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Enacting Jewish superdiversity at the boundary: classroom interaction in times of terror and war

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ABSTRACT

This article explores superdiversity as enacted classroom interaction between upper-secondary pupils and young people who identify as Jews. The empirical material under study is part of an educational programme called 'Jewish pathfinders' launched by the Norwegian government in 2015. The purpose of the pathfinders' work is to speak in school classrooms about everyday Jewish life as young people living in Norway, but the terror attacks of 7 October 2023 and the subsequent war in Gaza have impacted on their classroom interactions. Building on Akkerman and Bakker's article 'Boundary Crossing and Boundary Objects', we ask the following questions: How is Jewish superdiversity enacted in interactions between Jewish pathfinders and upper-secondary pupils in Norway? Furthermore, how is the boundary between upper-secondary pupils and Jewish pathfinders a particularly relevant site for learning about Jewish superdiversity? Our study reveals that learning at the boundary can be challenging and sometimes even impossible to achieve. Our theoretical contribution to the field is therefore three novel concepts: *boundary acceptance*, *boundary closure*, and *barrier objects*.

KEYWORDS

Superdiversity; boundary crossing; classroom interaction; Jewish pathfinders

Introduction: superdiversity in times of terror and war

Diversity has become one of the central concerns of educational policies, both in school practices as well as in society at large. However, as Vertovec argues, diversity needs to be understood beyond ethnicity as a primary marker. Jewishness is commonly understood as an overlap of religion, culture, and ethnicity (Døving 2022, 14–18). This makes Vertovec's concept relevant for examining Jewish superdiversity further. Suggesting *superdiversity* as an alternative concept, Vertovec calls for research that investigates how the interplay between multiple factors impacts on a person's social condition (Vertovec 2007, 1025). Building on Vertovec, Erdal notes that the concept of diversity, and even superdiversity, can reproduce the understandings of majority and minorities as predefined categories, and urges scholars to be attentive to situations where the differentiation between majority and minorities becomes ambiguous, blurred or renegotiated (Erdal 2016, 156–157).

Taking Vertovec and Erdal as its point of departure, this article explores superdiversity not only conceptually but as an enacted classroom interaction. This means, we approach superdiversity as something that gets *done* in concrete encounters. Our interest therefore lies in investigating how superdiversity is *performed* in several different ways (Mol 1999). The empirical material we study is part of an educational programme called 'Jewish pathfinders' launched by the Norwegian government in 2015, which aims to combat prejudice and antisemitism (Government 2024). An essential part of the programme is young Norwegian Jews visiting public

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schools. Some of the main topics during their school visits are Jewish identity, diversity, and antisemitism. The purpose of the pathfinders' work is to speak about everyday Jewish life as young people living in Norway. The Jewish pathfinders are not representatives of the state of Israel, nor are they Middle East experts (Haaland 2024, 22). Nevertheless, being asked about the Israel-Palestine conflict is a recurring theme for Jews living in Norway (Moulin 2015; Økland 2025), which is also something the pathfinders have experienced since the programme was initiated (Gacic 2023; Hammer and Paaske 2018).

The fieldwork on which this article is based took place after the terror attack on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent war in Gaza. The material consists of participant observations of ten sessions with approximately 250 upper-secondary pupils, between the age of 18 and the early twenties. As Harvey emphasises, the task of ethnographic researchers is 'to "bring home" a sense of the drama of what people actually do' (Harvey 2013, 222). Thus, by focusing on classroom interaction where the events in Israel and Gaza came to the fore, we will bring 'home' the 'drama' that took place during the fieldwork. Yet, the main reason for selecting these incidents is that superdiversity became enacted in unexpected ways when the pupils and the pathfinders interacted on the terror in Israel and war in Gaza. However, even in situations of crisis and war, many things continue as usual, including in classrooms. We have therefore also included interaction in which the pupils and the pathfinders talk about other topics related Jewish superdiversity.

Among many other aspects, the terror attack in Israel and the war in Gaza revolve around historical, geographical, religious and symbolic boundaries. Interactions during which this conflict emerges – including classroom interactions – will therefore often concern boundaries. To identify the ways in which Jewish superdiversity is enacted in classrooms, we have chosen Sanne Akkerman and Arthur Bakker's theoretical framework, which addresses boundaries as a site for learning (Akkerman and Bakker 2011). As opposed to their framework that builds on a large-scale review of educational research, our empirical study delves into the learning that happens *at* the boundary. One of the boundary situations they discuss is teacher students' experiences of discontinuity between the teacher-training site and schools. Based on this and other examples, Akkerman and Bakker define a *boundary* as 'a socio-cultural difference leading to discontinuity in action and interaction' (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 133). Related to our study, the boundary we investigate is whether, or how, the terror attack in Israel and the war in Gaza lead to a discontinuity in how Jewish superdiversity is enacted in interaction between upper-secondary pupils and Jewish pathfinders.

