, Oppedal, & Raeder, 2011). Such is the case when unaccompanied children are discussed in relation to vulnerability and agency by Eide & Hjern (2013). They claim that it is important to focus on both the unaccompanied children's vulnerability as well as their strengths and often positive view of life. Thus, the things that may work for children in general to develop healthily are also true for this group, and they generally wish to be treated and understood as equal to those without the experience of coming to Sweden as unaccompanied.

A great part of the previous research concerning unaccompanied children and youths discussed in this dissertation is taken from a British context. One of the leading researchers in the field is Kholi, who has published a number of studies related to both psychosocial as well as organizational issues (c.f. Kohli, 2006; Kohli & Mitchell, 2007; Kohli, Connolly, & Warman, 2010; Kohli, 2007; Kohli, 2011) One of these studies, of special interest to this dissertation, emphasized the meaning of food within a foster care context. Kohli et al. (2010) suggest that food and the meaning connected to it are

closely related to matters of belonging. Thus if and how they recognize the possibility to offer the youths food is an important task for the carers. It was thought that the food helps to link the past time with the present and thus creates a sense of coherence. In another study Kohli claims that unaccompanied children and youths may hesitate to participate in research because they have been exposed to so many similar situations when being asked to share their life story. This is something that needs to be taken into consideration from a researcher's point of view (Kohli, 2006).

Regarding the research conducted on the topic in the UK, Wade (2011) saw an increased interest increased at that time, but an interest that then just had primarily resulted in smaller qualitative studies. From an international perspective it is possible to see that much attention has been given to mental health issues in relation to unaccompanied (asylum-seeking) children and youths. In Barrie & Mendes' (2011) comparison between the UK and Australia concerning the production of knowledge in the field it is clear that the UK has published more than Australia. But despite the UK's focus on the experiences of these children and youths, more in-depth research about pre-flight experiences and their meaning for integration is required. More general discussions regarding different aspects of the practices for unaccompanied children and youths have also constituted an important contribution to the field (cf. Wade et. al. 2012).

Another UK-based researcher relevant in relation to the chosen focus of this dissertation is Sirriyeh (2010, 2013a, 2013b). A central theme in several of her studies is the concept of home. Two aspects of her research will be emphasized here. First, the quality of the relationship between the professionals and the unaccompanied children and youths in care, which is partly discussed in study II. She problematized and questioned what kind of relationship would be sufficient in such contexts (Sirriyeh, 2013b). The other issue I would like to highlight has to do with the creation of "the other" and issues of belonging. Sirriyeh (2013a) claims that the participants in her study, young asylum-seeking women, struggled with feeling of where and to what they belonged, and things like being forced to move around to different places in the UK and having limited control over making choices about their own life strengthened the feeling of being excluded and not belonging.

In Scotland, attention has been directed towards the unaccompanied children's experiences in the new country. Both the young people and the professionals participated in that study and focus was put on strengths and weaknesses in the services in order to discuss the young people's needs (Hopkins & Hill 2010). The same researcher has also published more of a methodological article focusing on ethical aspects when conducting research with unaccompanied children and youths. How to conduct an interview with unaccompanied children and youths is emphasized in that. It is important to recognize such strategies to prevent unnecessary stress to the participants involved in the research project (Hopkins, 2008). A study about unaccompanied children and youths from Sudan coming to the US, stresses their struggle with adapting to a new context and culture and to other careers when moving in with foster families (Luster et. al. 2009).

3.3 Research on care-leavers

The unaccompanied children and youths participating in this study should also be understood as care-leavers (or care-leavers to be) due to their experience of being placed in residential care. In this study, the period of transition is also seen as an important part of the work the professionals are doing. By first putting emphasis on the leaving care concept from a more general point of view it becomes clear that several issues are regularly included when defining this transition. These include the focus on social networks, education, housing and employment (Harder et al. 2011; Backe-Hansen et al., 2013; Wade & Dixon, 2006; Höjer & Sjöblom, 2010; Stein, 2012). These different aspects are linked to the concept of transition, which therefore becomes important in the discussions about leaving care. An overview summarizing research conducted on the field showed that the transition process has been examined and divided into three different categories with focus on: preparation of the youths for a life outside care, the young people's own experiences of being in the process of making a transition, and also the support offered after completing a placement and during the process of transition (Harder et al. 2011).

Wade (2008) links the transition process to the need of support, and claims that an extension of the time in care is crucial for improving the young people's chances of succeeding in the future, not least in order to make up

for what has been missed concerning educational matters while in care. The education for this group is often interrupted. A comparison between five European countries shows that things they have in common are issues concerning continuity in school and lack of social support (Jackson & Cameron, 2012). A need of support during an extended time is underlined by several researchers (Höjer & Sjöblom, 2011; Stein, 2012; Biehal & Wade, 1996). Another aspect emphasizing care-leavers' vulnerability is the number of young people leaving care who have lost one or both parents, a figure which is significantly higher among this group compared with peers with no out-of-home care experiences (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001; Franzen & Vinnerljung, 2006).

Some studies recognize the young people's voices (c.f. Höjer & Sjöblom, 2014; Dixon, 2008; Mendes, 2014). Despite geographical contexts, the above-mentioned struggles when leaving care seem to be general. Ibrahim and Howe (2011) claim that in Jordan, matters such as lack of education and difficulties with becoming established in the labour market are visible there also. They further argue that what may be of significance and may differentiate some countries from others is the embodiment of an individualistic approach compared to a collectivistic one. A collectivistic approach is claimed to be common in the Arabic society, but when dealing with the children in care the individualistic perspective also is applied in Jordan which is said to have negative consequences and may cause problem when the youths try to re-integrate into the (collectivistic) society after care. In the initial chapter of an anthology highlighting an international perspective on transitions from care to adulthood it is shown that the term 'care-leaver' in relation to making a transition may have different meanings, depending on the geographical location. While in the UK it is related to independence, in some other countries it is associated with different reasons for leaving the care of the state, which can include cases of adoption or returning to the biological parents (Munro & Stein, 2008).

After placement it is preferable if the transition from care happens gradually rather than abruptly (Stein, 2012). The period right after leaving care is a difficult time for many care-leavers trying to deal with feelings of loneliness, which may be one of the reasons for the increased level of mental health problems during this phase (Dixon, 2008; Ford, Vostanis, Meltzer, &

Goodman, 2007; Ward, 2001). A suggestion to address this problem is that the young people should be able to have continuing contact with the former care (Ward, 2011; Dixon et al. 2006). Protective factors and supporting strategies are brought up as important aspects in the leaving-care research, including for instance extended time in care (Biehal & Wade, 1996; Höjer & Sjöblom, 2011b; Stein, 2012), good quality of care (Sinclair, Baker, Lee, & Gibbs, 2007) and the significance of being able to meet the individuals' specific needs (Luke, Sinclair, Woolgar, & Sebba, 2014).

Questions regarding what may be doable within the national context, as well as in a more global arena have been discussed (Dixon et al. 2006; Backe-Hansen et al., 2013; Munro et al. 2011). Backe-Hansen et al. (2013) points out for instance that there are differences among the Nordic countries. Sweden handles the issues related to the aftercare within the child welfare system and Norway has its own independent body for these matters. However, the Norwegian system might not ensure good quality of the service, even though the Norwegian system may allow more targeted service. However, research has shown that Norway does not properly motivate the young care-leavers to seek further support due to, for instance, the responsible authorities' inadequate preparation (Oterholm, 2009). The importance of understanding this issue from a global perspective is acknowledged (Pinkerton, 2011; Mendes, 2009). Pinkerton argues for a global understanding of issues related to care-leavers. He claims that globalization concerns us all and so do the care-leavers and the practices targeting them. It is being suggested that more focus needs to be put on how it could be possible to exchange experiences cross borders in order to improve these children's lives. By referring to United Nations Committee of the Right of the Child, Pinkerton (2011) maintains that care-leavers have to be recognized on a structural level, for example meaning to be acknowledged as a global concern.

Care-leavers are sometimes divided into categories based on different needs. The ethnic minority background is one such category, care-leavers with disabilities or care-leavers as young parents are two other examples of such groups. It is being claimed that they are all in need of more support compared to other care-leavers (Stein, 2012). Within the care-leaving research there is some focus on ethnic minority groups per se, and such

research is often focused on matters of identity, racism, comparisons between these groups and other care-leavers, and the relevance of carers having the same ethnical minority background as the young people placed in care (Malek, 2011; Barn, Andrew & Mantovani, 2005; Biehal et al, 1992). A quite early study on the topic showed that even though most of the young people included in the study claimed not to be victims of discrimination and racism, issues related to the minority background were nevertheless always present and defined as a complex matter for the young care-leavers to deal with. Being forced to find a way to relate to racial and ethnic issues had a great impact on the development of the identity. From a professional point of view it was claimed that if some (in this case, very few) youths wished to get a social worker with the same ethnical minority background it may cause hinder other professionals in developing skills and knowledge meeting that specific minority (Barn, Andrew & Mantovani, 2005).

An interesting study focused on indigenous children and young people in Australia, a group who are overrepresented in the child welfare system. A comparison was made between them and the non-indigenous group, with attention directed towards the care-leaving processes. Even though the state is responsible for the care-leaving processes in the state of Victoria, this procedure is poor and research regarding indigenous young people is lacking. Cultural awareness and sensitivity of professionals was emphasized as an important factor in their work to build sustainable relationships with the indigenous young people and thus making it easier to support them after care (Mendes, Saunders, Baidawi, 2016).

SUMMARY

The three dissertations with an historical perspective all have in common descriptions of the children's social situations and conditions during the time of escaping from danger. Issues of ethnicity and culture raise a crucial question about belonging, which is a theme constantly present in previous research. To deepen the understanding regarding how the unaccompanied youths understand and make sense of their experiences during their transition it is important to emphasize the process of leaving care as a type of resettlement into society. The unaccompanied children and youths are leaving care and resettling into a new context both in terms of being care-

leavers in general but also as newcomers in a society where they are from then expected to manage on their own.

4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework applied in this dissertation consists of several different perspectives and concepts; ethnicity and culture, transnationalism and childhood sociology. When aiming at understanding different issues related to unaccompanied children and youths in residential care, such as the leaving care process and the youth' ethnic minority backgrounds, the concepts of ethnicity and culture deepen the understanding of the young people's ethnic minority background; the transnationalism gives a view of what it means to life in a transnational world; and the childhood sociology help us to see the unaccompanied child as any other child. Building on these perspectives it becomes possible to focus on both the specific such as the ethnic minority background as well as more general aspects, such as children, childhood, and matters related to that specific period of time. The process of power is constantly present and should therefore be understood as always having an impact on how we relate to these issues, whether the focus is on how childhood is constructed or how ethnicity works as a subordinating category. The central concepts of ethnicity and culture may have a more pragmatic meaning when discussed among the participants in an everyday situation, but are at the same time two strong theoretical concepts that need to be problematized and positioned.

4.1 Ethnicity & culture

This section will depart from a work presenting an extensive picture where the complexity of ethnicity and culture is acknowledged (Sandberg, 2010). Sandberg studied on discourses about ethnic minority youths in scientific and official documents. She found that social problems regarding youths with an ethnic minority background were often explained by referring to the cultural background, while the same problem for young people with a Swedish background was explained by y social or psychological notions. She claims that the ultimate situation would have been if there was no reason to carry out studies with a specific focus on these concepts (ethnicity and culture), and instead have a more general one. However, there are societal structures of power, resulting in class, geographical (space/place of birth) differences that relates to the colour of skin, existing/ascribed ethnic and cultural background etc. These separate people into certain groups,

depending on what is being defined in terms of ethnicity and culture. The understanding of, and how different groups are categorized and related to each other in respect to power and dominance is therefore crucial not at least since these have real consequences; thus there is a need for studies aiming to illustrate ethnicity and culture from a perspective of power to clarify how they work as subordinating categories (Sandberg, 2010).

4.1.1 Ethnicity

So, what do we then mean when we bring up the concept of ethnicity for discussion, and what possible connections may this have with the concept of culture which often seems to be mentioned in relation to or instead of the meaning of ethnicity? Ethnicity is defined by Williams (1976), and comes originally from the Greek word *ethnikos*, which means heathen. That meaning of the concept was used from around the 13th century until the 18th century, when the concept of ethnicity was related mainly to racial features. The concept of ethnics was then used in relation to describing, for instance, Jewish and Italian people with the notion that these groups were less valuable compared to what was spoken of in the US in terms of other 'races'. The meaning of ethnicity as a differentiated/differentiating aspect is discussed in earlier work. For instance, take a closer look at Weber's (1983) discussion concerning ethnic groups, related to the concept of 'race' as something illustrating a common and inherited characteristic creating some kind of belongingness to a certain group, and having an impact on how we tend to act. Such ways of perceiving behaviour as a construction for belonging create a differentiated understanding of 'the other'. Without claiming that Weber's (1983) way of relating the meaning of ethnic groups has the same understanding as that used in this dissertation, I still want to point out his early focus on differentiation. In Simmels' (1971) discussion about the 'stranger' (which is applied in study III), the focus was also on social and cultural differences, using the majority society as a norm differentiated from the stranger. Weber's (1983) early focus on differentiation is something which is emphasized in Swedish literature, and is often used for learning purposes when trying to explain and dig deeper into the meaning of the concept of ethnicity (see for instance similar discussions in Peterson & Ålund, 2007; Wikström, 2009). However, it is claimed that what many definitions of ethnicity have in common are a focus

on classification of people and relations between different groups (Hylland-Eriksen, 1993). What differentiates certain approaches to the concept of ethnicity is the emphasis (or lack of it) on power.

4.1.2 Culture

Williams (1976) has also discussed definitions of culture. It becomes clear that this concept does not have the same obvious distinction as ethnicity (see also Sollors, 1986 for a similar perspective). Culture has been used in many different contexts, and its meaning seems to have changed to a great extent based on situation and time. It is also claimed that the concept of culture is one of the most complex in the English language, due to its long history of being used in so many different disciplines and fields (Williams, 1976). Culture is broader than ethnicity and is used more in an everyday context. One way of understanding the meaning is to put it in relation to cultivation, civilization. Being cultivated was linked to groups of people developing the fastest and in a certain direction (Liedman, 1999). Even though the cultivation aspect has been taken away from the concept of culture, a similar focus is still present in the understanding of different cultures. Based on Hylland-Eriksen's way of reasoning, ethnicity and culture are related to each other. In order to be able to talk about ethnicity as something existing, there need to be groups of people in contact with each other. Between these relations there also needs to be a perception about the other groups' differences compared with one's own group belonging. Hylland-Eriksen, (1993:22) wrote: "Just in those cases where cultural differences are perceived as important, and are made into something social relevant, the social relation involves an ethnical element." Björngren-Cuadra (2005) questions the concept of culture competence, and asks for a deeper understanding of its possibilities and limitations.

