

Chapter 3

Child Refugees and National Boundaries

Marie Louise Seeberg

Refugee Children; Child Refugees: Four Situations and a Question

1938: Escaping from Hitler's Germany, seven-year-old Edith leaves her parents and her home as part of the Kindertransport,¹ organized transportations of mainly Jewish children to the UK from Hitler's Reich, based on private guarantees that they will not be a financial burden. She is taken into a foster family with her older sister (Milton 2006).

1939: Berthold, aged seven, travels with a group of children from Bratislava to Norway and is taken into a foster family. As Germany invades Norway in 1940, he is transferred to Norway's only Jewish orphanage. In 1942, all the orphanage children are safely conducted to Sweden, from where he returns to Norway in 1945 (Levin 2009; Rothlauf 2008).

2013: Mohammed, fourteen, arrives in the UK from Iran. Smuggled into the country in the fridge compartment of a lorry, he and eight other youngsters climb out of the lorry, walk along the road, and are discovered and arrested. Social workers take him into a residential centre for unaccompanied minors where he waits, wondering what will happen next (Gentleman 2013).

2013: After a series of rejections and appeals, the Jasmin versus Norway case is closed. Jasmin, seventeen, born in Germany to stateless Kurdish parents who have been denied asylum and the right to work, is finally granted residence in Norway

¹Plural: Kindertransporte.

M.L. Seeberg (✉)
NOVA, Oslo and Akershus University College, Oslo, Norway
e-mail: marie.l.seeberg@nova.hioa.no

with her mother and siblings on the grounds of her social and cultural integration (NOAS 2014).

In this chapter, I compare some criteria for refugee children's crossing of national boundaries at four different socio-temporal sites: the UK and Norway, in the late 1930s and the early 2010s. My comparison is based on a closer look into the cases of the four children introduced above, one from each of the four sites. Their situations and experiences serve to identify key criteria for the crossing of territorial, social, and symbolic boundaries into the two nation states at these different points in time.

In times of crisis, national refugee policies tend to be restrictive, yet the protection of children remains the most broadly recognized of all humanitarian concerns. The presence of refugee children, or child refugees, reveals an Achilles' heel of democratic states: the weaknesses of combined underlying premises of nationhood and of childhood. I argue that these premises connect in ways that provide a key to understanding both nationhood and childhood. As social spaces, nations and childhoods are defined and encompassed by context-specific boundaries. Studying how these boundaries are (re-)enacted in specific cases may help us understand the connections between nationhood and childhood.

Why are some children allowed to cross the boundaries into certain nation-states at particular times, and others denied access? Which of their multiple statuses—as a child, a refugee, or an asylum seeker—may give them access to different spaces within specific nation-states? How may child refugees be regarded as different from adult refugees, and how may such differences affect their rights and possibilities? Such questions bring to light the combined underlying premises of nationhood and of childhood, with changing notions of personhood at the core.

In this chapter, I do not aim to address all these questions, but will focus on comparing and analysing specific criteria for national boundary-crossing as they apply to four children. My concern here is with their entry into the territorial, social and symbolic spaces of UK and Norway. The concept of boundaries cuts across legal, social, or cultural criteria for admission. Although there are significant legal dimensions to the admission policies and processes of refugees, a comprehensive description of the relevant legal frameworks is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Here, my comparison of the UK and Norway in the late 1930s and in the early 2010s aims to throw light on the following question: How may similarities and differences in the criteria for refugee children's crossing of national boundaries throw light on changing and contested notions of childhood? I shall investigate this using the four examples introduced above—Edith, Berthold, Mohammed, and Jasmin.²

²Their names have not been altered, as all the cited material is taken from previously published sources.

Boundaries of Nations, Boundaries of Childhoods

Receiving states may provide refugees with basic protection—the right to legal entry and temporary or permanent settlement—or add social rights to education, work, healthcare and the vote, as well as symbolic admission into the national community. Such differentiation of access depends on the context, including international and national laws. The concept of *boundaries*, the focus of attention for Barth in his work on ethnicity (1969), is useful in studying differential access to social spaces. National boundaries are always, to some extent, porous (Papadopoulos et al. 2008). With Lamont and Molnar’s (2002) typology as my point of departure, I distinguish between three main forms of national boundaries. *Territorial* boundaries are the physical borders of the nation-state, *social* boundaries delimit the rights, resources, and duties associated with citizenship as formal membership in the nation-state, and *symbolic* boundaries are the “conceptual distinctions made by social actors...that separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership” (Lamont and Molnar 2002, 168). The sum of the three forms of boundaries constitutes the limit of the national community, and crossing a boundary implies a degree of inclusion into this community.