In addition, Akkerman and Bakker emphasise that boundaries 'simultaneously suggest a sameness and a continuity in a sense that within discontinuity two or more sites are relevant to one another in a particular way'. Explained by their previous example, even if teacher training and schools differ, their sameness and continuity consist in mutual concern with pedagogy and mutual interest in the student teacher's learning process (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 133). In our case, we will examine how *boundary crossing*, which usually refers to transitioning and interacting across different sites (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 133), plays out in interaction between upper-secondary pupils and Jewish pathfinders, and whether they are two sites that are particularly relevant for each other when it comes to enactments of Jewish superdiversity.

Furthermore, Akkerman and Bakker emphasise *boundary objects*, which they define as artefacts that are recognisable and carry meaning for both practices. Using the example of a teacher portfolio, they argue that boundary objects are artefacts which have a bridging function, connecting practices together (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 140). Paying attention to boundary objects in our material, we will study not only artefacts' bridge-building function but also situations where objects constrain interaction. Overall, Akkerman and Bakker claim that boundaries carry significant learning potential (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 132–133).

The questions we discuss in this article are: How is Jewish superdiversity enacted in interactions between Jewish pathfinders and upper-secondary pupils in Norway? Furthermore, how is the

boundary between upper-secondary pupils and Jewish pathfinders a particularly relevant site for learning about Jewish superdiversity?

Existing research: Jews and Judaism in public schools

Two research contributions have been conducted specifically on the Jewish pathfinders programme. In 2018, Hammer and Paaske examined the Jewish pathfinders programme based on classroom observations, interviews of the pathfinders, and questionnaires prepared for the pupils. Their overall conclusion was that the pathfinders' visits at schools in Norway have a significant impact on the pupils they meet. Hammer and Paaske found that the Israel-Palestine conflict is a sensitive topic for the pathfinders in the study, and that they feel unsure how to bridge the gap between their own personal opinions, their position as a representative of the Jewish people, and the fact that their job as pathfinders is not political (Hammer and Paaske 2018). A more recent study on the Jewish pathfinder programme conducted by Gacic (2023) demonstrates that the pathfinders challenge standardised teaching about Judaism in schools by addressing personal Jewish life. Further, Gacic shows that pupils show great interest in the Israel-Palestine conflict, but that the pathfinders are reluctant for this topic to be brought to the fore. Overall, negative connotations associated with the term 'Jew' are, according to the pathfinders, related to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Based on the data material, Gacic concludes that the Israel-Palestine conflict is an important contributor to the formation of narratives that link Jews to conflict and hostility towards Muslims (Gacic 2023).

Other contributions on representations of Jews and Judaism in public upper-secondary schools have shown that young Jewish adults experienced representations of Judaism during their time in school as superficial, stereotypical, and fact-oriented, ultimately lacking a nuanced and diversified presentation of Jews and Jewish life (Holmqvist Lidh 2016; Moulin 2011, 2015; Økland 2025). Additionally, studies on Judaism in textbooks challenge traditional representations that emphasise orthodox Judaism (Bengtsson 2020; Herberger and Aschim 2021). Another strain of research has focused on religious minorities entering schools to speak of their traditions from a first-person perspective, indicating that pupils tend to ask rule-based questions when religious representatives visit classrooms (Naeslund 2009), and that their visits foster an increased level of knowledge about Jews and Judaism (Ofsted 2013; Simonovits and Surányi 2019).

Taken together, these research contributions are predominantly based on data in which people who self-identify as Jews retrospectively evaluate teaching about Jews and Judaism, as well as research focusing on how minority representatives perceive their own teaching contributions. Our contribution differs in that we base our analysis on present-day observations of classroom interaction. Moreover, the material has been collected during a timeline when antisemitism and prejudices against Jews increase in Norway as well as in other European countries (Government 2024).

A striking finding across the reviewed research is that pupils tend to ask questions about the Israel-Palestine conflict whenever a Jewish guest visits a classroom. However, the Jewish guests themselves are reluctant to enter discussions about the conflict with the pupils. As such, the Israel-Palestine conflict is very much present, but at the same time continues to be an unresolved challenge in classroom interactions with pupils. Thus, our analysis of classroom interaction after the terror attack in Israel on 7 October 2023, and the subsequent war in Gaza, provides knowledge about a challenging and under-researched topic.