4.1.3 The ethnic groups as a social organization

The understanding of the concepts of ethnicity and culture in this thesis are built on a theoretical understanding that is connected to the Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth. Based on his understanding, ethnicity and culture are seen as concepts having meanings connected to each other. Ethnicity, according to Barth (1969), is a social organization. Culture is seen as being created by human beings, and consists of language, institutions, and

symbols – a kind of collective representation. Ethnic groups are created and compared to other groups, and are further developed into organizational groups. The standpoint of most importance in relation to the present research project is the focus on ethnic groups as something non-essential. This means that groups exist; however, their cultural characteristics can change, depending on time, place, and people involved – as well as, but not the least – on processes relating to definitions, categorization and the creation/perception of difference and relations of power. Thus, it is difficult to talk about ethnic groups as being consistent, but rather one should emphasize the interchange and the interaction between different groups, individuals and processes of power. With this interpretation of ethnic groups it becomes difficult to make broad generalizations based on where someone happens to be born. The existence of an ethnic group with a certain ethnicity and certain cultural characteristics is more complex than that, and as mentioned earlier, always depends on power (Barth, 1969).

The concept of ethnicity is central in the present doctoral project and will be looked upon as a socially constructed category rather than something fixed and unchangeable. Putting that concept in relation to a critical view gives an additional picture of how to understand issues related to something like experiences of social exclusion (and inclusion) among individuals trying to become integrated into a more or less new geographical context. An empirical example is in Järvinen (2003). She studied homeless immigrants and identified the experience of loneliness as quite common among them. The issue of loneliness became visible through the expressed feeling of being marginalized from the rest of the society and the participants defined themselves as uninvited guests in the eyes of the majority population (a.a). The position of uninvited guest can be related to the experienced position of the unaccompanied children and youths visible in study I.

4.1.4 Ethnicity, culture and notions of racism

Wern (2001) claims that cultural racism represents a movement from biological racism to a modernized version where the culture serves the same purpose, i.e. being understood as superior in relation to cultures outside the non-European area. This is something that Jönsson (2013) discusses in relation to social work practice in terms of culturalisation. Like De los Reyes, Molina & Mulinari (2005), Wern (2001) seems to agree that the

discourse in society focuses on aspects of alleged cultural differences instead of biological differences. De los Reyes, Molina & Mulinari (2005) claim further that a result of this is that people belonging to an ethnic minority background are put in the same group that was earlier made for the working class, people with disabilities, and Romani people. If the link to processes of power in relation to the concepts of ethnicity and culture is silenced, racism will always be reproduced and will go unnoticed. Some authors also claim that it is not possible to address the concepts of ethnicity and culture without also entering the domain of racism (Hall, 1999; Solomos & Back, 2000; Said 2004).

4.2 Transnationalism

The circumstances surrounding unaccompanied children and youths need to be understood from a broader perspective then just what happens within the borders of Sweden. Therefore, the empirical data in this dissertation discusses the theoretical perspective of transnationalism. However, in this part of the text the opportunity will be taken to consider more deeply some specific aspects within this theoretical framework. This perspective is also visible in some of the previous research on unaccompanied children and youths (e.g. Stretmo & Melander, 2013; Backlund et al, 2012).

Activities taking place between different national states make it possible to create relations on different levels. This includes an individual level where a certain person might be able to interact via Skype with someone located on the other side of the globe, but also includes enterprises exchanging favours and doing business despite the geographical distance. The activities taking place may also be of a more political and cultural character. These activities are possible as a result of the development and easier access to technological equipment at lower cost (e.g. Grillo 2001; Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999; Vertovec, 2004). It is claimed to be easier to engage in this kind of activity when the boundaries dividing the states in a sense now are vaguer, not meaning it is easier to migrate between countries but rather because of the possibility to keep in contact and to establish relations (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002).

The intensity of the activity cross national border has been on interest for several researchers (e.g,. Pries, 2001a, 2001b; Wimmer & Glick Schiller,

2002). The borders were earlier described as more distinct. Understanding the nation state as closed, with no or little action in relation to others, created a view of the immigrant as socially marginalized, culturally different, but also as a possible security risk due to a reinforced alienation, a perception which, due to a transnational perspective, seems to have been partly reconsidered. The preferred concept may now therefore be the term 'transmigrant' (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002).

4.2.1 Different dimensions of transnationalism

Gustavsson (2007) divides transnationalism into several different dimensions; these divisions seem to depict a multidimensional content. They are: mobility, identity and belonging, social networks and social structures, cultural practices and institutions (Gustavsson, 2007: 454). The meaning of the dimensions is commonly used in research applying a transnational perspective, both in empirically- and more theoretically based studies.

Regarding Gustavsson's (2007) meaning of the dimensions stated above, a review shows that the dimension regarding mobility aims to explain that migration is not a single occurrence but rather an on-going activity taking place. While traveling back and forth between the sending and the receiving country, it is also easier to maintain relationships. In addition, the identity and belonging dimensions includes both how collective as well as how individual identities are created, changed, and influenced by social and cultural formations between countries. With the social network and social structures dimension, the focus is on relatives, friends, and the migrants living in different places around the globe. The norm of solidarity is something that is negotiated and formed in such relations. Last, the occurrence of 'hybrid' cultures represents the exchange of cultural expressions having an impact on the societies and the individuals involved in the migration process. In Vertovecs' (2004) report, where he discusses how transnationalism has been examined in previous research, several examples fit into the above-mentioned dimensions. One is the description of changed circumstances for families and parenthood, explained as a consequence of developed media technology. However, it is also emphasized that transnational relations is not always positive and easy to deal with because of potential emotional costs.

4.2.2 Examples of studies on transnationalism

In a study carried out by Pries (2001b), the mobility between the US and Mexico is discussed as an example of an on-going movement among immigrants. The question is raised of whether this has to do with the people's unwillingness to settle down or the difficulties in getting into the society due to factors such as processes of bureaucracy. Khayatis' (2008) dissertation, which focuses on the concept of diaspora in relation to Kurds in France, is another example of earlier research within this field. In his description of the theory of transnationalism the dimensions are viewed by stressing the connecting links between countries that are important for individuals' identity development.

The theoretical perspective of transnationalism has also been brought up and discussed in Swedish research related to unaccompanied children and youths, but also related to migrants in general. An example besides Khayati (2008) is a dissertation focusing on transnational relations between Swedish-Somalian people. Here, the issues are related to strategies for financial support as well as the meaning of transnational relations between individuals who migrated from Somalia to Sweden and the ones left behind (Melander, 2009). Further influences of a transnational perspective can be seen in research conducted with a focus on unaccompanied children and youths in Sweden (Stretmo & Melander, 2013; Backlund et al., 2012 & 2014; Söderqvist, 2014; Hessle, 2009). An overall conclusion regarding the studies carried out within the Swedish research arena is that the integration in Sweden seems to be facilitated if the children and youths have the possibility, on an individual level, to get in contact with and keep such relations at the same time as they establish a new life in Sweden.

4.3 Childhood sociology

Although the interviews conducted in study I included young people over the age of 18 they all had the experience of belonging to the category of [unaccompanied] children. The professionals participating in the research had to relate to people under the age of 18. Thus, it is important to outline how the children in our society have been and are understood. A discussion of the now almost classic works when focusing on the childhood sociology

will begin this section (Prout & James, 1990; James & James, 2004; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998).

Prout & James (1990) highlight a paradigm that opens up a new ways of researching children and childhood, differing from how earlier research has understood childhood in general and children in particular. As the specific focus here is on the relevance of this theory in relation to unaccompanied children and youths, it is significant to draw attention to childhood understood as a social construction. This opens up the possibility of understanding childhood based on the specific context of which the child happens to be a part. An additional important aspect is the role given to the child when s/he is no longer looked upon as a passive participant, but rather as a co-creator in the socially constructed context of which we are all a part (Prout & James, 1990).

The concept of childhood was discussed by Aries already in 1962. Influences based on historical, cultural, and political elements play a significant role in shaping childhood as well as how the child experiences that specific time in life (James & James, 2004). Picturing childhood in such a way also says something about how to understand the concept of child/children. James and James (2004) argue further for the importance of being able to distinguish the individual from the collective. In one way, it is stated that children may be talked about in terms of a collective, but it seems to be more appropriate to highlight the individual child's own contribution and being in the social world. In doing so we are making sure that the child's agency is being recognized. It is further claimed that children constitute one of a few groups often referred to as a collective, taking for granted that they are sharing the same experiences and ways of being. Such generalization is mostly used in a society when discussing groups of people who are or could be marginalized in different aspects, for example the elderly (James & James, 2004).

This theory is sometimes presented in terms of being 'new'. James and his colleagues (1998) emphasize this issue and claim that discussing the concepts of childhood and children based on a theoretical understanding is not anything new or revolutionary. Instead, the reason for illustrating these issues from such a perspective is built on a wish to highlight the historical context surrounding childhood, but also emphasizing the importance these

issues are given in contemporary society. Qvortrup (2012) confirms this kind of argument. In his discussion it is also possible to see how understanding the balance between the general and the specific conditions is given importance. He has chosen to use France as an example when arguing that from the 1920s the values and norms concerning childhood were introduced. But as the decades passed, these values and norms changed to fit better into the development of the society. Thus according to Qvortrup (2012), childhood is, like adulthood, something that changes over time. It is a kind of a structural form that consists of both a permanent structural part as well as constantly changing content. When a child grows up, childhood will be a social space that is experienced in different ways but this structure will later be left behind. Thus the childhood needs to be defined in both general and more specific terms where the collective is not hiding an individual perspective.

4.3.1 "Children" – an ambivalent category

When presenting the main features of the sociology of childhood this theory seems reasonable and not that difficult to apply. However, when looking further into different practical contexts the ambivalence in relation to this issue becomes visible, not least when discussing children's participation in research. Whether or not children are supposed to participate in research or if such participation would cause harm says something about how we tend to understand children and youths today, not least when looking at childhood as an institutionalized period of time characteristic for the postmodern era (Halldén, 2012; Kjørholt, 2012). Jensen (2012) emphasizes this question by focusing on children in difficult life situations and their possibility to participate in interviews. The Convention of the Rights of the Child is brought up with reference to the paragraph emphasizing the children's right to make their voices heard about things that concern them. It is also argued that in relation to the CRC the researcher's view of children's possible participation has changed. If earlier a more protective aura characterized the attitude towards the child's participation, it is now different and tends to be more permissive.

The child's perspective is another important aspect of the discussion of the sociology of childhood. Näsman (2013) is one of several arguing that several child perspectives exist, rather than just one specific one (see also Halldén,

2003). An example brought up by James & James (2004) put such an argument into an understandable context. They claim that a child growing up in a middle class urban family in Rio may have more in common with a child growing up under the same circumstances in London, than someone of the same age spending their childhood in a less wealthy family in the countryside in Rio.

Näsman (2013) claims that to be in the age range between 0-18 means that you are categorized as a child and this category is often not questioned. Andersson (2013) presents a discussion concerning the field of child welfare and the trends that have been important for how we tend to understand the children in our society. In the 70s and 80s a family-oriented perspective was in focus, which basically meant that focus was put on a well-functioning relationship between the parents and the children, even if the child was placed outside the home. Also, the prevention work for families was included in such a perspective. In the 90s and 00s the sociology of childhood was introduced and had a great impact on how we understood the child as an independent person, which may be related to the changed view of children's participation in research. Andersson (2013) argued that the different trends do not have to be understood as each other's opposites. The children's rights may be emphasized at the same time as the importance of the child being a part of a family is strengthened. How the state is constructed and what kind of welfare regime the country has also says something about how we tend to see children. From an early stage, Sweden and the Scandinavian countries had the state involved in family matters, for instance by offering day-care. Notions of equality between men and women were put into practice in order to make it possible for both to be a part of the labour market. That also had an impact on the children's condition, where the equality between different groups of children was defined as crucial (Kjørholt, 2012).

The difficulties with how to understand the children are also emphasized by Frenqvist (2011), claiming that the category itself includes an aspect of 'neediness'. The risk is however that the individual needs of the children disappear when the entire group of children is automatically defined as in need of extra support. Brown-Rosier (2011) argues that there are several places in our society where the exclusion of children is never questioned. The fact that they are children can work as the only explanation for

exclusion. An example of this is shops with a notice informing the customers that only a certain number of children are allowed to be inside at the same time. The same is true for hotels and restaurants using the prohibition of children as a positive argument in marketing. If the same actions were put in relation to other groups in our contemporary society, such as homosexuals or black people, the protests would be massive. Brown-Rosier (2011) argues that possibility to exclude children is proof of children's sub-ordinated position. So, despite the strengthened position the children may have due to the emergence of the sociology of childhood, ambivalence is still present. The 'child' can be understood as weak or as independent, depending on the specific situation and the temporary purpose.

SUMMARY

Ethnicity and culture are examples of both theoretical as well as practical concepts that are linked to the unaccompanied children and youths due their ethnic minority background. When using the concept of ethnicity I refer to a more theoretical understanding of the concept, a kind of social organization, to use Barth's (1969) words, a group that exists only when compared to other groups. As the concept of culture is more frequently used on a daily basis it will become visible more often in the participants' statements. Consequently, I will sometimes refer just to the concept of ethnicity and at other times to just culture.

The perspective of transnationalism gives an understanding of the experiences and circumstances the unaccompanied children and youths are living under and have to relate to. Links and relations between the unaccompanied young people and to other countries and people are important knowledge in the understanding of this group. The last perspective applied is that of childhood sociology, which gives an important perspective on the different positions the unaccompanied young people can attain in relation to the understanding of childhood/childhoods and being a child/ young unaccompanied person trying to resettle in a new geographical context. This theoretical perspective illuminates both the specificity of being an unaccompanied child/young person and on the other hand being like any other child/young person that belongs to a common category and age group that is affected by the conditions related to their position belonging to that group.

The transnationalism and the sociology of childhood should be understood as equally important theoretical perspectives in this dissertation, even though ethnicity and culture are the main concepts that will be used.

5 Summary of the studies

5.1 Paper I

Leaving Care with "Cultural Baggage": The Development of an Identity within a Transnational Space

The purpose of this study was to examine the unaccompanied minors' experiences of leaving care, and relate these to perceptions about ethnicity and culture. Two main questions were presented. (a) How do unaccompanied minors define their identities throughout the process of transition from care? and (b) How do unaccompanied minors perceive the meaning of their ethnic minority backgrounds in relation to the transition into adulthood after leaving care?

The young men participating in the study thus belong to the group of care-leavers meaning those having the experience of being placed outside home and of completing that placement. Previous research about care-leavers in general has shown that it is a critical phase that often takes place when young people are in the middle of their transition to adulthood. Care-leavers are more likely to have limited access to economic and social means. In this study it is suggested that the experiences of migration may be added when discussing the definition of identities and the transition out of care.