I regard exclusion and inclusion in terms of degrees rather than as absolute opposites. Territorial, social, and symbolic national boundaries have over the past century developed from near congruence towards increasing separateness (Ong 1999). In the 1930s, the sovereignty of nation-states depended on a harmonious relationship between territory (geography), bureaucracy (state), and people (national identity). The concepts of inclusion and exclusion from territory, bureaucracy, and nation were inherent in the citizen/immigrant divide, based on the existence of a physical border (Preuss 1995). The distinction between citizen and immigrant was particularly visible at the border. In the 2010s, European border policies require a revision of this classical border concept (Bigo et al. 2010). Boundaries have shifted: “the line differentiating members from non-members is relocated” (Zolberg and Long 1999, 9). The distinction between citizens and different categories of immigrants is now visible at Europe’s outer borders, in practices physically taking place within each European state, and at visa and ticket points well beyond Europe. The criteria for gaining access to Norwegian or UK territory interact with the criteria for gaining access to welfare benefits, in different ways for different categories of people in what Fuglerud (2005) has called processes of “graded sovereignty.” Such processes are mediated through policies and practices that in turn interact with media representations of “asylum seekers.”

Refugee policies vary between the four sites, yet in all of them protection is granted only to a small minority of those potentially in need of it. Kjeldstadli (2003a) finds the explanation for this similarity in an international game logic where each state competitively reduces its “offers” to refugees in order to prevent as many as possible from seeking asylum. This logic thrives on the ambiguity of the

international political situations of the two periods where recognizing a “real refugee” may be complicated. Restrictive policies are strengthened through regulating the rights to social goods. Such strategies, with clear consequences for the life chances of refugee children, have played out quite differently at our four sites.

Along with changes in national boundaries, the boundaries of childhood have also changed considerably since the 1930s. A “belief in the natural innocence of childhood as a world apart” was constitutive of Norwegian nationhood until the 1990s (Gullestad 1997, 33). In a general, nostalgic view, the boundaries of an idealized, paradisiacal childhood have gradually been pushed back (James et al. 1998, 242). This corresponds to a paradigmatic turn towards children’s rights and agency, where “Norway tends to be in the forefront when it comes to the child as an actor with participation rights” (Vitus and Liden 2010, 67). In both periods in the UK, childhood remains more implicitly and ambiguously interrelated with the nation, not least because the composite national identity of the UK and the “massive stratification of contemporary Britain” makes it impossible to “write sensibly about an English childhood” (James 2002, 149). The main contemporary difference is that of Norwegian childhoods as symbolically, politically, and individually central to adult society, whereas in the UK, children and childhoods emerge as relatively marginal and subjected to rigid “adult power” (James 2002). As we shall see, this is also evident in our selected cases.

The Four Selected Cases

The four cases introduced initially form the empirical basis for this chapter. The cases are taken from the literature and from Internet sites, published by associations of or for refugee children and by newspapers, featuring the stories of individual child refugees. These are only four of many thousands of cases, and I cannot claim that they are representative in any statistical sense of the word. However, I would hold that each case is in its own way typical for its time and place, and that the four cases, separately and together, form a sound basis for an initial analysis within the theoretical framework of territorial, social, and symbolic boundaries as described above. The critical reader may also rightly point out that I have selected cases that are particularly suited to this kind of analysis.

The four sites have also been purposely selected. Norway and the UK share a close historical affinity as countries of refuge on the north-west geographical margins of Europe, yet there are considerable differences in their ideas and practices of childhood and nation. The 1930s and 2010s are both periods of international crises and of complicated and ambiguous “refugee producing” situations, in contrast to the block alliances of World War II and the Cold War. Ideas and practices of childhood and nation have undergone considerable changes from the first period to the second, making it possible to investigate both changes and continuity.