Background, material and method

Approximately 1500 Jewish people live in Norway. As a national minority, they are entitled to protection of their distinct identity (Government 2024). The Jewish Community of Oslo is the religious community with the largest number of Jewish members in Norway. The community's website states that it follows orthodox practices and rituals, but that the members' religious

observance is diverse. The Jewish Community of Oslo is responsible for carrying out the administration of the Jewish pathfinder programme on behalf of the Norwegian government (Government 2024). The young people who act as Jewish pathfinders received oral and written information about this study and gave their informed consent. The pathfinders were also given the opportunity to review and comment on a late version of this article.

The fieldwork was conducted over a three-month period when the war in Gaza following the 7 October 2023 terror attacks was ongoing. The fieldwork consisted of classroom observations, including entering and leaving transitions, conducted by the first author. She accompanied the pathfinders to two schools – one in a wealthy area close to a city centre (school 1) and one in a rural and socio-economically middle-class area (school 2). The total material consists of observations of ten sessions. Nine classes consisted of pupils who are permanent residents of Norway, while one classroom was composed of pupils who had recently arrived in the country as immigrants or refugees. Each session was facilitated by two pathfinders and lasted for 90 minutes, with one or two teachers present every time.

The classroom sessions with the pathfinders are not standardised, but are nevertheless quite similar from session to session. Each lecture starts with a presentation of the aim of their visit and a short introduction to the main topics of the session – identity, diversity and antisemitism. The pupils are strongly encouraged to ask questions. The pathfinders alternate between talking about the lives of Jewish people in Norway, providing opportunities for the pupils to ask questions, and engaging them in different interactive exercises. The data material from the fieldwork consists of 14–25 pages from each session.

Both the teacher and the pupils received written and oral information about the study in advance. Since the empirical material does not contain any personal identifiable information, the pupils were not asked to give their informed consent in accordance with Norwegian privacy regulations. The study was pre-approved by Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research. One pupil is foregrounded in part three of the analysis, but the interaction does not disclose information which can identify the pupil. In addition, changes have been made to protect the anonymity of the pupil further. To ensure that the presence of the researcher was as non-invasive as possible, the researcher was seated in the back of the classroom taking only handwritten notes. Additionally, the researcher regularly consulted with the pathfinders to determine if they found her presence disturbing or if there was anything they wanted her to do differently. The pathfinders confirmed that it was not necessary to make any changes and that her presence was not disturbing.

We approached the analysis with an open-ended strategy (Engler et al. 2022, 528), reading the material carefully and identifying how issues related to Jewish diversity were dealt with during the classroom sessions. As part of this process, we noticed that the Israel-Palestine conflict, and particularly the terror attack in Israel and the war in Gaza, were brought to the fore several times. Following an abductive approach emphasising the interplay of theory and empirical data (Reichertz 2014, 127), we delved deeper into this material, and at the same time, by reading Akkerman and Bakker's article about boundaries as a potential site for learning, we began to discuss whether these instances provided new insights into the complexity of Jewish superdiversity. Applying Akkerman and Bakker's four learning mechanisms – reflection, coordination, identification and transformation – as sensitising concepts, we then categorised the material based on the interaction we found between the Jewish pathfinders and the pupils. As the analysis will show, applying Akkerman and Bakker in a study about how Jewish superdiversity is enacted, reveals that learning at the boundary can be challenging and sometimes even impossible to achieve. Our theoretical contribution to the field is therefore three novel concepts: *boundary acceptance*, *boundary closure*, and *barrier objects*.

Theoretical framework: boundary crossing and boundary objects

This article investigates how Jewish superdiversity gets enacted in classrooms by applying Akkerman and Bakker's theoretical framework, which deals with learning in situations marked by diversity and

mobility. Moreover, instead of just arguing that boundaries are sites for learning, they have also synthesised previous research about boundary learning in four potential learning mechanisms. Hence, using Akkerman and Bakker's concepts as analytical devices, our study explores if and how these mechanisms might be not only potential, but also actual mechanisms in concrete classroom action and interaction.