Transnationalism is used as the main theoretical framework in this paper. This theory put the focus on activities and connections established within and between people living in different countries having an impact on the identity formation. From that perspective, the geographical boundaries seem less important as the fluidity over boarders opens up for a different definition of the migrant as less socially marginalized, less culturally different or possible security risk. The focus on actions crossing the boundaries of different states turns the migrant into what is termed as a transmigrant, emphasizing the individual's fluidity as well as also linking to the concepts of identity and space. An additional theoretical perspective presented in this study is the sociological approach to childhood. The unaccompanied children and youths participating in this study are part of a greater context

related to children and childhood in general. In that, the child is understood as an active human being and there are considered to be several children's perspectives rather than just one.

The study is qualitative and the data was collected through individual interviews with 11 young men who had experienced leaving care after being received in a Swedish municipality as unaccompanied minors. At the time of the interviews the young men were aged between 18 and 22, all had been issued permanent residency and had been in Sweden up to five years. Some had experiences of living in foster homes while most had stayed in residential care units going through the leaving care chain, including different stages with the purpose of preparing for future independent living.

The results showed that thoughts of the ethnic minority background were constantly present in the young men's lives, and this was also the case during the placement. The results are presented in four themes; (a) cultural baggage; (b) isolation; (c) on the go; and (d) just an ordinary life. The young men's perceptions about culture were constantly present in the discussions. The Swedish culture was compared with their own culture and used as a tool to explain certain behaviour and understand different situations. What was being defined as Swedish culture was sometimes despised but at other times was sought, all depending on the specific situation. Lack of social contacts describes the theme of isolation where the language barrier was used as an explanation for difficulties getting included in the Swedish society. The results showed also how Sweden was not necessarily portrayed as the young men's future home. The possibility to stay in contact with friends and relatives around the world seemed to have an impact on these young men picturing themselves living somewhere else in the future. However, they were ambivalent because the time spent in Sweden away from family made it more difficult to adapt to a situation in the country of origin when visiting. The process of leaving care started mentally long before the placement ended formally. Life in care was seen as a temporary period and everything that followed was defined as the "ordinary life". Future plans included independent living, self-sufficiency. However, great disappointment was expressed when experiencing obstacles to entering the labour market or getting to know other young people.

The young men participating in the study illustrated in different ways the meaning of their ethnic minority background in relation to how they tended to define themselves. Their stories about preparing for leaving care showed a continuous attempt to make adjustments in order to fit in. Different contexts were experienced as requiring different kinds of ways of being, forcing them to create what can be called situational identities. Compared with care-leavers in general it seems as if unaccompanied youths participating in this study had to master their own and possibly others' perceptions of their minority background, which here are defined as 'cultural baggage'. It may therefore be possible to talk in terms of a multiple adjustment, including the struggle with obstacles care-leavers in general have to overcome and how they must adjust to a perceived view of how to become Swedish. This picture was created among the young men themselves based on their view of how others define them.

5.2 Paper II

Home sweet home? Professionals' understanding of 'home' within residential care for unaccompanied youths in Sweden

The focus of this study was, from a professional point of view, to examine the concept of home within the frameworks of residential care units for unaccompanied children and youths in Sweden. What does the concept of home and/or homelike environment at the two chosen residential care units mean from professionals' points of view? What possible implications may the professional's interpretation of the concept of home and/or homelike environment have on the daily work with the unaccompanied young people at the residential care units?

The concept of home is discussed in several different disciplines. It seems to be a complex concept with numerous ways of defining it. A home may thus be more than a physical structure and can also be related to a state of mind. Saunders & Williams (1988) claim that there are certain aspects that need to be included in a definition of the concept, despite its complexity. These aspects are that it is a place where people feel they have control, there is an absence of surveillance, and a feeling of being able to be who you are. As a contrast to a home, Goffman's (1961) theoretical discussions about total institutions characterized as complex organizations with rigid systems of

rules have been used. The regulations in the total institution are binding in relation to the inmates, and there is a clear division between them and the staff, where the staff members can utilize far more discretion. These two groups, staff and inmates, are divided into two strata: one is inferior and the other superior.

The study is qualitative, and data have been collected through participatory observations at two residential care units and individual interviews with the professionals. Five weeks were spent at each residential care unit to observe the staff's daily work. The observations aimed to get a better understanding of the presidential care units. Furthermore, interviews were conducted emphasizing both the personal views of work and reflections on specific incidents that had been observed, many of them related to the notion of home. The data was processed using content analysis.

The presentation of the findings has been divided into three themes. First; the ideal home representing the professionals' vision of what kind of residential care they were trying to provide for the youth. That kind of home included more hands-on aspects such as the being able to offer basic comfort and security, such as food on the table. The professionals also referred to what they perceived as being a 'Swedish home', using themselves as good examples. However; observed situations during the daily practices showed the struggle with putting the vision of letting the youths have more discretion into practice. The substitute home is the second theme; it represents the professional's way of relating to their work. Examples are given of staff members comparing the residential care unit with their own family, claiming that it almost works under the same conditions. That kind of comparison with a family-like context was only brought up in the interviews, and never mentioned in the direct contact with the youths at the residential care unit. Despite the important role as some kind of family described by some of the professionals, it becomes clear that this substitute home is something they agreed on ending at a specific time i.e. when the placement was about to end. The third and last theme, home as an obstacle, represents that the intention to create a home for the youths also had an impact on how the professionals related to their work. The home metaphor also affected the staff as it sometimes became difficult to separate between private and professional matters. The staff members together with the supervisors were trying to

reach some kind of consensus concerning where the boundaries should be drawn. At both of the residential care units, rules existed to distinguish between 'the professional me' and 'the private me'.

There were several criteria in previous research for reaching some common understanding of what we actually can call home. Saunders & Williams (1988) highlighted the possibility of being in control, lack of surveillance and a place to be oneself. It may be possible to relate these three aspects of the concept ontological security, when it comes to the staff's aim to make on the staff's aim to make the young people feel secure and comfortable. Although parts of the meaning given by the participants to the home definition seem to fit with the criteria stated above, most of the circumstances in the residential care units did not live up to the expectation of what can be defined as a home. The reason for this is that the presence of both controlling elements and surveillance practiced by the staff was inevitable, as a part of the aim of guaranteeing the young people's well-being and observing their behaviour, which was reported to the responsible person at the social welfare office.

This study has an important implication for the social work practices. The programs executed in Sweden for unaccompanied young people were originally not made for them. Unaccompanied young people have different backgrounds than the young people who are usually placed in care, and therefore also other needs. By focusing on these specific needs, the social work practice may facilitate increased well-being of these groups. It is important to note that the staffs' ambitions of creating a home-like atmosphere' reflect only good intentions, but they sometimes come into conflict with structural and organizational conditions that are difficult for them to control.

5.3 Paper III

"In Sweden work is more important than the culture, actually!" The care-leaving process for unaccompanied youths from the perspective of social workers

The focus of this study was to present reflections about the leaving care process for unaccompanied children and youths from a professional

perspective with specific attention directed towards the meaning making of the minority backgrounds related to the children's and youth's care-leaving process.

The purpose was twofold:

(a) How is the care-leaving process defined and put into practice by the professionals in their daily work with unaccompanied youths at residential care units? (b) How are the youths' minority backgrounds defined and acted upon by the professionals, in relation to the care-leaving process?

Several issues are important to take into consideration when trying to understand the process of leaving care; such as social networks, education and housing. These are examples of areas where the youths in care may need to have extra support, as lack of such may make the re-integration in the society as well as the transition into adulthood more difficult. The process of transition may be understood as starting when the placement is initiated and as continuing during placement, but it reaches its most critical point when placement is about to end. The support for care-leavers is also needed after the formal placement is completed. In research about care-leavers the concept of interdependence is discussed as an alternative to independence/dependence. Interdependence puts focus on reciprocity. Thus families, friends and the communities all play an important role in the leaving care processes; the responsibility is not placed on just one of them.

The study is qualitative and the data have been collected through focus groups interviews with professionals operating at two different residential care units for unaccompanied children and youths. The differences in educational background and work experiences made the focus groups heterogeneous. Social workers, teachers and leisure assistants with everything from a few months to three years' experience of working with this specific target group were represented in the group. The focus group's discussions were based on situations observed during the moderators' participatory observation at the residential care units. The data was later analysed using thematic content analysis.

Hasenfeld's theory concerning the human service organization (HSO), Schutz's transnationalism, (1944) and Simmel's (1971) concept of the

stranger was the theoretical framework used. The HSO works as an overall perspective focusing on the basic conditions for services such as the residential care units. The HSO may be seen as closely connected to a specific context governed by rules and regulations nationally and having a great impact on how the work within the service organization is carried out on a local level. From the perspective of transnationalism, attention is given to action and activities taking place between countries having a great impact on both individual and structure levels in the society, and also to the individuals creating transnational relations. The concept of integration plays a significant role in the transnational perspective. This is a theory where the migrant is defined as a transmigrant who exists in some kind of flow and movement rather than in a static position. Schutz (1944) and Simmel (1971) emphasize a different perspective on the same concept, with a focus on strangerhood as a form of exclusion.

The results of this study have been presented in three different themes. The first *becoming independent* emphasizes the professionals' focus on helping the unaccompanied youths to be independent. Independency was understood as something that would contribute to a successful integration. Leaving care for this specific group of care-leavers is therefore claimed by the professionals to be different compared to other care-leavers as focus here is put on getting into contact with a new society rather than on some kind of re-integration. Being able to define the concept of integration seemed however to be difficult among the professionals as it also included a more diffuse aspect related to getting the unaccompanied youths to be like any other Swede. In the second theme, a *collective individualist,* the professionals struggle with seeing the individual's needs among the group of youth. Frustration was expressed concerning the inability to see and meet the youths' specific needs to make sure they reached some kind of equality so no one would feel discriminated against. The last theme *the cultural mystery* focused on the meaning making of the youth's ethnic background. A quite rigid picture presented itself where the culture was portrayed as static was presented among the professionals. That was exemplified through when a staff member that shared the same ethnical background as some of the youths was appointed as a cultural interrupter and given great responsibility based on that. However, there were others among the professionals who

seemed to have a more fluid way of defining and understanding the meaning of the culture background.

The professionals participating in this study belonged to the category of street-level bureaucrats operating within the HSO. The care-leaving process occurring within the frameworks of such organizations is often discussed in terms of processing people, aiming to change the service-user (Hasenfeld, 2010). That process is in this specific context defined according to what the staff aim to achieve with the youths; here there is strong focus on independence and integration. Becoming independent, doing things on your own, and not being too close to either the residential care staff or peers seemed to be important key factors for a successful transition from care. The unaccompanied youth migrant background makes us suggest that the transnational aspect is a way of relating to both the past and the present in order to be prepared for the future, and not only as something understood as temporary or only relevant when keeping in touch with relatives or performing activities, as proposed by Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, (1999). The lack of reflection on transnational processes during the daily activities in the residential care units may be a result of the conditions within an HSO, forcing the professionals to prioritize other things. The minority background had a central position in the discussions in the meetings between the professionals and youths, and was looked upon as something rigid or something that could be negotiated, depending on the situation. However, the minority background is an important part of understanding how the care-leaving process should best be formed to match the needs of the youth. Loch (2014) suggests that we look beyond the discourses of assimilation and integration and emphasize the possibility of movement. This creates a challenge for the professionals to use their discretion in allowing space for this heterogenic group of youths and to encourage them to find their own place and identity. Becoming independent in a transnational world, as well as within the framework of an HSO that sets the scene for the practices for unaccompanied children and youths, may require a more updated version of dependence versus independence than that given by the professionals in this study. Therefore, the introduction of interdependence seems to be more appropriate in this type of social work with this group of young people.

5.4 Paper IV

"Cause you know how it is here" – methodological implications in research about unaccompanied children

Many people are coming to Europe in the hope of finding a safe haven. Global challenges are converted to local issues. The minority backgrounds of these people are often mentioned as an important component of the understanding and the care of those coming to Sweden. The aim of this study is to discuss methodological challenges in research about vulnerable groups, with a specific focus on unaccompanied children and youths. What challenges become visible in the research process when the researcher aims to focus on the unaccompanied youths' perspective during their initial time in Sweden? What different positions and roles become visible in the encounter between unaccompanied youths and the researcher during the interviews. What different implications may that have in relation to the research process? The discussions taking place in this study aim to increase the focus on methodological issues regarding children with a minority background in general and unaccompanied children and youths specifically.

The increased interest in children's participation in research is based on two factors. First, the recognition of children's rights thanks to the convention on children's rights but also a change in how children are being understood within the disciplines of social science, for instance through the sociological approach of childhood (Kirk, 2007), which is the theoretical perspective in focus in this study. The possibility to take another person's or group's perspective with the purpose of making someone else's voice heard has been extensively discussed within the feministic research tradition, as has the relationship between the researcher and the subject, and the question of what kind of knowledge is produced. Issues concerning positioning, partiality and reflexivity are also among such matters (Archer, 2004).

The methodological discussions in this study are based on the findings of a research project with the following main components; unaccompanied children and youths, the professionals views on issues of ethnicity and leaving care. The study is qualitative and the empirical data have been collected through individual interviews with youths having the experience of seeking asylum in Sweden on their own, observations at two residential care

units (HVB), and individual interviews and focus groups interviews with professionals operating at the residential care units.

Several issues are highlighted and discussed in the analysis, e.g. the difficulty in giving someone the possibility to talk about specific topics only, for instance 'race'/ethnicity. A narrowed focus such as that may result in that a minority-based position is reinforced. In several of the interviews the youths described how they experienced Swedes as different, sometimes in a negative way. During the interviews it became clear that some kind of consensus concerning "we-as the others" versus "them-as the Swedes" was established between interviewer and the participants. What is being said in an interview is a result of an interaction taken place between two or more parties; these parties have different tasks and responsibilities during the process of the interview (Hydén, 2014). The research questions being presented at the beginning of this study concerned possible methodological implications when a group of individuals being defined as vulnerable are involved in research. These issues were also related to the professional role of the researcher, and the personal self also has an impact on the research process. The challenges seemed to be many. The sociological approach of childhood asks us to understand children as competent, which requires a commitment to foster the children's active participation in the society, but also in the research. The researcher's similarities and differences with the one being interviewed are not static, but fluid, and change in the interaction with the participant. A constant negotiation and re-negotiation concerning our respective roles as researchers and participants takes place. The purpose of the discussion in this study was to emphasize the importance of constantly reflecting on the role of oneself as a researcher and the influence it may have on the relation to the participants, as well as the opportunities and limitations of that role in the research process and for the results.