During my searches for individual accounts, I found hundreds of books and internet pages presenting interviews, biographies, and autobiographies, especially from two of the four sites: the UK in the 1930s and Norway in the 2010s. The *Kindertransporte* were for decades ignored or surrounded by silence. They came to attention during the 1980s, along with many other aspects of the Holocaust (Seeberg et al. 2013); writings and individual testimonies of this spectacular rescue operation have since proliferated. In Norway, similar attention has not been accorded to the few Jewish children who escaped to Norway in the same period. The contrast is especially interesting when juxtaposed with the contrast between the considerable public attention given to individual children denied asylum in present day Norway and the public silence surrounding individual children in the asylum process in the UK. These differences in public attention reflect the differences in how refugee children are perceived and received at the four sites. Methodologically, this means that the material available to me has been much more limited in the cases of the UK in the 2010s and Norway in the 1930s than in the UK of the 1930s and the Norway of the 2010s.

The 1930s: Edith and Berthold

In the 1930s, the legal concept of the refugee was linked to the newly founded League of Nations and its first High Commissioner of Refugees, the Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen, who was appointed in 1921. On Nansen's death in 1930, the Nansen International Office for Refugees continued its work, increasingly for Jews and other refugees from Nazi Germany. In Europe, the 1920s' dominant fear of Communism and Stalin was gradually overshadowed in the decade that followed by the increasing alarm caused by Hitler's national socialism and expansionist ambitions, leading to shifting and ambiguous alliances. British and Norwegian authorities joined other European governments and referred to each other's restrictive immigration policies in legitimizing their own. Although a refugee law was in place—*The Convention Concerning the Status of Refugees Coming from Germany* of 10 February 1938—neither Norwegian nor British authorities recognized Jews as refugees on the grounds of racial persecution (London 2000; Kjeldstadli 2003b). Governments at the time deemed a “strict policy” necessary to “prevent a mass influx” of refugees and rejected most applications for entry.

When Edith arrived in the UK, she was one of nearly 10,000 Jewish children whose lives were saved in spite of this strict policy, through the *Kindertransporte*. She travelled by train with her older sister Ruth as part of a group of children, and remembers the border control between Germany and the Netherlands. In her autobiography, she describes the journey:

[T]he officer in uniform with a swastika armband who collected our papers at the border looked upon me with what I took to be parental concern as he handed back my passport, which under my name—augmented by the Jewish “Sara” mandated by the Third Reich—had been stamped STATELESS...I know that to cross to England we boarded the boat at Rotterdam... But the crossing itself is a blank. Probably we were all asleep. The next day comes to mind as the revelation of a huge London station with massive steel arches overhead. Liverpool Street Station (Milton 2006).

Their travel documents were in order. The double visa requirements—exit visa to leave Germany and entry visa to enter the UK—had been taken care of before the children were put on the train, by parents, Jewish committees and other volunteers. Edith had no idea who facilitated her passage to the UK and where her own journey fits into the larger initiative:

[I]t took me more than forty years to understand that our transposition to England ... was a fragment of a larger and extraordinary history. The Kindertransport ... has been the subject of a fair amount of recent literature and of several films. It could, in fact, be counted as a sort of miracle, and I am still amazed at my own bland passivity and ignorance about my escape (Milton 2006).

The criteria that must be fulfilled for this miracle to happen were laid down by the UK government. In the following citations, I have used bold font in order to highlight the criteria for my subsequent analysis:

In response to the events of November 9 and 10 [Kristallnacht], the British Jewish Refugee Committee appealed to members of Parliament [to rescue Jewish children] and a debate was held in the House of Commons. The already existing refugee aid committees in Britain switched into high gear, changing focus from emigration to rescue. The British government had just refused to allow 10,000 Jewish children to enter Palestine, but the atrocities in Germany and Austria, the untiring persistence of the refugee advocates, and philosemitic sympathy in some high places—in the words of British Foreign Minister Samuel Hoare “Here is a chance of taking the young generation of a great people, here is a chance of mitigating to some extent the terrible suffering of their parents and their friends”—swayed the government to permit **an unspecified number of children under the age of 17 to enter the United Kingdom**. It was agreed to admit the children on **temporary travel documents**, with the **idea that they would re-join their parents when the crisis was over**. **A fifty Pound Sterling bond had to be posted for each child “to assure their ultimate resettlement.”** The children were to travel in **sealed trains**. The first transport left on December 1, 1938 ... the last left on September 1, 1939—just two days before Great Britain’s entry into the war ... By that time, approximately 10,000 children had made the trip (The Kindertransport Association 2015).

The phrase “non-Aryan children,” rather than “Jewish children,” was used in the Parliament discussions (Norton 2010) and, although most of them were Jewish, some non-Jewish children are also said to have been rescued (cf. Gopfert and Hammel 2004). The children had to be under the age of 17. Many were younger. The older children had to look after the younger ones:

It was understood at the time that when the “crisis was over,” **the children would return to their families. Parents or guardians could not accompany the children**. The few infants included in the programme were **tended by other children on their transport**. **A £50 Sterling bond** had to be posted for each child, “to assure their ultimate resettlement” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 2015).

The requirement to post a bond of £50 for each child meant that no child would depend on the British government for subsistence. In practice this requirement limited the number of rescued children to the ones for whom funding could be provided. It also transferred all responsibility for the refugee children to the private sector: individual British citizens as well as non-governmental organizations.

Kindertransport was unique in that Jews, Quakers, and Christians of many denominations worked together to rescue primarily Jewish children (The Kindertransport Association 2015).

Private citizens or organizations had to guarantee to pay for each child’s care, education, and eventual emigration from Britain. In return for this guarantee, the British government agreed to allow unaccompanied refugee children to enter the country on temporary travel visas (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 2015).

The British government’s contribution was limited to allowing the children to cross the territorial boundaries. Thus, their lives were saved. The crossing of social and symbolic boundaries was left to the children and civil society. Children were taken into Jewish or non-Jewish foster homes, as fostering was considered the best solution. However, there were not enough foster homes, therefore some children were put up in hostels or were sent to the countryside to work on farms. The scheme was organized as an educational one, and schooling was provided. It is unclear what kinds of schools the children attended and who paid for their education. More research is also needed to uncover the services to which the children had, or did not have, access. In terms of symbolic boundaries, the picture is much clearer. Edith describes it well:

(...) my life begins when I am seven going on eight—when I have just set foot in England. It is 1939 (...) It is the fact that I worry so much—the fact that unlike all the others I am afraid—that makes me an enemy alien. This is what worries me most of all—I am an enemy alien, and I am proving that I am an enemy alien by being such a coward about bombs and other things falling from the sky. I would like desperately to disguise myself as a little English girl, but I know that I would convince no one, since the very act of trying to disguise myself proves I am not English. (...) I suspect it is as a first quite unconscious step in my attempt to be less foreign that I am setting about forgetting all my German (Milton 2006).

Separated from parents and homelands and desperately contesting the label of “German enemies,” the children rapidly shed their Germanness in favour of English identities. They needed to belong, and there was only one way to achieve this: to become English. Language was the primary marker of national identity. At the same time, Edith describes how her Anglican Church foster family expected and even encouraged her to retain a Jewish identity, incorporating her into a pre-existing British Jewish category.

In Norway, no similar large-scale operations took place. However, a rescue on a very much smaller scale was organized in cooperation between individual Norwegian citizens and non-governmental organizations. In an article about the subsequent rescue of these children to Sweden as Norway came under German occupation, Irene Levin writes:

In spite of the restrictive refugee policy, the Norwegian government accepted around 500 Jews from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia during the years immediately preceding the war. Among these were the 21 children from Vienna—aged seven to nine years (...). After some time, two boys from Czechoslovakia arrived. One of them was Berthold Grünfeld (Levin 2009, my translation).

The conditions for accepting the Jewish children were stricter in Norway than in the UK. The children had to be no older than 12 years and their state of health had to be checked and found acceptable by a doctor recognized by the Norwegian government. It was also expected that the children's parents were on their way to migrate to a third country where reunification would happen. The organization *Nansenhjelpen* (the Nansen relief), founded by Fridtjof Nansen's son to provide safe haven and assistance for Jewish refugees in Norway, was to be responsible for all expenses. Given these conditions, the immigration was limited to a maximum of sixty children, and it was specified that any adoptions would not lead to amendments of the quota (Hamkoll 2010, 45–46). There was no expectation these foreign, Jewish children would stay in Norway and “become Norwegians,” and with the German occupation, they lost any basis for doing so.