6. Method

"If I were of a different gender, belonged to a different social class, had a different skin colour, believed in a different God, were of a different age or had a different nationality, the story may have unfolded differently (Wilińska, 2012:14)".

Conducting research is always about making choices and taking certain perspectives in favour of others, and that was also the case in this dissertation. As stressed by Wilińska (2012) I also believe that the dissertation presented here can be traced back to who I am. Eliasson (1995) is one of many who discuss the importance of making such choices visible.

Issues of exclusion have been of interest to me for a long time, not least issues related to ethnic and cultural matters. This project gave me the possibility to look further into such matters and possibly get some answers to attitudes and ways of behaving that I have met as a response to who I am over the years. The overall aim of this dissertation was to study how the perceptions of ethnicity and culture become meaningful in relation to the transition from care. With the main focus on perceptions of ethnicity and culture my own experiences have definitely had an impact on how the story of the unaccompanied children and youths unfolded, to use Wilińskas' words. Some of these choices and the impact my personal background might have had on this research project are discussed in study IV, but in order to prevent the research being characterized only by who I am, scientific considerations and methods have been used throughout the project, and some of them are discussed in the text below.

This section will consist of a description of the choices I have made when conducting the research, an overall illustration of how the study has been carried out, as well as discussions concerning possible consequences. The section is divided into four parts, each representing a particular set of data, namely: a) Individual interviews with youths, b) Observations at two residential care units for unaccompanied children and youths, c) Individual interviews with professionals at the residential care units, and d) Focus group interviews with the professionals at the residential care units. As a concluding part an ethical discussion will be presented, following the same structure based on the four data sets.

6.1 Data set A: Individual interviews with youths

Different aspects have been considered in relation to selection of participants. Eleven youths participated in individual interviews (study I). The access to the participants was gained through a supervisor at a residential care unit for unaccompanied children and youths located in the southern part of Sweden. The supervisor of the practices asked the youths about their interest in participation. About 25 youths who had left or were in the last stage of the placement were asked to participate. I was given the phone numbers only of the ones interested in participating. As I was not there when this first contact was made it is difficult to know what exactly had been said about the project and the youth's possibility to participate. According to the supervisor, the youths received a brief description of the project and about my role, they then could say whether I could contact them to give some more information and ask if they were interested in participating.

The group of 11 youths that ended up being a part of the study could have been either very positive or negative about their experiences in care. An attitude that is either negative or positive can be a motivation for participating, and the ones with a more balanced view might not feel the same need to express their points of view (e.g. Forkby & Liljeholm-Hansson, 2011). Based on the results of study I, there was some variation in terms of the attitudes. There are examples of some being very pleased with their stay, while others are dissatisfied. More importantly, several of the stories are nuanced and situations are described from more than just one perspective.

The youths were all offered the chance to be interviewed with an interpreter present but only one wished to do so. I believe that this interview came to be somehow a little different compared to the other ten. Lacking direct contact since everything had to go through a third person made it more difficult to get a flow and get deeper into the conversation. The interpretation created a feeling of being interrupted when waiting for the translation. To exclude the interviewee person based on their limited knowledge of Swedish would have been unethical and was therefore not an alternative. The presence of an interpreter has been problematized (Ingvarsdotter et. al., 2010). The study

claimed that it always is difficult to know exactly what may disappear in a translation. Such things as dialects and other markers that may say something about the person's background could be hidden. That is also true when the interpreter and the person being interviewed come from different areas and backgrounds, which may make it difficult for the interpreter to understand certain verbal expressions, which thus are not passed on to the researcher (Ingvarsdotter et. al., 2010).

The residential care unit through which I got into contact with the youths was chosen due to its experiences of receiving unaccompanied children and youths for a few years. Some of the youths had gone through the complete out-of-home care chain, first staying in a collective unit, then moving out to one of the apartments belonging to the residential care unit to practice independent living with a decreasing amount of support. It should be mentioned that although the contact was made through this place, some of the youths had experiences of living in foster homes and had only stayed at the residential care unit for a short period of time. The idea of residential care units driven by the municipality and not the state developed in 2006 (SKL, 2011); therefore, having two or more years of experience was quite a long period of experience.

This way of choosing the targeted unit, and later on the youths that ended up participating, may be defined as a convenient selection (Alston & Bowles, 2013). My purpose was never to look for a representative selection with the aim of being able to make broad generalizations. The purpose was rather to look for participants having these experiences. Such selection is claimed by the researcher to be relevant when, as in this case, specific knowledge is required within a certain area where the research is limited (Alston & Bowles, 2013). A convenient selection also allows an explorative approach to researching the chosen area.

6.1.1 Retrospective interviews

Repstad (1987) discusses the implementation of retrospective interviews that were used in his research when meeting youths. Since the unaccompanied youths had left the care unit a few years ago, they were asked to talk about a situation they had left behind. Repstad (1987) claims that there are some risks with that kind of interview, since an interview reflects emotions and

contexts the participant experienced at that specific time. Accordingly, the participants' present situation may have an impact on how they choose to present themselves and their experiences related to their first years in Sweden.

In a similar way, Thomsson's (2002) discussion about possible truths becomes interesting. She claims that results from an interview study cannot be argued as absolutely true, objective, and forever up-to-date. Focus should rather be put on the possibilities those stories offer for a deeper understanding of a specific phenomenon. Thomsson (2002) further claims that possibilities are given to establish theoretical reasoning and descriptions, which creates a basis for the reader to reflect on and get an understanding of the current issue. By interviewing a relatively small sample of youths with experience of coming to Sweden unaccompanied, the expectation was to focus on the youths' individual experiences. Through stressing those experiences, a greater understanding was not only obtained concerning the specific issue, but hopefully the possibility was also provided for a discussion on a theoretical level with the intention of generating increased knowledge about this specific topic.

One of two crucial aspects is that we as human beings seem to have the tendency to forget situations and opinions related to something that happened earlier in life. The second aspect concerns the possibility of remembering emotions we experienced at a certain moment (Repstad, 1987). It is quite understandable that the youths participating in this study did not exactly remember everything that happened at the time they lived in and left the residential care unit. One factor that may have had a great impact is that that specific time was probably quite turbulent, as for much of it, they did not know whether or not they would be able to stay in Sweden. This confirms Repstad's (1987) statement about the fact that stories may be changed or partly created at a later stage in life. Although the consequences of a retrospective approach may be dubious, the advantages seem to exceed the possible disadvantages.

Being placed in residential care is a stressful situation. This is discussed by Höjer & Sjöblom (2009) who claim that such experience may have an impact on future adulthoods. Because of that I decided not to focus on youths being placed in care when I was collecting the data. Apart from the

fact that it may have been difficult to reflect on a current situation, it could have been even more difficult to say something about the future which justified the chosen retrospective perspective.

6.1.2 The interview situation with the youths

The interviews were carried out in a separate room in the residential care unit where the youths lived. The place was chosen by the youths, who had been offered several other alternatives e.g. a separate room in the library. All the youths explained their chose of place by saying that it was familiar to them and easy to get to. Even though each interview situation was unique, some aspects seemed to be quite similar, such as me introducing the themes and the questions and taking the overall responsibility for the structure of the conversation in a role as a moderator. However, what differed was the level of comfort the youths seemed to have regarding how the questions were answered and the stories being told. Kohli (2006) claims that the way the stories are told by the unaccompanied children and youths in such situations relates to the level of trust. A relation needs to be built, based on trust, to ensure the young persons are willing and able to share in detail parts of their life story. It is impossible for me to say what kind of relationship and level of trust we created during that time, but most likely it was limited, due to our single meeting and the restricted amount of time during this meeting. Nevertheless, the feeling of closeness in the conversation differed, depending on the youths I met. While some were quite reserved and required more questions, others needed just to get a few questions to start talking spontaneously and freely. Based on those experiences I argue that the problem in cases where you only meet the person for an interview once is that it is not possible to build a deeper relationship or a great amount of trust. This aspect was taken in consideration when analysing the data, but that may not mean the stories given cannot be rich and of importance.

6.1.3 Analysis of individual interviews with the youths

The purpose of the interviews with the youths was to seek a conversation with focus on storytelling, stressing the youths' experiences as unaccompanied migrants and creating an understanding of the other person's way of shaping their world.

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim in order to be analysed. In the analysis, different themes were distinguished. The transcripts were read through a number of times with the purpose of finding aspects binding the data together. At the same time, attention was paid to individual and characteristic differences. The overall themes worked as a general structure, which included some subthemes. Svensson (2004) discusses the issues of processing qualitative data. He claims that qualitative data characteristically is based on its representation of linguistic units. These units build the basis for the categorization and descriptions often used in qualitative studies. In this study the linguistic units and their contents were based on the youths' experiences, which played a central role in the context and became the foundations for the categories later developed into themes. Another aspect to stress at this point is the concept of theoretical saturation, meaning reaching a limit where more or new information bringing additional angles or answers to the aim of the study does not seem to be available from the data (Svensson, 2004). This also becomes the case in this study at the end of the process of categorization.

Both the manifest and the latent content of the interviews were taken into consideration in the process of condensing meaning into codes. The codes formed the basis for the creation of categories, which in a last step were developed into specific themes (cf. Krippendorff, 2004; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Based on the empirical data, the results are thus presented in several different themes representing both the verbal as well as the more underlying content of what the youths communicated. Alston & Bowles (2013) argue that regardless of whether one works with a qualitative or a quantitative study, it is important to create a theoretical understanding for the argumentation carried out in the study and its results.

6.2 The residential care units

Two residential care units for unaccompanied children and youths were chosen when observing and interviewing the professionals. They are presented here according to the above described structure, e.g. the data collection at the residential care units should be understood as three of the four data sets.

6.2.1 Descriptions of the residential care units

To get a better sense of how the residential care units were structured, I will give a description of the overall organization as well as try to give some hints about the everyday life at the residential care units. Due to necessary confidentiality, I will portray a more general picture without supplying too many details about any of the specific places, in order to prevent the possibility of identifying the places. Both units were located in small villages, and accepted only boys from 15 years old, who were allowed to stay in the residential care system until the age of 21 if needed. At each unit, 9-12 placements were available, although not all places were always occupied during the time data was collected. When entering the buildings, the first impression was not that of a residential care unit. It could also have been a student home or something similar due to the open atmosphere, which gave a feeling that one could just walk in and out as one liked. In both units the kitchen connected with the dining room was the central area. Both the staff and the youths spent much time there either talking to each other, surfing on the internet, or doing homework. The impression given was that this part of the building invited the residents to gather, and created a feeling of togetherness. The youths very seldom spent time in their own rooms with the doors closed except for when they slept. At both places it was emphasized by the staff that they preferred the youths to speak Swedish when using the common spaces. However, this rule was broken from time to time, mostly because of the youths' lack of knowledge of Swedish, which seemed to be even harder to use when talking to one of the other youths sharing the same mother tongue.

The two residential care units accepted boys only. At that specific time a majority came from Afghanistan. As the residential care units accepted both youths in the process of seeking asylum and those with residence permits, the youths did not have the same status. Not knowing if they were to be allowed to stay in Sweden created a special atmosphere. The staff had, for instance, a discussion about how to motivate some of the youths to go to school when those specific individuals were obviously preoccupied with thoughts about their uncertain future.

6.2.2 The professionals at the residential care units

The professionals had different kinds of educational backgrounds. Participants in the study included social workers, teachers, and leisure-time/after-school assistants having daily contact with the youths in care. About 60% of the staff were women. As both units were quite newly established, the staff member with the longest employment had been there two to three years, while some of them were newly employed. Having a heterogenic staff group in relation to education, background, and experience was something the supervisors had intentionally looked for, with the argument that unaccompanied youths differed from the youths normally put into residential care in Sweden. This situation thus also required a more varied composition of professionals. That intention could be seen in the strategy of employing at least one of the staff members with a different ethnic background to Swedish. This was something presented as an asset, especially regarding the language barriers, but that person sometimes also functioned as a facilitator who helped to overcome what were identified as cultural barriers between the staff and the youths.

One of the reasons why these two residential care units were chosen was that the supervisors' outspoken aim was to focus on and develop the leaving care processes, which included more hands-on preparation, such as looking for decent apartments and writing guidelines to help the youths deal with everyday life on their own, but also included working with youths and preparing them mentally for leaving the collective care unit. Based on that, the units were divided into three different stages, including the collective unit. There were also apartments where the youths could practice independent living for one to several days, and a final set of apartments located away from the collective unit where the support from the staff was limited in order to give the youths the final preparation for later being able to move out and be on their own.

It must be emphasized that during my time at the residential care units the youths showed mixed feelings about going through the different stages of leaving. While some did not seem to care that much and followed the directions given by the staff, others were looking forward to moving out, and still others showed a clear resistance towards having to practice independent

living and being separated from the group. These were things the staff tried to deal with mainly through motivation and gentle persuasion.

6.3 Data set B: Observations

A month was spent at each one of the units in order to carry out participatory observations. The focus of this part of the study was on the professionals only. This procedure offered the possibility to take part in everyday interactions between the professionals at the residential care and the unaccompanied children and youths living there at that specific time.

The observations were complemented with notes taken throughout the whole process. This kind of research design was also possible to find in observation studies conducted earlier (e.g. Whitaker, 2004). By focusing on the ethnic and cultural aspects it became possible to see in what actual situations such issues were given importance, and how they then were constructed. Ethnic background could be something that has constitutive importance for professionals in an institutional context, for instance the students in a school environment (Gruber, 2007).

The observations might be described in terms of being more participating then passive. Being part of the daily activities seemed to support getting a better understanding of the specific context. The observation included both the professionals' planned activities, such as short trips, as well as less important activities such as watching TV or doing homework together. The task was to be a part of the activities but at the same time maintain the reflective approach necessary for the position of a researcher. The level of participation was something that was directed and adjusted depending on the situation and the individuals present at a specific time.

In a study carried out in similar contexts at a residential care unit for children placed outside their homes in Denmark it was claimed that observations where the research team think they can be invisible are impossible. Therefore, the focus was instead put on participating in the everyday activities that took place at the residential care unit, but without trying to adopt a professional' role (Egelund & Jakobsen, 2009).

The time spent at each of the residential care units was about four to five weeks, two to four days (including nights) per week. The purpose of being at

the unit during different times of the day was to get a picture of how things worked in as many different situations as possible, and thus also get a better view of the professionals' work situation, as their schedules covered both day and night shifts.