The 2010s: Mohammed and Jasmin

Compared to the images of hardship and poverty in the 1930s in Europe and its colonies, the early 2010s evoke images of an unequally distributed yet previously unimaginable abundance. There has been a global tendency away from mainly inter-state conflicts to an upsurge of civil wars and conflicts that to a lesser extent follow territorial boundaries (Kaldor 2013). Norway was at the pinnacle of wealth, while the UK, still affluent, was struggling in the aftermath of the recent economic crisis. The rest of Europe was marked by economic crisis in different ways and to different degrees. Outside Europe, economic instability was the order of the day in many countries, often linked to a lack of democracy and to war and conflict within and across national borders, causing people to flee from many different countries and for many different reasons.

In the UK, territorial boundaries were not formally open to child refugees. Since 2004, a UK refugee quota scheme (the Gateway Programme) annually provided assistance to 750 refugees designated as especially vulnerable by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Platts-Fowler and Robinson 2011). However, this scheme had no particular focus on children and was extremely small compared to the numbers of de facto refugees and asylum seekers arriving in the UK. The majority of child refugees were smuggled into the UK hidden in lorries crossing the Channel from France. Journalist Amelia Gentleman stayed for two days in a hostel for unaccompanied child asylum seekers near Dover, and learned as much as she could from them and the staff. She reported:

An Iranian boy, Mohammed—who, like everyone interviewed here, asked that his real name should not be printed, and who says he is 14—describes how his uncle paid for him to be taken from Iran after his brother was arrested. He doesn't know how much his uncle paid, nor precisely what route he took, although the interpreter says it usually goes through Turkey and Greece, taking more than three months, with 10-day breaks from time to time, staying in houses along the way and surviving mainly on biscuits. (...) At Calais, Mohammed was grouped with about eight other young people and hidden in a lorry, late at night. "The traffickers used ladders to get us in through the roof; the driver didn't know we were in there." (...) When the lorry came to a stop somewhere outside Dover, they climbed back out of a vent in the roof and began walking along the road until they were spotted and arrested (Gentleman 2013).

Mohammed had been helped or escorted from Iran to Calais by paid helpers and had travelled for months. Having crossed the territorial boundaries into the UK, the small group of child refugees of which he was part was taken into social care:

The younger boys, and girls of all ages, are immediately found foster carers. Almost none of the children have documents, so determining their age is a complex process; but those boys who seem to be a bit older (15 or above) are sent to (...) a hostel for unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Young children were taken into foster homes, as Edith had been more than 70 years earlier—a strong form of symbolic as well as social inclusion. However, those who seemed "a bit older" than fifteen were placed, together, in a hostel staffed with social workers. Although not immediately allowed across symbolic boundaries, the young asylum seekers were thus given access to some social goods:

This is a peculiar refuge: sparsely furnished bedrooms, along dimly lit corridors painted in faded 1970s institutional colours. The children remain here until their age is confirmed, their health checked, their asylum requests investigated and their educational needs assessed. They are given a few sessions about British life and culture—with a heavy focus on drugs and sexually transmitted diseases—but much of the time they are left to their own devices, allowed to wander into the nearby town or sit in the centre's shabby common room, congregating into huddles of boys with shared languages. (...) the county is under pressure to improve the care they are given. Support workers are on hand from 8 am to 10 pm, trying to help them adjust to their new environment. "They have been on the road for such a long time, getting into all sorts of difficulties with people, that there is a sense of relief at having a roof over their heads, a place that is warm and safe," the Kent official says. "But they quickly move on to the next worry: what is going to happen to me now? (...) A doctor at the practice that looks after the children's home residents says (...) Many are underweight from surviving on one meal a day. "I see young men with terribly painful injuries from their journey," the doctor says. "Many of these young people haven't had any medical care throughout their life" (Gentleman 2013).