A mixes method design, and such as this one using individual interviews, focus-groups and observations influenced from ethnographic studies, within the discipline of social work or adjacent disciplines has been shown in several dissertations (Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2010; Dreyer-Espersen, 2010; Lalander, 1998). Based on those it is possible to see how different types of data may emphasize different perspectives concerning the chosen research problem. The notes from the observations taken for this particular study were written in parallel with the observations. The challenge was to create or find time to systematically take some notes separated from the rest of the practices in order not to disturb or create uncertainty among the youths and/or the professionals. The notes were re-written in more detail after each observation period. They consisted of reflections and descriptions of different situations, as well as direct quotations that seemed to be of interest in relation to the issues being researched. The methods chosen were intended to work as tools to help understand the other persons' (in this case the professionals') points of view. That was the case, whether I carried out observations or more spontaneous conversations taking place in relation to the more or less participatory observations (e.g. Lalander, 1998; 2009).

The data collected through observations were processed using content analysis (Patton 2002). Thereby, units of content were identified, such as descriptions of situations related to the professionals' work schedule, which later were condensed into codes. Those were compared with each other in the next stage and developed into categories, as in the work schedule example fitting within the category of rules at work, which represented different situations and perspectives of where to draw the line between the professional's off-duty and the time at work. In the last stage in the analysis the themes presented in the findings were constructed based on an abstraction of the categories, and thus represent parts of both manifest and latent content.

6.4 Data set C: Individual interviews with the professionals

Individual interviews were conducted with the professionals working at the residential care units who were chosen to participate in this study. Altogether, 13 out of 17 professionals agreed to participate in individual interviews, which were conducted at the workplace, but somewhere separated from the rest of the on-going functions. In one case, two of the care workers preferred to be interviewed together due to lack of time. The individual interviews aimed to get a picture of how that specific person experienced different issues related to the aim of the research project. The interviews were conducted by me and lasted 40-70 minutes, depending on how much the participants had to share. In order to create an understanding of the leaving care process in relation to issues such as those related to ethnicity and culture, the participants were asked to reflect on a more general picture of their workplace. This included how they would describe the practices, and why they had chosen to work there, as well as the experiences of the unaccompanied youths' needs and possible challenges related to those. This kind of question was followed up by asking for reflections about leaving care and how they had chosen to work on that process at each of the specific workplaces.

Without asking specifically about factors that could be related to what may be defined as ethnicity and culture issues, such perspectives were brought up by all of the participants spontaneously. Thus the youths' minority background was a factor used as a way of describing both how they experienced the children and youths, as well as what they thought about how the practices needed to be structured, and how they related to dealing with certain issues. One such example was when one of the participants was trying to explain what she thought is most important to equip the youths with when leaving care. After some reasoning back and forth she concluded that they as professionals needed to give the youths tools such as knowledge to master the most important things in society. When asking her to be more specific, the following reflection was given: "(…) *and I believe that if we haven't succeeded in preparing them well enough they will never get the chance, or be an ordinary Swedish person, if that's the way to put it*." (Staff at residential care unit 1).

In such ways, the minority backgrounds are illustrated, which in this case is emphasized by focusing on perceptions of differences between 'us' and 'them'.

The type of interview used may be similar to the description of a conversational interview with semi-structured questions. That kind of interview is described by Patton (2002) as being a flexible type which gives the possibility of directing the interview in a desired way. The issues raised are often based on things being observed in the actual context. Another factor affecting the choice of a conversational interview is that this kind of interview may not generate the same kind of answers from every participant, as the answers may partly depend on the interaction between the interviewer and the participants. This is the case in this study when carrying out observations; the conversational interview seems to be most appropriate when it is possible to spend some time in the setting. Thus the form of the interview may to a certain extent be reformulated during the research process. An additional point brought up by Patton is related to how such a way of interviewing may be seen as unstructured, which might be true, but that is not the same as the interview being unfocused. This means that the overall purpose of the project will control the structure, but within these frameworks, space is given for variations (Patton, 2002).

The interviews were structured with the purpose of letting the professionals reflect on issues related to the present time – meaning situations related to their present work situations. According to Grönmo (2006) such questions may be formulated in different ways, but are often characterized by what the participants usually do in a certain situation. This may be exemplified by one of the questions asked during the interviews, where the participants were asked to describe their jobs for friends and family and explain what they did at work. Some of the questions may be identified as what Grönmo (2006) defines as a kind of prospective question, aiming to find out how the participants think different situations or issues will turn out in the future. This kind of question may be experienced as difficult to answer and should therefore be related to a topic familiar to the participants. The prospective questions in this project were mainly related to issues regarding leaving care, for instance how they thought the future after care would look. The complete leaving care chain was something not being practiced yet, as such a program

was about to be developed close to when the youths were to move out of care. In one way, questions about the future leaving care program might have been more difficult to answer; on the other hand, as it was an urgent issue, the participants possibly would have had time to think about it, especially since it had been discussed during several meetings in order to develop a method that worked for this particular target group.

6.4.1 Analysis of individual interviews with the professionals

When interviewing the professionals individually, the focus was on how they perceived their role as a professional at the residential care units for the unaccompanied children and youths rather than themselves as private persons. However, in a street-level bureaucracy, it is not always possible to discern the private person from the professional as the professionals need to use themselves as tools in order to interact with the youths and others involved in the practices (Lipsky, 1980). The difficulty with separating these roles was illustrated in the professionals' references to what they had done with their own children in certain situations, strategies they thought were also applicable when reflecting about the unaccompanied children's and youths' situation. Thus when asking the professionals to describe why they had chosen to work with unaccompanied young people, some reflections related to themselves as private persons.

The data collected through the interviews were processed using content analysis (Patton 2002). All the interviews were transcribed verbatim and read through numerous times. After reading through the interviews, the coding started. No specific program was used for coding, I used different colours to separate meaning units, codes and later the themes. The purpose was both to see specific issues but at the same time to look for common patterns in the data. The results were later presented in three main themes. Both the manifest and the latent content of the interviews were taken into consideration in the process (cf. Krippendorff, 2004; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The manifest data represent the issues that the professionals actually talked about in their interviews, in direct response to the topics I brought up. The latent content became rather visible in a later stage when looking closer at what they had been said, trying to create an understanding of the sometimes underlying meaning in their arguments. At

the end of the analysis, the data was divided into different themes representing what had been said but also the more underlying content of what the professionals had tried to communicate.

6.5 Data set D: Focus group interviews with the professionals

Data was collected through three focus groups at the two residential care units participating in the research project. There are several ways of conducting focus group interviews; those used in this specific project were inspired by researchers such as Kreuegers (1994), Kitzinger & Barbour (1999) as well as Morgan (1998), who has several publications where the method of focus group interviews is discussed and explained. The same method is also highlighted in general method books as one of many ways of collecting qualitative data. The method has also been used in other dissertations which have been of value in order to understand how to apply the method for this particular project (cf. Wibeck, 2002). The focus groups consisted of the professionals working at the residential care units for unaccompanied children and youths and were also the target of the observations described earlier.

According to Morgan (1998) there are three particular standpoints emphasizing the core of what can be identified as a focus group interview. First, this type of group conversation distinguishes itself from other types of group conversation by being a technique for collecting research-related data. There is thus a difference between this kind of gathering and the kind of conversations taking place during, for instance, a group therapy session. The second point brought up by Morgan is that the interaction and the group dynamics are crucial aspects. The focus groups were moderated by me, and the discussion built on earlier observations in the residential care units. By letting the professionals discuss this issue based on the observation in a group, the focus was put on the dynamic that was created among the participants. In this interaction it was of interest to create an understanding of how together they formulated and developed meaning around certain issues related to their daily work. Despite an on-going interaction it was clear that working together in this kind of context was not the same as sharing the same opinion about how to understand and deal with different

issues related to the work. The focus group interviews made such differences visible as well as highlighting how the participants tried to negotiate in order to at least reach a point where it was possible to understand the other person's point of view, despite not agreeing. The third and last point brought up by Morgan (1998) concerns the moderator, and according to him is another characteristic aspect making this kind of discussion different from others. The moderator sets the agenda by deciding the topic and structuring the discussion. In these focus groups the staff had the opportunity to reflect on what I had seen during the observations. An example of such observation could be that the staff were asked to reflect on the possibility of meeting every unaccompanied youth's needs when they obviously were there as a group and many rules seemed to apply collectively. One discussion concerned how to work individually with the leaving care processes within a group of youths with different amounts of time left in care. The participants were asked to discuss a topic with each other, and were interrupted by the moderator only if they changed topic or strayed too far from it. The discussions lasted 60-90 minutes, and were recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

Nine staff members worked at the first residential care unit and eight at the second one. All members of staff were asked to participate in the focus groups and all agreed to do so. In order to adjust as much as possible to the on-going practices, the groups were composed based on working hours and other practicalities. For instance, the interviews were sometimes conducted during the time the participants usually had staff meetings. These adjustments resulted in uneven numbers of participants in each focus group; five in the first, three in the second, and nine in the third. According to Morgan (1996) the number of participants may vary depending on the study, but preferably should not be too large. It may, however, be admitted that a more even distribution among the group members would have been preferred, even though the purpose still seemed to be fulfilled as dynamic discussions took place in all three groups. This was something which may have to do with the fact that they knew each other well already and were used to discussing similar issues as part of the review of their everyday practices.

6.5.1 Analysis of focus groups interviews

The data collected from the focus groups was later processed in a content analysis. As being explained in the four studies, the aim and research questions of each specific study have been the focus when starting the analysis (Patton, 2002). The data was read through a number of times and divided into different groups where similarities and differences in the interviews with professionals were highlighted. Certain meaning units were discovered and specific patterns could be distinguished in the interviews. The analysis ended up by identifying specific themes reflecting both what had been explicitly said but also more implicit messages, which was acknowledged by also paying attention to body language and ways different things were expressed. An example taken from one of the studies shows the three main themes; *becoming independent*, *a collective individualist*, and *the cultural mystery*. These illustrate how the care-leaving process was defined and put into practice. They also present a view of how the professionals' understanding of the youths' minority backgrounds was acted upon, and successively interpreted in relation to the different chosen theoretical frameworks and concepts. It is claimed that focus group data can be either horizontal or vertical (Kreuegers, 1994). The data analysis for this study may be more of a horizontal kind as matters that were brought up in all three groups are represented in the themes and the related discussions. This way of analysis and presenting the data is claimed to be useful when dealing with quite homogeneous' groups of people, as in this case when the groups consisted of professionals working within the same context, who were asked to discuss similar topics (Kreuegers, 1994).

6.6 Ethical considerations

This research project's overall design and implementation are based on the general ethics with reference to Codex rules and guidelines for research (Codex, 2000). This section aims to focus on possible ethical dilemmas and will be discussed with the purpose of making them visible and stressing how they were dealt with in this research project.

6.6.1 Individual interviews with the youths

I focused on unaccompanied youths who at the time had passed the age of 18 and thus, according to the UN child convention, could no longer be categorized as children. But despite the age aspect, there are other factors making it relevant to conduct a deeper argumentation regarding the ethical considerations taken in this situation. According to UNHCR, unaccompanied children and youths belong to what they call a risk category, having rights and needs to be looked after and protected due to the psychosocial vulnerability to which they are claimed to be exposed. That is something which must be taken into consideration.

Even though the youths I met were over the age of 18, not too long ago they had been considered as belonging to the group of unaccompanied children. At the same time it is also important to keep in mind that the group of unaccompanied youths and children is heterogeneous', consisting of individuals with different backgrounds and experiences. This means that the level of vulnerability probably varies among the individuals (see Brunnberg, Borg & Fridström, 2012; O'Connell Davidson & Farrow, 2007: Gunnarsson, 2008). The occurrence of vulnerability also needs to be put in relation to the fact that the youths participating in the study also have experiences of being placed within the child welfare system outside home. This is a factor that according to previous research may have a significant meaning regarding the individual's future life, thus the time after placement is crucial (Stein, 2012; Höjer & Sjöblom, 2010; Sallnäs & Vinnerljung, 2009).

An additional aspect that needs to be emphasized is that the youths involved in this research may be understood as being bearers of a kind of complex vulnerability consisting of the migration experience and the experience of being placed outside home. I believe, however that there needs to be a clear differentiation between the unaccompanied children and youths having an application for asylum still under way, and the ones who have been issued a permanent residence permit and are thus allowed to stay in the country. The study concerning the youths (study I) included only the latter group. Save The Children in Sweden presented an example in their report where unaccompanied children with the right to stay in the country had been interviewed. These groups are, according to the report, not as vulnerable as

children waiting for asylum, based on the fact that the uncertain period of waiting for the decision is over (Gunnarsson, 2008).

Codex rules and guidelines for research (Codex, 2000) were taken into consideration during all stages of the project, including the requirement of providing information. The youths participating were informed about the project by the supervisor at the residential care unit. They were then also offered written information about the project before considering possible participation. Personal information about the youths who declined to participate was not given to me. The youths willing to be involved in the project received more information about the project when they were contacted by phone by the researcher. In the specific interview situation, both oral and written information were given to the participants. Emphasis was also put on the information about the youths' choice to be involved in the study, including that they could withdraw their participation at any time.

However, it may also be of importance here to stress that the participants were in control of how much information they wanted to share (Hessle, 2009). Concerning the consent, the youths were asked to sign a paper which explained the possibility to withdraw their participation whenever they wished. Since all of them were over the age of 18 it was not necessary to ask their legal guardian for permission (e.g. Sallnäs, Wiklund & Lagerlöf, 2010). Some of the stories told by the youths were assumed to be of a sensitive character, so the promise of confidentiality became even more relevant. In this case it meant that no personal information was given to anyone outside the project which would make it possible to identify participating individuals.

The data was protected and stored out of the reach of unauthorized persons. When the youths were first told about the project they received information about how the results of the project would be used. This meant that they received information about the data being part of a doctoral project partly consisting of scientific studies being published in relevant journals, and were also informed that the results might also be spread in oral presentations. Hopkins (2006) claims that unaccompanied children and youths have often been involved in situations where they have been told to talk about their lives. A researcher might be just another person wanting to collect information about things which may be perceived as very sensitive and

time–consuming to discuss. The unaccompanied youths' possible previous experience regarding interviews must therefore be taken into consideration from a research perspective, and might allow some further understanding if the researcher is met with scepticism.

6.6.2 Data set B: Observations

The professionals at the residential care unit received the information about my wish to collect data through observation (and interviews) by their supervisor. It is difficult to say exactly what information was given as that conversation took place after a meeting I had separately with the supervisors. After few days I was informed that it was OK to conduct the research. I believe that the supervisor's positive attitude contributed to the staff's willingness to participate. It should however be mentioned that even though my presence through observation might have been difficult to avoid as it was based on a group decision, it was easier for the staff to decline to participate in the interviews later (which some of them did).

In order for me as a researcher to get permission to carry out the project as described above, the ethical committee in Linköping (Dnr 2011446-31) required that the children and youths also needed to approve the researchers' presence at the residential care units. After the professionals had first received brief information about the project from their supervisors, I participated in a meeting with the professionals, and then another meeting with the professionals and the youths where both the professionals and the youth received more information about the project and were asked to sign a consent agreement. It should be emphasized that the youths' approval was necessary even though my focus during the observation was on the professionals' work rather than on the youths.

The majority of the youths needed to approve of my presence in order for me to be able to carry out the research, which they did even though at least one in each group showed some signs of hesitation before signing the papers. The ones who hesitated changed their mind after some time. In such cases, it may be important to reflect on whether they changed they mind because they really wanted to be part of the project or because they experienced pressure from me and from the other peers in the room who had already agreed to participate. In that situation I could have decided to come back later and let

them think about it some more, which I did not do. This reflection is emphasized here in order to highlight the ethical complexity of being a natural part of research process.

Fine & Sandström (1988) claim that youths, in comparison with younger children, have the ability to reflect on and make decisions about how much contact they want to have with the researcher, especially in cases where the researcher's position is connected to minor dimensions of power in relation to the young people, which was the case in this particular situation as the youths were not in any way dependent on me as a researcher. It was taken into consideration that if any situation should occur in which some of the youths should choose not to take part in an activity due to my presence, the observations would be cancelled, but such a situation never occurred. It must also be added that in the kind of environment that the residential care units represent it is quite common that adults who do not have an obvious role, such as people employed at the residential care unit, are present. These people may for instance be students doing fieldwork or contact persons visiting some of the youths.

6.6.2.1 A reflection on my own role

The researcher's own position may have a significant meaning in relation to the observations being carried out. As a woman it may for instance seem to be easier to observe a group of girls, thus the researcher's identity can have more or less impact on the study (Fine & Sandström, 1988). In this particular research project a relatively heterogeneous group was studied, including both the professionals, and children and youths of different ages, genders and with different backgrounds. Because of this variety, the role of the researcher seemed to be less distinctive.

Another ethical issue that needs to be brought up is the risk of difficulties when leaving the field. Whitaker (2004) described how several of the people she had observed expressed disappointment about the fact that she was not planning to come back after completing the collection of data. The participants in that study thought the researcher had been a great support and thus had become a meaningful person in their lives. Even though my time spent in the field was shorter than in the case just mentioned, the youths also asked questions about my intention to come back and visit after finishing the

data collection. Inspired by Whitaker (2004), I tried to spend some extra time with the people (in this case the youths) who had expressed such thoughts. I also tried to once again explain the purpose of the project, and in the conversation I mentioned the initial plan of staying for a few weeks at each of the residential care units.

6.6.3 Data set C: Individual interviews with the professionals

As described in section 7.6.2 above, the information about interviews was given at the same time as the entire project was introduced. The professionals were asked to participate in the individual interviews separately by email. Nine staff members worked at the first residential care unit and eight at the second one. All were asked to participate in individual interviews, and 13 of them agreed to do so. The ones who did not participate did not answer the question which was sent to them by email. I avoided asking more than once, as it seemed to be important that they felt they could decline to participate and still be able to feel free to interact with me during the observations without feeling pressure. The ones who participated were informed about the purpose of the project again. They were also informed about the voluntary nature of participating and found out how the data would be used later on. The interviews were recorded and were later stored so that no one unauthorized had access to the files. During the whole process the data were treated with confidentiality that makes it difficult to identify specific individuals.

As a last point in this section I would like to highlight the risk of putting too much emphasis on a specific group of individuals. The risk might be that too much attention is paid to the issue of differences; as a consequence the researcher may reinforce already existing patterns of exclusion (Lalander, 1998). This aspect must therefore be considered during the entire project, not least in the interviews with the professionals but also in terms of how the results later on are presented. With the ambition of avoiding such negative consequences I have tried to avoid a comparative stand and instead pay attention to the appearance of ethnicity and culture as categories that are created in the interaction between both individuals with majority backgrounds as well as those from ethnic minority groups.

6.6.4 Data set D: Focus group with the professionals

As mentioned above the group sizes for the focus groups were not optimal. A risk with having excessively large groups such as the one with nine participants may be that not all get the chance to make their voice heard or that people in the group who usually talks a lot also do that during the focus group (Wibeck, 2002). Cornin (2008) confirms that the moderator needs to be aware of dominant persons in a group as they can easily steal the attention which prevents others from raising their opinions. In order to prevent such situations focus was put on trying to make sure that all got a chance to raise their opinion, even though it was not always easy.

An option could have been to mix the participants in the focus groups, meaning including people from the different residential care units. I decided not to do that because some might have felt more comfortable discussing these issues, which some could have considered sensitive, with people that they already knew. Wibeck (2000) argues that if the participants' experience that they are connected to each other and have some common interests with the other group members the discussions tends both to be better and give better outcomes.

6.7 Validity, reliability, and generalization

This research project is, as described above, a study where individual and focus-group interviews, together with observations, constitute the empirical data that was analysed. To what extent could then this rather small study be trusted, has it captured what it set out to, and has it been done in ways to secure trustworthiness? Validity is a concept stresses the importance that we are researching what we intend to. It is important that validation is ensured throughout the entire research process.

Validity can also be discussed in terms of internal and external validity. The internal validity refers to the whole research process and related to whether the different phases are put together in a logical way and whether the researcher has been systematic and thorough in collecting and analysing data. The external validity relates to whether the results of the study are generalizable beyond the object of the study and if the presented results meet the aims it intended to.

Another concept often used when considering the quality of research is reliability, which highlights the trustworthiness of the results that are being presented. Very reliable research makes it possible to replicate the study with the same or similar results (Gilbert, 2008; Esaiasson et al. 2011). An important difference between quantitative and qualitative research relates to replicability. The collection of data in quantitative approaches could be safeguarded by using pre-structured questionnaires, but in qualitative studies, the researcher as a person plays a large role. For example, in interviews it is the researcher who poses questions and follow-up questions based on observation. It is this person who will steer the focus of the interview toward what is of interest. Even in semi-structured interview, many decisions must be made spontaneous during the interview. Total replication in this approach is thus impossible, but this does not mean that everything goes or that the process should be kept in the dark. On the contrary, because of the difficulty with replication, and the importance of the researcher in the research process, there is a great need for openness and transparency (Taylor, 2001). The description of decisions undertaken during the research process, the circumstances under which the data were collected and how analytic themes were developed, is crucial to judge the trustworthiness (Kvale, 2009).

This research project has attempted to present a transparent picture of the different stages of this study, by for instance by presenting a detailed description of how the different studies in the dissertation were conducted. The transparency will hopefully allow the reader to take part and judge the process and the way in which the studies have been carried out. In addition to transparency, it was important to maintain a critical approach throughout the whole process in order to avoid selective perceptions and biased interpretations (Kvale 2009), which was done through an on-going discussing with my supervisors about the analyses and the results.

When discussing the generalizability of the outcomes of this study I would like to focus on the theoretical level. The results obtained from the collected empirical data are compared to knowledge based on previous research as well as the theoretical basis of this study. This is in contrast to relying on, for instance, the number of participants necessary to accomplish statistical

generalization as in quantitative research. It is on this theoretical level where it becomes possible to compare and generalise findings.

In summary, through the way I described and made my research journey visible I tried to increase the trustworthiness of this study. Moreover, the purpose of transparency was also to increase the reliability of the study by making it possible to re-do the research project using the same methods – even if the results to some extent will depend on who the researcher is (Kvale, 2009).

7 Discussion

The aim of this dissertation was to study how the perceptions of ethnicity and culture become meaningful in relation to the transition from care. One further aim was to reflect upon methodological challenges in research focusing on unaccompanied youths'. Based on these aims, three main questions were formulated emphasising a) how the unaccompanied youths understood and made sense of their experiences during their transition from care into independent living, b) how professionals understood and make visible their perceptions of the children's and youths' cultural background and ethnicity during the transition from care into independent living, and c) which methodological challenges become visible between the researcher and the unaccompanied youth during the research process. This dissertation started with a fictive story about Rahim, based on the experiences from the research. At the end of the story, some questions were presented. The questions all address general issues about transition, belonging, and what home means. Put as a question: 'Who did I become since I came to Sweden and where am I heading now?' Within the frame of this discussion, it is not possible to answer all dimensions of Rahim's questions fully, but the central meaning of his questions will form the basis for the discussion of the results. Identity is frequently used in this discussion as it on a theoretical level is linked to the concept of belonging and home (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Identity should however also be understood as having a more everyday meaning aiming to focus on how the youth trying to figure out who they are and how the professionals are trying to guide them in this process.

When Rahim asks about who he has become he also expresses feelings of insecurity about not fitting into the country he now is a part of. The question highlights the complexity about what a transition processes means to the individual and not just as an administrative decision put on paper. The second part of the question focuses what will happen in the future. The process of leaving care focuses on the future and a (high) functioning life after care. To have a successful care-leaving process, certain aspects have been shown to be important for young people, namely; their social network, education, housing, and employment (Harder, Köngeter, Zeller, Knorth, & Dickscheit, 2011; Höjer & Sjöblom, 2010; Stein, 2012; Wade & Dixon, 2006). All these aspects are very important in practice and will play a

significant role when discussing home and belonging, two central concepts in this dissertation.

The concept of belonging has to do with matters of inclusion and exclusion. When talking about inclusion, someone else's exclusion from a group or a context is automatically implied (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Gedalof, 2009). Belonging has been studied in relation to unaccompanied young people in previous research, highlighting its importance and the lack of feeling included (Wernesjö, 2014; Sirriyeh, 2013a,b; Stretmo & Melander, 2013; Kohli et al. 2010). (Re) constructing a home is a central part of the care-leaving process for a migrant about to resettle in a new country. Having access to a social network and success in education can be connected to the young people's experience of home and belonging as a these things have to do with the feeling of safety (Saunders & Williams 1988). A broader and more comprehensive understanding of what home is, is linked to earlier research and Study II where it is stated that home can be everything from a physical building, to a state of mind, or a feeling of safety and comfort (Douglas 1991; Ahmed 1999; Sirriyeh 2010, 2013a; Saunders & Williams 1988). I would argue that some of the aspects considered as important in the general care-leaving research might be even more salient and challenging for unaccompanied children and youth. Due to the new context in Sweden, a social network may be lacking due to family and friends living abroad. It is also possible that the continuity in schooling for this group is more problematic than for other care leavers, both before coming to Sweden and after arriving. This is because learning Swedish is a first obstacle before even moving on to regular education.

This discussion is divided into five parts highlighting the results of the dissertation from different perspectives: 1) the youths' perspective on the transition, 2) the professionals' perspective on transition, 3) the encounter between the youths' and professionals' perspectives on transition, and 4) the methodological challenges. The section will be concluded with 5) implications for social work practices and suggestions for further research.

7.1 The unaccompanied youths' perspective on the transition

Perceptions of ethnicity and culture are very important in unaccompanied youths' understanding of their experiences of transitioning from care to independent living. A central feature of the youth's understanding of exclusion is a division between groups where a 'we' is given meaning in relation to 'the others'. These youths find themselves being in a subordinated position as a result of their ethnical background and due to being a (trans)migrant and, as such, lacking knowledge about Swedish society and the Swedish language. The care-leaving process for the unaccompanied youth who participated in Study I should be understood as a challenge based on two aspects. First, given the struggles that care-leavers deal with in general, earlier research has argued for an extended time in care as a way to stretch the restricted time frame of support (Höjer & Sjöblom, 2011a; Stein, 2012; Wade, 2008; Biehal & Wade, 1996). Second, the 'cultural baggage' of the professionals' and other people's perceptions about the meaning of the youths' ethnic minority background which had an impact on how the youth thought of themselves and their future life in Sweden. The youths' own understanding of their own and other cultures should also be added to the 'baggage' as their perceptions in interaction with others are reinforced (Study I).

Several researchers claim that identity is a central issue when discussing care-leavers with an ethnic minority background in general (Stein, 2012; Malek, 2011; Barn, Andrew, & Mantovani, 2005; Biehal et al, 1992). This research has shown that the experience of being exposed to racism or discrimination is generally quite uncommon. Nevertheless, having an ethnic minority background is something that these young people have to relate to and it impacts how they define themselves. The results from Studies I-IV clearly indicate that these experiences are also important for unaccompanied youth with experiences of being in care and leaving care. The question 'who am I?' or, more specifically, 'who am I going to be?' is one of great importance for unaccompanied children and youths. Their self-perception is vital when considering the concept of belonging. To belong is a process that involves several actors (Gedalof, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 2006). For these children and youths, professionals and other people, such as their friends and

families in different parts of the world, are actors in their lives. The concept of belonging, as mentioned in the background section, can be divided into different levels (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Christensen, 2009; Yuval-Davis et. al. 2005). The first level concerns social locations, the second concerns individuals' identification and emotional attachments to groups, and the third concerns the ethical and political value system. There is a connection between the different levels as they impact each other (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The youths are in the middle of an intense identity developing process when they transition from care to independent living (Stein, 2014). This is true for young people in general, the unaccompanied children and youth, as well as other young people with experience of being placed in care.

Aspects relating to ethnicity are put together from cultural history and traditions and understood in relation to new experiences and the process of migration (Ålund & Alinia, 2011). The results from these studies have shown that everyday interactions have a profound effect on how the youth make sense of their everyday experiences in terms of exclusion and inclusion. In Study I an example was given of a youth not being recognized by his teammates outside of the volleyball field despite being sure of that his teammates knew who he was. The experience of not being acknowledged by peers who could be considered as friends constitutes an important part of how the unaccompanied youth made sense of their experiences during their transition from care into independent living. Not being recognized by familiar people seems to have a great impact on the youth's experienced position as subordinate. This suggests that processes of power set the agenda for a hierarchy where an ethnic minority background is put at lower level than the majority population. An experience of not being recognized in everyday interactions might hinder the transition from care to independent living since it indicates exclusion and reinforces the idea that unaccompanied children and youth are strangers, as defined by Simmel (1971). This kind of experience of ambivalence in respect to belongingness in everyday interaction was important to the youth. However, this does not downplay the importance of other levels of belonging, such as being placed at residential units often separated from swedes, a system that in different ways reflects the political system and policy values (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Agency is an important concept in the sociology of childhood (Prout & James, 1990; James & James, 2004; James et al., 1998). The concept is highlighted by James & James (2004) who emphasise the importance of paying attention to the individual child in rather than a collective of children. If the child's agency is forgotten it may make the individual child feel invisible. The results from Study I suggest that active attempts at diminishing social distance between the child and the majority of society is easier for some children and youth than for others as they are a heterogenic group. Active attempts to get in contact with people, participate in sports or taking extra Swedish classes to reduce language barriers are examples of attempts to take control and make use of their agency. If professionals and others that are in contact with the children and youth fail to see the individual and forget to strengthen his or her agency, it may be more difficult for them to take own initiatives. Järvinen (2003) notes the on-going debate within the discipline of social work concerning where to 'put the blame' for social problems. She suggests that society should be responsible for the child's agency. With regards to Study I, it is important to focus the role of youth agency in cases of feeling of excluded. According to Järvinen (2003), it is possible to 'blame' the individual for different troubles, such as for being homeless or having drug problems (or in this specific case lack of social networks and exclusion). However, it can be argued that such troubles can only be explained by referring to the structural level. Thus, having agency seems to be able to work both as a strength for the individual, but also as a way to blame the individual for being in a particular situation.