This description indicates what the children had access to: beds and meals, basic health services and rudimentary education—it was something, but much less than a foster child would get. Social workers also did most of the age assessment in order to determine whether the asylum seeker was really a child or just pretending to be one:

Social workers consider how they interact with their peers, whether they are reserved or shy, whether they have shaved hundreds of times before or if they have never used a razor. They look at whether children are still growing physically during the time they are at the centre. Dental x-rays can be used. (...) the parliamentary report into the care of migrant

children expresses concern that “funding pressures could be incentivising local authorities to assess children either as adults, or as older than would otherwise be the case,” because of the huge costs involved—last year, in Kent alone, £14m was spent caring for these children (...)

Children who arrived without their parents were the responsibility of local authorities and, accordingly, there was a considerable body of literature on “unaccompanied minors” and on how to do social work with child asylum seekers in the UK (Kohli 2006; Wade 2011). Much less was known about the children in asylum seeking families in the UK: known as “dependants,” they had no separate asylum cases, and constituted no separate category in Home Office statistics.

In Norway, by contrast, children in asylum-seeking families attracted extensive popular support and were symbolically significant as litmus tests of “Norwegian values.” A strong national identity built on the ideal and practice of childhood as local belonging (Gullestad 1997) interacted with the central role of children’s rights in law and in popular perception and supported the creation of strong local support for many asylum-seeking children (Vitus and Liden 2010).

My fourth case is Jasmin. In 2013, when I first read about her, she was seventeen years old. Born in Germany in 1996, she had come to Norway with her family in 2002. Her parents had previously lived in Turkey, as refugees from Lebanon. The family was stateless. For a decade, Norwegian authorities tried to send the family to Turkey, while Turkish authorities refused to receive them. Crossing the internal Schengen borders from Germany to Norway in the early 2000s had not been particularly difficult. It turned out to be much more difficult to be allowed to stay, and to gain access to the rights that make it possible to lead a normal life: the crossing of social and symbolic boundaries. Jasmin wrote:

The fact that my parents are here now, is not their own fault. My parents were children when they escaped the war in Lebanon. What do you think they should have done? Stayed? Remained there, and died, instead of fleeing? I don’t know, but their parents made the decision for them. Later they married and continued onwards with us children. What do you want? That my siblings and I do the same: continue to go from one country to the next?³

In the context of Norway in the early 2010s, very little was said about the territorial boundary-crossings into Norway. In a research report, Brekke and Aarset (2009) described a number of journey patterns. All means of transportation were used, which also means different points of entry. A main common denominator here, as case of the UK in the 2010s, was the prominent role of “people smugglers.” Norway, too, had a quota of refugees agreed annually with the UNHCR; official government representatives facilitated their admission to Norway. However, as in the UK, quota refugees constituted a very small minority of de facto refugees and there was no special quota for child refugees. In Norway, the mainstream media focused on the “removal” of often quite young children from Norway, usually with their parents and siblings.

³This and subsequent Jasmin quotations NOAS 2014, my translation.

All children up to the age of sixteen have the right to schooling in Norway, and several reports show that asylum-seeking children were in fact enrolled in schools in this recent period, although in some cases in lower-quality courses than other children (Lidén et al. 2011; Valenta 2008). Schools provide a crucial link between the social and the symbolic, and local communities' actions against the deportation of specific children was to a large extent grounded in the children's belonging to the local community through its school. Jasmin described her situation like this:

I have many friends. Some of them were allowed to stay in Norway and got the residence permit, and those were moments of great happiness. At the same time, there has been much sorrow because many of my friends were sent back to their home countries.

The friends Jasmin referred to here were friends at the reception centre for asylum seekers, where the family had lived for ten years. Such friendships with other young people living at reception centres may analytically be regarded as inclusion into a temporary community of outsiders. Jasmin also had other, more stable social arenas:

Out of school, we have activities and at school we are very active. (...) My life has limited freedom. One day I was told that I could not continue to secondary school because I did not have a residence permit. My friends all supported me and said I would be ok. Luckily, the headmaster accepted asylum seekers after all.

These friends were school friends, including young people who were not living in the liminal state of waiting for asylum, but who had more predictable life trajectories in their local communities in Norway. In spite of secondary education not being a right for rejected asylum seeking children, Jasmin was accepted into secondary school. Yet her troubles were not over:

Over the summer, all my friends have summer jobs because they want to earn some money for themselves. I also wanted to get a job. I applied and applied and in the end I did succeed in finding a job. But unfortunately I was then told that I could not get a work permit because I am an asylum seeker. All I wanted with that job was to earn a little money of my own, like everybody else. (...) I would like to ask if you know what it is like to be at the receiving end of all those "no's". No to work, no to school, no to going abroad on holiday, no to freedom and many no's that I cannot count. It is as if I were tied up with a rope and cannot go on.