To conclude this part: the greatest challenge that youth face when transitioning from care to independent living is managing and fighting against being excluded. This includes exclusion processes involving both common issues for all care leavers as well as processes specifically related to the unaccompanied group, such as coping with the experience of being defined as a stranger. This challenge expresses itself in a type of frustration that Wernesjö (2014) defines as 'conditional belonging', an expression that also is suitable for the young people in Study I. I argue that depending on the situation the youths were either recognized and welcomed as a part of the group, or ignored as a stranger. In a structured activity where roles were assigned and relationships governed by formal rules, it was easier for them to become a member of the team. However, when the interplay was in an

informal, everyday interaction it was harder for these youths to feel that they fit in and were acknowledged.

7.2 The professionals' perspective

The results from studies II -IV showed that the professionals' understanding of the ethnic minority background works as a filter to understand the daily work with the children and youth at the residential care unit. How the professionals define and understand the group of young people has an influence on how the procedure for after care is constructed, not least in relation to the level of support the youth are assumed to need. Great emphasis was placed on dealing with the young people's experiences of migration and issues related to their ethnic minority background, for instance in finding ways of getting to know more about traditions practiced before coming to Sweden. Attention was also directed at finding a way to integrate the children and youth into society (Study III).

An example of how the youths' ethnic minority background worked as a filter in daily life can be seen in the approach to celebrating holidays. The professionals' eagerness in celebrating holidays that the children and youth used to celebrate before coming to Sweden can be understood as a way of recognizing the youth' ethnic background. However, these attempts were sometimes met with low interest from the youth. The reason for the youths' lack of excitement in celebrating holidays as they used to do in, for instance, Afghanistan can be linked to Halls (1999) arguments concerning the importance of context. Recreating a tradition in Sweden means that something new will be created. This is not necessarily negative, but it is an example of cultural traditions being made flexible and reconstructed in interaction with others, which makes it impossible to replicate. Hall (1999: 231) discusses the concept 'cultural identity', which can be divided into two parts. On the one hand, an essentialist view of culture states that culture is an authentic core that is shared by people with a common historical background and joint traditions. On the other hand, cultural identity can be understood as something that is constantly changing beyond an essential core and where the position of the individual plays an important role. In this second case, the identity is not predicted in a certain way in beforehand even if not totally separated from its historical background, but rather seen as unfixed. Identity

is shaped in the interaction with others and influenced by the specific situation (Hall, 1999). In relation to the concept of cultural identity and its possible meanings it seems like the professionals participating in this research project found it hard to understand the children and youth's background as fluid and tended to view their cultural identity as static (Study II, III).

Examples have been shown in studies I-IV of how cultural background and ethnicity are held as the crucial knowledge and targeted pillars of change for the professionals who support youths to transit into independent living. For instance in Study II, when the professionals in the focus groups explained the importance of having at least one person staff member an ethnic background other than Swedish as an interpreter - both in terms of language and in terms of cultural. Several researchers emphasise the importance of making the processes of power visible as a way to prevent racism (Hall, 1999; Solomos & Back, 2000; Said, 2004). Other authors suggest that racism appears in new forms (Wern, 2001; De los Reyes, Molina & Mulinari, 2005).

Rather than using the term 'racism', I would prefer to talk about the issue of culturalisation, as it seems more related to what took place at the residential care units. Jönsson (2013) argues that culturalisation of social problems are not unusual, but that they have negative consequences and that they complicate the development of social work practices and new methods. Strong beliefs in cultural competence is one example of when culturalisation occurs. At least two problems can be raised regarding this. First, it ignores the heterogeneity among groups of people that exists even if people have migrated from the same country. Second, it suggests that there are essential differences based on different cultures that need to be treated with specific knowledge (Jönsson, 2013). I would argue that the good intentions of the professionals reinforce stereotypes of 'the other' when cherishing the cultural competence without further reflection. Björngren-Cuadra (2005) claims that care in what can be called a multi-ethnic society could develop much further if focusing on the service-users agency and possibilities rather than his or hers cultural patterns. Also the belief in culture competence needs to be treated with caution as it suggests a simplified understanding on the meaning of culture.

The professionals have a responsibility to help the youths develop a sense of belonging. This might be done by recognising processes of power (Hasenfeld, 2010; Järvinen, 2003). I suggest that there is a link between the professionals' understanding of ethnic minorities and what is communicated to the children and youth. To prevent culturalisation or racism the professionals have a responsibility to be aware of how the category of ethnicity is created, understood, related to other categories, and in what way it may be reinforced to avoid the creation of cultural stereotypes (see for instance Jönsson, 2013; Sandberg, 2010; Wern, 2001). Even though it is important to emphasize the individual responsibility among the professionals, they must also be understood as being a product of the human service organization (HSO) system. The HSO has obvious restrictions and its structure is characterised by ambiguity (Hasenfeld 2010) which may have consequences for the professionals' decision making and their opportunities to find individual solutions.

To conclude this section: it is important to emphasise the opportunity for residential care units to prevent culturalisation, prejudice, and racism. This situation needs to be discussed based on the sociology of childhood (e.g. Prout & James, 1990; James & James, 2004; James et al., 1998). The complexity is that on the one hand how to define the children and youth being as 'everybody else' in terms of needs and experiences but on the other hand to see them as unique individuals in relation to their history and experiences. Specifically, to acknowledge their particular experiences due to migration and an ethnic minority background. The question is: when should the focus be on their unique characteristics, and when should their similarity to others be highlighted? I would argue that sometimes the children and youth's specific characteristics (what is experienced as different) is given more credence than what makes them similar to others (that we all are human beings) thereby reinforcing a stereotypical image of the migrant and emphasising their otherness. The challenge is for professionals to integrate the children and youths' specific and general features into their work with this group. In order to do this, a starting point is to allow the individuals to define their own situation and ethnic background. This allows for individualising the care while avoiding exoticising, romanticising or estranging ethnical matters.

7.3 The encounter between the youth and the professionals' perspective

One of the core issue in this dissertation is the concept of 'home', or rather how to construct a home during time in institutional care (Study II), in the process of leaving care, and after care (III, I). A home, which may be defined as everything from a physical building with walls, windows, and a roof, to feeling an emotional attachment and sense of safety (Saunders & Williams 1988; Dupuis & Thorns 1998; Ahmed 1999). As the children and youth in the residential care units have a history before entering Sweden, they already had a home. This means that the home being created in Sweden becomes a re-construction where the past is linked with the present and becomes the basis for the unaccompanied children and youths' future home. When depicturing their context as such, it is necessary to emphasize again the movement and fluidity in the processes that creates the home. This is an important part in the concept of resettlement (Valtonen, 2008). Resettling in Sweden may be what these young people are doing, some of them for a life time and others more temporarily (Study I).

I regard the (re)construction of 'home' in this new society within the metaphor of a home being built with different bricks. The unaccompanied children and youth bring bricks of childhoods that have partly taken place outside of Sweden, which includes other languages, traditions, and sometimes religions. They also bring bricks of hope that include dreams and perceptions of being able to care for themselves and for others. Possibly to care for family who are physically far from them, but mentally and, with the help of technology, feel close by. The professionals' bricks consist of personal views, educational and work experiences, and their organizations aims. Their personal views are translated into empathy which make some of them relate to how they act, think, and feel in relation to their own perception of home and family life. This context is influenced by their perceptions on what Swedish norms and values are (Study II, III). The organizational aims are distributed in terms of goals that correspond with the ideas of a successful integration on a structural level. As Study II and III show, the idea of integration as a part of the care-leaving process reduces the possibility for interdependency (Mendes, 2005). Instead, care-leaving

processes stress principals like assimilation, independency, and individuality.

Whichever bricks are brought to the (re)construction of home, the goals seem to be the same for the unaccompanied children and youth and for the professionals participating in this research project. That aim is to reach a sense of safety and belonging on all three levels: to other people, to a different social context, and to society as a whole. Even though the main purpose with the (re)construction of home seems to be the same for the youth and the professionals, different conditions and points of departure may make it difficult to agree on details such as the meaning of belonging and whether it is possible to translate to a tailor-made solution for each individual.

7.4 The methodological challenges

When the youth and the professional's perspectives are put together it becomes possible to highlight the methodological challenges that are present between the researcher and the unaccompanied youth. Nygren & Oltedal (2014) described how their research and noted the importance of not being too Eurocentric. Even though countries from both Africa and Latin America were represented in their study, the European perspective dominated the construction of the vignettes they used. This is something that the research group had to pay extra attention to. One of the main challenges in my research has been to avoid taking shortcuts in aspects that are key in understanding another person (Study IV; such as skin colour or birth place).

Another great challenge, linked to Nygren & Oltedal's (2014) issue, is about avoiding reinforcing possible exclusion by emphasising an 'us' (Swedish) versus 'them' (foreign). In the process of belonging several parts have an impact on the outcome. The unaccompanied children and youth may have the opportunity to influence their experienced feeling of belonging. This should be recognised and encouraged by professionals, other people interacting with them, and also the research community (IV). I would argue that professionals and those researching this topic have a great responsibility to increase youths' feeling of belonging. Recognising processes of power can be instrumental in this (Hasenfeld, 2010; Järvinen, 2003). This includes observing how the category of a particular ethnicity is created, understood,

related to other categories, and in what way it may be reinforced to avoid creating cultural stereotypes (Jönsson, 2013; Sandberg, 2010: Lalander, 2009). This call for ethical awareness about how categories are created and displayed applies particularly to researchers focusing on ethnic minority backgrounds (Bhopal, 2010; Edwards, 1990; Khawaja & Mörck, 2009).

7.5 Implications for social work practices and further research

Based on the discussion presented above, some points will be highlighted below to stress potentially useful findings for social work practice. This section concludes with two suggestions regarding further research.

A transnational perspective needs to be acknowledged to be included as a natural part of everyday social work practice with unaccompanied children and youth. Practicing a transnational perspective means that the children and youths' narratives regarding their relationships with people abroad are heard. Moreover, if desired, it should be possible to arrange connections between the professionals and children and youths' families and significant others worldwide. Taking advantage of the technological possibilities to sustain transnational relations is important and is a positive development for unaccompanied children and youth's in recent years. To increase the sense of belonging, young people may need support in building and keeping continuity in life to get a sense of biographical continuity despite their often-dramatic trajectories. The objective here is to provide help to bind past, present and future time together. Apart from being close to and attentive to the young person's individual histories, work also has to be done on a more structural level to broaden inclusion opportunities. For example, facilitating contact between involved organizations (such as the volleyball club mentioned in Study I), in order to develop opportunities for the young people to participate and to feel included more broadly.

Facilitate the social workers' (and researchers') opportunities for applying a reflective and critical approach is needed to increase the sense of belonging among the young people. A critical and reflective approach may prevent the professionals' good intentions from ending up in practices of culturalisation. Within a reflective and critical approach power relationships need to be clearly defined. In social work the service-user and the professionals do not

act on the same level as equal partners. A failure in recognising the inequality between actors may obscure the structures that place people in subordinated roles and that have a negative impact on how the individual portrays him- or herself.

A suggestion for further research is to further consider aspects such as gender, class, and sexuality to deepen the understanding of unaccompanied children and youths' experiences of belonging. Another important next step would be to consider how media can impact the feeling of belonging and the experienced possibility to (re)construct a home after leaving care. Earlier research has shown that the media plays a role in creating images that portray youth with an ethical minority background in stereotypic pictures as, for instance, 'the immigrant with a criminal record' (e.g. Hammarén, 2008). Therefore, deeper knowledge about how media discourse creates meaning and understanding of unaccompanied children and youth is critical.

I would like to conclude this last part of the dissertation with emphasizing that the responsibility to create a home for unaccompanied children and youth is something that concerns us all – the young person's themselves, the professionals, and organizations in the civil society as well as the general public. To belong and create a home is not about reaching a final destination but rather a continuing process that never can be considered as being fully completed.

8 Svensk sammanfattning

Den här avhandlingen handlar om hur föreställningar om etnicitet och kultur blir betydelsefulla i relation till övergången från samhällsvård. Detta har studerats utifrån tre olika perspektiv; ensamkommande ungdomars, professionellas och från ett metodologiskt perspektiv.

I takt med att gruppen barn och unga som söker asyl i Sverige har ökat under de senaste åren har även behovet av kunskap kring denna målgrupp ökat. Detta avhandlingsarbete ska ses som en del i detta kunskapssökande. Avhandlingen är en kvalitativ studie bestående av fyra delstudier samt en kappa, vilket är en sammanfattande bakgrund, som binder samman delstudierna och lyfter fram det huvudsakliga resultatet. Empirin har samlats in via enskilda intervjuer med ungdomar med erfarenhet av att komma till Sverige som ensamkommande och i samband med detta placerats i samhällsvården. Vidare består empirin av observationer på två HVB-hem för ensamkommande barn och ungdomar, enskilda intervjuer med professionella på dessa HVB-hem samt fokusgrupper med samma personalgrupper. Materialet har i respektive delstudie analyserats med hjälp av en kvalitativ innehållsanalys. Avhandlingsarbetet täcker ett tidigare delvis outforskat område och behandlar frågor om etnicitet inom det sociala barnavårdsfältet med specifikt fokus på gruppen ensamkommande barn och unga.

Innan de fyra delstudierna presenteras kommer en kort bakgrund att introduceras. Denna bakgrund syftar till att ge fördjupad förståelse kring det valda forskningsområdet.

8.1 Bakgrund

Ungdomar med erfarenhet av att vara placerade utanför hemmet hör till en grupp som kan definieras som sårbara eftersom de inte sällan har ett bristande socialt nätverk, en icke kontinuerlig skolgång och svårigheter att komma in på arbetsmarknaden. Att vara mellan 18-20 år och i färd med att lämna samhällsvården för att klara sig själv som ung vuxen kan innebära en komplex övergång till vuxenvärlden. Hur förutsättningarna ser ut i form av olika stöd och omständigheter i övrigt efter avslutad placering kan därför få stor betydelse för möjligheterna att leva ett självständigt vuxenliv. Stöd i övergången till detta i form av ekonomiska, sociala och pedagogiska insatser

till de unga kan vara avgörande för en ökad möjlighet att kunna delta i samhällslivet på lika villkor. För gruppen ensamkommande barn och ungdomar handlar det, utöver svårigheter unga som lämnar samhällsvård generellt kan ha, även om att utveckla sätt att förhålla sig till migrationserfarenheten vid inträdet i det nya samhället.