In 2013, the whole family was granted residence in Norway.

Comparing the Four Cases

Comparing the three sets of criteria across the four cases may appear to be a daunting task, and a detailed comparison would be beyond the scope of this chapter. However, Table 3.1 summarizes a more general comparison of the three sets of criteria in our four cases.

In the UK in the 1930s, selected children were accepted as refugees when adults were not. Only to a small extent were the children allowed to access social

resources and thereby cross the social boundaries of the nation state. Symbolic boundaries were open to them on the one and absolute condition that they change their national identity, of which language was the main marker. This was the chance to simultaneously and literally “take the young generation of a great people” as the Foreign Minister had argued, by transforming them from German to English and, again quoting the Foreign Minister “to some extent mitigate the sufferings of the adults” by encouraging them to thrive as Jews, but now as *British Jews*.

Jews had been allowed into Norway since a hotly debated constitutional amendment in 1851, and the Jewish community numbered about 2000 individuals at the beginning of the Second World War. Refugee policies were very strict, largely due to a concern with “creating a Jewish problem” in Norway (Mendelsohn 1987). As the historian Kjeldstadli puts it: “For political refugees to enter and stay was possible with some exceptions, while for Jews, entry was very nearly impossible with some exceptions” (2003b, 467, my translation). In the late 1930s, hardly any Jewish children were allowed to cross the territorial boundaries into Norway, let alone the social or symbolic boundaries. This is one of many indications that Jewishness and Norwegianness were widely regarded as irreconcilable identities, and that children were regarded as independent carriers of a Jewish identity.

Table 3.1 A summarized comparison

	UK 1930s	Norway 1930s	UK 2010s	Norway 2010s
Territorial	10,000 children admitted Under 17 £50 bond as economic guarantee	60 children admitted Under 12, healthy, prospect of reunification with parents in third country, economic guarantee	750 quota refugees, some of which were children. Otherwise: Illegal. No reliable statistics—children registered as dependents “Removal” possible at 18 (end of childhood)	A small number of quota refugees, some of which were children. Otherwise: Illegal. Detailed statistics on children “Removal” possible at any time
Social	No government expenses. CSOs and private people covered expenses	No government expenses. CSO Nansenhjelpen responsible	Access to social care—place to stay, food, basic healthcare. Full legal rights to education 5–16 years, unclear whether this reflects practice	Access to social care—place to stay, food, basic healthcare, school. First year of school often separate and not up to standard. Children more rights than adults
Symbolic	Full assimilation expected	Remigration expected	Return expected at end of childhood	Children assimilated, parents rejected

In the early 2010s in the UK, children were hardly visible as refugees in the public domain. If they arrived with their parents, their social and symbolic inclusion as well as their continued territorial inclusion depended on that of their parents. Children who arrived alone were given access to social care and had the right to schooling, but were likely to lose the right to these and the right to stay six months before their childhood was legally over. This was mainly an issue for children who had been granted a limited leave to remain because they had been found not to be in need of international protection, but could not be returned in the absence of adequate reception arrangements in the countries of origin. Until 2012, children were granted leave for three years or until they turned 17.5 years old; after this the leave was limited to “a period of 30 months or until the child turned 17.5 years old, whichever was shorter” (CCLC 2013). The younger they were, the more they were allowed across the symbolic boundaries. Being recognized as a child, then, did give considerable privileges, albeit temporarily.

In the early 2010s in Norway, child refugees found themselves in a highly ambiguous position. As children, they were symbolically included and principally regarded as Norwegians. Socially, they had full rights to schooling and health services and more rights to benefits than did adult refugees. As asylum seekers, however, they might still face removal from Norwegian territory at any time if their individual cases for asylum were rejected. The stark contrast between the support and warmth surrounding them in the local community, especially in school, and the brutality of being picked up by the police—be it in the same school or at home in the small hours of the morning—has been recounted by many former asylum-seeking children and their advocates.