Migration innefattar en rörelse där människor flyttar från ett ställe till ett annat för att bosätta sig. En migrant kan vara någon som flyttar över nationella gränser men kan även inkludera personer som flyttar inom nationen. Det är dock det förstnämnda som åsyftas när det handlar om de ensamkommande barnen och ungdomarna som deltagit i detta forskningsprojekt. Deras migrationsbakgrund relateras inte sällan till att de har en annan etnicitet och kultur än majoritetsbefolkningen. I detta avhandlingsprojekt knyts frågor om etnicitet och kultur samman med vad det innebär att lämna vården för att integreras i samhället. Sådana frågor har tidigare diskuterats inom den så kallade "leaving care" forskningen där barn och ungdomars migration och minoritetsbakgrund exempelvis har lyfts upp i relation till frågor om identitet och rasism. I den här avhandlingen diskuterar jag hur de ensamkommande barns och ungdomars situation är kopplade till frågor som berör tillhörighet och hem. Dessa frågor menar jag är en del av förståelsen kring vilka de är och vilka de blir i mötet med Sverige och det nya livet. Tillhörighet är i sin tur relaterat till vad det innebär att vara inkluderad respektive exkluderad, alltså frågor som är högst relevanta då det är dags att lämna placeringen i samhällsvården.

HVB-hemmen, där det empiriska materialet samlats in för forskningsprojektet, kan benämnas forskningsmässigt som en människobehandlande organisation (MBO). Med kunskap om hur dessa typer av organisationer fungerar, blir det blir lättare att förstå hur ungdomarna och de professionella förstår och förhåller sig till övergången från vård till vuxenliv och betydelsen av den etniska minoritetsbakgrunden. Utmärkande för MBO är att klienten själv genom sin person erbjuder det så kallade råmaterialet som krävs för att verksamheten ska fungera. De professionella arbetar med klienten för att försöka uppnå de uttalade målen vilka är fastställda inom organisationen, vilket innebär ett processinriktat arbete inom de ramar som organisationen satt upp. Att påverka och förändra något kräver att det finns någon form av makt, varför makt är en central

aspekt i den MBO. Det handlingsutrymme som de professionella besitter i denna typ av organisationer påverkar möjligheten att forma arbetet och styra klienten. Det finns en inneboende obalans mellan de anställda och klienterna där de anställda har mycket mer utrymme och möjlighet än klienten att påverka utgången av olika uppkomna situationer.

8.2 Teoretiskt ramverk

För att tolka och förstå resultaten i de olika delstudierna har ett teoretiskt ramverk satts samman som består av ett par teorier och teoretiska begrepp.

Etnicitet och kultur är två huvudbegrepp i avhandlingen vilka är kopplade till de ensamkommande barnen och ungdomarnas etniska minoritetsbakgrund. Etnicitet och kultur är exempel på begrepp vilka både har en teoretisk och ett mer pragmatiskt och alldagligt användningsområde. När etnicitetbegreppet används i avhandlingen refereras det till en teoretisk förståelse. Med etnicitet syftas i detta sammanhang på en slags social organisering, en grupp existerar endast när den jämförs med andra grupper och skapas i interaktion med andra individer. Etnicitet och kulturbegreppet är tätt sammankopplade i dess betydelse även om kulturbegreppet är bredare. Kulturbegreppet användes oftare än etnicitet i vardagliga sammanhang och är också det ord som deltagarna i studien oftast använder när de pratar om individers olika sätt att vara baserat på härkomst, inte sällan uttryckt som normer och värderingar. I avhandlingen används både etnicitet och kulturbegreppet, ibland tillsammans och ibland var för sig, beroende på det specifika sammanhanget.

Ett centralt teoretiskt perspektiv i avhandlingen är transnationalism. Detta hjälper till att skapa en förståelse för vissa av de förutsättningar som de ensamkommande barnen och ungdomarna lever under som ett resultat av migrationen. Fokus ligger i detta perspektiv på interaktionen mellan olika länder och vad denna resulterar i på en såväl strukturell som på en individuell nivå. Möjligheten till att ha kontakt över gränser är något som påverkar individens vardag och skapar sammanhang och känsla av tillhörighet över nationella gränser. Att vidmakthålla eller återupprätta kontakt med viktiga personer i andra länder blir betydelsefullt för barnens och ungdomarnas utveckling och välbefinnande. En annan teoretisk ingång erbjuds genom barndomssociologin. Inom barndomssociologin betonas vikten av att se barnen som subjekt med eget aktörskap att påverka sin

situation och omgivning. Barndomen, eller snarare barndomar ska förstås utifrån att de är unika och bör därför benämnas i plural snarare än singularis. Samtidigt finns det gemensamma behov och rättigheter vilka alla barn har. Översatt till avhandlingens område innebär denna förståelse att å ena sidan att betrakta ensamkommande barn och ungdomar som andra barn i relation till behov och vad denna tidsperiod i livet kan innebära, men å andra sidan bör deras specifika och individuella behov och förutsättningar baserat på migrations- och placeringserfarenheten tas i beaktande.

8.3 Delstudie I

Syftet med delstudie I var att studera ensakommande ungdomarnas erfarenheter av att lämna vården och relatera det till föreställningar om etnicitet och kultur. Två huvudfrågor ställdes; a) hur definierar de ensamkommande ungdomarna sin identitet under övergången från placeringen i samhällsvård? b) Hur föreställer sig de ensamkommande ungdomarna betydelsen av deras minoritetsbakgrund i relation till övergången till vuxenblivande efter att ha avslutat placeringen i samhällsvård? I denna delstudie intervjuades 11 ungdomar om sina upplevelser av att lämna en placering i samhällsvård med fokus på deras egna och andras föreställningar om etnicitet och kultur. Resultatet i studien visade att tankar kring den etniska minoritetsbakgrunden var ständigt närvarande i de unga männens liv, vilket också var fallet under den tiden som de varit placerade. Resultatet presenterades under fyra olika teman; a) kulturellt bagage b) isolering c) på väg d) bara ett vanligt liv. Sammantaget betonas hur det som benämns som den svenska kulturen ibland framställdes som åtråvärt men andra gånger som något ungdomarna ville distansera sig ifrån. Bristen på socialt nätverk diskuteras i temat gällande isolering där språkbarriären användes som en förklaring till varför de ensamkommande ungdomarna upplevde det som svårt att bli inkluderade i det svenska samhället. Resultatet visar vidare att Sverige inte nödvändigtvis betraktades som det land där de unga planerade sin framtid, utan möjligheten att flytta och bo i andra länder var ett ständigt närvarande alternativt sätt att bygga sin framtid. I studiens diskussion betonas de ungas upplevelse av kravet på en dubbel anpassning för att komma in i det svenska samhället. Denna anpassning innebär att i likhet med andra unga som lämnar samhällsvården ska också de ensamkommande ungdomarna övervinna hinder relaterade till

en återintegration till samhället. Utöver detta ska de också anpassa sig i förhållande till deras och andras föreställningar av att "vara svensk". Vidare diskuteras att erfarenheter av migration är kopplade till en känsla av att vara annorlunda och upplevelser av bristande tillhörighet. Detta tycks bygga på såväl andras som de ungas egna föreställningar om den etniska minoritetsbakgrunden.

8.4 Delstudie II

I studie II är begreppet "hem" centralt och baserat på aspekter rörande tillhörighet och plats speglat utifrån ett professionellt perspektiv. De frågor som ställdes var; a) vad betyder konceptet hem och/eller en hemlik miljö på HVB-hemmen från ett professionellt perspektiv. Vilka möjliga implikationer kan de professionellas tolkning av konceptet hem och/eller en hemlik miljö ha i det dagliga arbetet med de ensamkommande unga på HVB-hemmet? Empirin samlades in genom enskilda intervjuer, fokusgrupper samt observationer med personalen vid två utvalda HVB-hem. Resultat i studien visar att "hem" användes som en metafor för at beskriva en verksamhet som ses som eftersträvansvärd, men inte alltid helt enkel att faktiskt få till stånd. Önskan om att skapa ett hem för de ensamkommande barnen och ungdomarna hade dock även konsekvenser för de professionella, då det inte var självklart var gränserna mellan arbete och fritid i kontakten mellan de professionella och de unga skulle dras. En utmaning för gruppen av personal och deras närmsta chef var att nå konsensus gällande gränsdragningen. På båda HVB-hemmen var regler uppsatta för att underlätta denna gränsdragning. I diskussionen lyfts svårigheterna med den institutionella strukturen som omgärdade omsorgen av ensamkommande unga fram. De placerades på HVB-hem vars struktur, villkor och förutsättningar var skapade för andra grupper än ensamkommande barn och unga vars migration och frånvaro av föräldrar var det centrala. I studien argumenteras för att ensamkommande ungas behov hade kunnat tillgodoses bättre om omsorgen hade skräddarsytts efter deras förutsättningar.

8.5 Delstudie III

Fokus i den tredje delstudien ligger på de professionellas reflektioner kring "leaving care" processen för ensamkommande barn och ungdomar med specifikt intresse kring de betydelser som skapas kring de ungas

minoritetsbakgrund. Syftet är formulerat i två huvudsakliga frågeställningar: Hur är "leaving care" processen definierad och använd i det faktiska arbetet av de professionella med de ensamkommande unga på HVB-hemmen? b) Hur har de ungas minoritetsbakgrund definierats och agerats utifrån av de professionella i relation till "leaving care" processen? Resultatet i delstudie tre presenterades i tre teman; a) att bli självständig. b) en kollektiv individualist och c) det kulturella mysteriet. Inom den typ av människobehandlande organisation som HVB-hemmen utgör strävar de professionella efter att möta behov hos ungdomarna vilka utgår från föreställningar om deras minoritetsbakgrund. De professionella önskar lära ut vad de värderar som viktigt att veta för att kunna bli en självständig vuxen efter att placeringen har avslutats. Inom "leaving care" forskningen talar man om vikten av ett ömsesidigt ansvar för individens integration i samhället då placeringen upphör, ett resonemang som tycktes utebli bland de professionella då mestadels av ansvaret tycks läggas på den enskilda individen. I artikeln appliceras ett transnationellt teoretiskt perspektiv. I det transnationella perspektivet lyfts risken med att betrakta de ensakommande ungas situation och person på ett statiskt sätt fram tillsammans med vikten av att uppmärksamma relationer som sträcker sig över gränser och formar de ungas syn på tillvaron. I resultatet diskuteras de professionellas strävan efter att hjälpa de ensamkommande barnen och ungdomarna att bli självständiga. I detta sammanhang förstods självständighet som något som skulle bidra till en lyckad integration. Det förelåg dock vissa svårigheter hos de professionella med att förhålla sig till vad integration innebar och hur den skulle uttydas. Ibland översattes det till att handla om att ungdomarna skulle bli som vilken svensk som helst. De professionella som deltog i studien kämpade med att uppmärksamma den enskilde individens behov och kunde då samtidigt bortse från att denne också är en del av en grupp. Det uttrycktes frustration över svårigheter med att se den enskilde individens behov och samtidigt försäkra sig om att alla behandlades lika och att ingen blev förfördelad. Sammantaget underströks i diskussionen vikten av att de professionella behöver förstå de ensamkommande barnens och ungdomarnas situation som icke statisk. Relationer över nationella gränser formar dessa unga personers bild av dåtid, nutid och framtiden.

8.6 Delstudie IV

Delstudie fyra syftade till att föra en diskussion om metodologiska utmaningar som kan uppkomma då forskaren strävar efter att öka förståelsen för ensamkommande ungas livssituation och upplevelser kopplade till etniskt ursprung. Den metodologiska diskussion som förs baseras på resultaten från delstudie I-III. I delstudie IV lyfts svårigheten med att tilldela deltagaren i forskningen ett specifikt ämne som denne ska bli representant för, som exempelvis etnicitetfrågor. Ett för smalt fokus i forskningen på etnicitet kan resultera i att en minoritetsgrundad position förstärks. I de intervjuer som gjordes med ensamkommande ungdomar blev det tydligt att svensken uppfattades som annorlunda, många gånger i negativ bemärkelse. Vidare diskuteras i delstudien hur det i samförstånd med intervjuaren kunde bildas ett konsensus mellan intervjuaren och deltagarna (från delstudie I) där ett tydligt "vi" och "dem" växte fram. I diskussionen understryks vikten av att kontinuerligt reflektera kring den egna personen och forskarrollen, och då inte minst vilka möjligheter och begränsningar dessa roller kan få för forskningsprocessen olika delar. Förmågan till och behovet av reflektion från forskarens sida är centralt, och bör genomsyra alla delar av forskningsprocessen. Forskarens skillnader och likheter i förhållande till informanterna är inte statiska, utan snarare flytande och förändras också i interaktionen med de involverade under forskningsprocessen. Barndomssociologin understryker vikten av att barn förstås som kompetenta och att de ges förutsättningar till att blir aktiva deltagare i samhället. Samma förhållningssätt bör även gälla vid deltagandet i forskningsprojekt där barnet bör få en aktiv roll och möjlighet att definiera sin egen situation. I forskningen pågår en ständig förhandling och omförhandling relaterat till våra respektive roller som forskare och som forskningsdeltagare.

8.7 Övergripande resultat

Sammantaget visar resultaten från de fyra delstudierna att föreställningar om minoritetsbakgrund skapas i den dagliga interaktionen mellan de ensamkommande unga och personalen. Det visar sig bland annat i de ungas upplevelser av att behöva kämpa för att få en tillhörighet i det svenska samhället och att föreställningar kring minoritetsbakgrunden ständigt är närvarande. De unga erfar ofta ett utanförskap vilket relateras till den etniska

minoritetsbakgrunden vilken utgör en särskiljande faktor mellan dem och andra jämnåriga. Hur de professionella definierar och förstår gruppen ensamkommande unga har betydelse för hur de utformar omsorgen och då inte minst hur detta sker i relation till övergången till vuxenlivet. Att förbereda och arbeta för att de ensamkommande unga först ska vistas och få stöd i vården för att sedan kunna lämna den handlar för de professionella om att skapa en trygghet för de unga som de senare kan bygga vidare på. Tryggheten som de professionella försöker skapa benämns av dem ibland i termer av "hem", andra gånger i termer av integration och uttrycks som möjligheter av att "lyckas i livet". De professionella strävar efter att hitta en balans mellan att å ena sidan bejaka de ungas tidigare erfarenheter, kopplat till den etniska minoritetsbakgrunden, och å andra sidan att införliva hos dem det som uppfattas som "svenskt". Konsekvensen av att samtidigt försöka bejaka två sidor, tidigare erfarenheter och svenskhet, blir till en svår och avgörande balansgång för att på så sätt (åter)skapa känslan av tillhörighet och ett "hem" i Sverige.

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