Across the four sites, whereas it is possible to legitimize rejecting adult refugees by framing them as a political or economic burden or as a security problem, the moral and political costs of rejecting child refugees are higher. In the early 2010s, Norwegian media played an important role in mobilizing popular protests against the deportation of child refugees. In the UK, too, as we have seen, age assessment is crucial in deciding the territorial, social and symbolic rights of refugees, giving privileges to children. The exclusive child rescue operations from the Third Reich show that in the 1930s, too, children triggered more sympathetic responses than adults did.

There may be different normative and legal reasons behind the sharp distinction between child and adult refugees at the four sites. One dimension of difference is agency versus victimization. The definition and rights of children, codified in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989), are well incorporated into Norwegian law since 2003; this Convention was signed by the UK but not incorporated into British law. An early predecessor to the Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by the League of Nations in 1924. The emphasis then, in the UK and in Norway, was on refugee children as vulnerable and passive victims rather than as agents with individual rights (Eide 2005; Myers 2009). Recent research on refugee children focuses chiefly on their experiences and rights as individual agents rather than on power structures (Finch 2005; Parr 2005).

Paradoxically, however, in the UK of the 2010s, children who express “excessive” agency may be considered not to be children at all (Crawley 2010).

Contesting the Boundaries of Childhood and Nationhood

By their very existence, child refugees contest, try out, bend and change the boundaries of childhoods as well as of nations. How, then, may the similarities and differences we have seen in the criteria for refugee children’s crossing of national boundaries throw light on changing and contested notions of childhood?

In the 1930s’ UK, an image of children emerges from the *Kindertransport* case as primarily innocent, incomplete human beings in need of adult protection; they were “becoming” rather than “being,” and the refugee children were, in terms of national identity, blank slates with the potential of becoming British. In Norway in the 2010s, the corresponding idea of refugee children as blank slates with the potential of becoming Norwegian is also prominent. However, there is also a strong component of children “being” what they are in their own right, and a very concrete emphasis on their agency and individual rights as children. In contrast, the UK in the 2010s and Norway in the 1930s emerge as sites where children were both subordinate to adults and received less adult, public attention. At these sites, rejection was more likely to pass unnoticed, and the attempted boundary-crossings also less likely to be successful.

While the UK’s territorial boundaries in the early 2010s arguably remained more porous than Norway’s, letting more refugees or asylum seekers in, refugees and especially refugee children appeared to have greater access to social benefits in Norway than in the UK once they managed to cross the physical border. Children in the UK, unless they arrived alone, were registered as “dependants” and did not feature as individuals in statistics. This supports observations of UK perceptions of children as subordinate and “incomplete.” In Norway, individual children were especially targeted for public, local support, emerging as vulnerable and somehow more important and valuable than adult refugees, reflecting the importance of childhood in Norwegian society and nation building.

In contrast to the European Jewish refugees during the 1930s, refugees who arrived in Norway and the UK in the early 2010s came from many parts of the world and a majority, though far from all, came from predominantly Muslim countries. Anti-Jewish, anti-Muslim and colonialist-racist attitudes thus, in different ways, form parts of the background for boundary-upholding criteria of national communities at all four sites. Jews were a minority in all their nation states of residence in the 1930s and this is one of several significant differences between their situation and that of Muslims in the 2010s. However, racist-fuelled tensions between transnationally and religiously constituted groups and national sedentary populations are present in both cases (Engebriksen 2011). Although none of my examples involve refugees from the war in Syria, as they pre-date the so called “migration crisis” of 2015, the analytical framework is no less applicable to these

more recent developments, where concepts, policies, and practices of borders and boundaries are increasingly and acutely relevant.

How inclusion and exclusion processes play out, what the legal criteria and implications may be, how the presence of refugee children may contribute to boundary shifting, and how boundary-crossing and possible boundary-shifting are represented in public debate are questions that need to be researched in more detail. The same applies to investigating how boundary-crossing criteria at all four sites draw on civic and ethnic symbolic resources, enabling us to identify and analyze interlinks between humanitarian and immigration issues and arguments. Finally, the exploration of such questions may bring about new insights into the changing boundaries of childhood and nationhood, the interconnectedness of nationhood and childhood, and the shifting notions of personhood that form their combined premises.

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