Akkerman and Bakker developed their theoretical approach based on a review of the existing literature on boundary crossing and boundary objects. *Boundary crossing* is most often used to refer to 'a person's transitions and interactions across different sites' (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 133). One of the examples they use to exemplify boundary crossing is that teacher students experience a discontinuity in how the teacher training site is different from what is valued at schools, and at the same time, that sameness and continuity 'reside in the fact that both sites are concerned with pedagogy and the learning process of the student teacher' (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 133). Related to our study, the way the Jewish pathfinders present what it means to be Jewish might be different from – i.e. in discontinuity with – how the pupils have learnt about Judaism at school. At the same time, sameness and continuity is present in the sense both the pupils and the Jewish pathfinders, who have recently been pupils themselves, know the school context well. The challenges teacher students face when transitioning from teacher training to schools is, as Akkerman and Bakker point out, considerable. However, the boundary-learning situation we are studying here concerns classroom interactions about Jewishness in the aftermath of the 7 October terror attacks and the war in Gaza. Taking Akkerman and Bakker's claim that crossing boundaries is a condition for learning into account, we ask whether and how boundary crossing takes place when Jewish pathfinders interact with upper-secondary pupils in Norway. Analysing interactions across these sites can complexify boundaries as sites for learning and provide new insights about what Jewish superdiversity entails.

Apart from boundary crossing, boundary *objects* are a key term in theories about boundary learning. According to Akkerman and Bakker, these objects articulate meaning and address diverse perspectives in different social worlds but are at the same time objects that have a structure that is recognisable across different worlds (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 140). Moreover, boundary objects are defined as artefacts with a bridge-building function because they link different sites together (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 133). One of Akkerman and Bakker's examples is teacher portfolios. This is an object that has a bridge-building function because it makes it possible for both the mentor and the school supervisor to track the development of student teachers (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 133). Thus, the boundary objects described by Akkerman and Bakker refer to physical objects that carry a somewhat positive connotation. Some of the boundary objects that appear in our material have more contested connotations, loaded with diverse meaning across different social worlds. This is particularly the case in a situation where one of the pupils enters the classroom with a keffiyeh – a traditional garment commonly known as representing the Palestinian struggle for liberation. Analysing how this object functions in a classroom situation challenges Akkerman and Bakker's assumption that artefacts that are recognisable across different sites have a bridging-building function. Rather, the different social worlds embedded in an object might also constrain the possibility for boundary learning.

To enable a fine-grained analysis of how Jewish superdiversity is enacted in classroom interactions between upper-secondary pupils and Jewish pathfinders, we will briefly describe the four learning mechanisms Akkerman and Bakker have extracted as potential outcomes of boundary learning. The first learning mechanism, *identification*, refers to an increased understanding of the meaning of the different interacting sites in relation to one another, and reflects a meaning-oriented learning process through which boundaries are constructed and reconstructed. The second learning mechanism, *coordination*, is about creating cooperative and routineised exchanges between the involved practices. It reflects a smooth, effortless, and routine-based process of people or objects moving back and forth between sites. As opposed

to coordination, *transformation*, as the third mechanism, is a type of learning which involves collaboration and co-development of new practices, often entailing confrontation and continuous joint work (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 150–151). The fourth mechanism, *reflection*, emphasises the role of boundary crossing, where both parties realise and explain differences between the practices involved and thereby learn something new about their own and the other's practice (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 144–145).

Analysis

Everyday life as Jewish in Norway

Since an essential and also the most extensive part of the Jewish pathfinders programme is to provide pupils with actual meetings with young people and their everyday lives as Jews in Norway, the first part of the analysis will describe elements of how the Jewish pathfinders elaborated on Jewish identity and diversity in Norwegian upper-secondary schools, and how these interactions enact Jewish superdiversity.

In every session, the pathfinders talked about how some Jews are more devoted to religious and cultural regulations, such as dietary restrictions, attend the synagogue regularly, or celebrate Jewish holidays, while other Jews pay far less attention or value to those regulations and yet they still identify as entirely Jewish. On meeting the pupils, the pathfinders emphasised that there are various understandings of *who* 'counts' as a Jew within the Jewish population in Norway, and also that the degree of belief in God varies. Above all, one of the things the pathfinders stressed in each session with the pupils was that their own Norwegian identity and their Jewish identity are not separate, but highly conditioned by each other. One of the pathfinders elaborated on being an active member of the Jewish Community of Oslo, partaking in ceremonies in the synagogue and keeping kosher. The other pathfinder said that he identifies as Jewish even if he does not have a Jewish mother, has not converted, and was not raised within an organised Jewish community.

As an example of how he keeps kosher, the pathfinder told a class how he eats taco at home. Taco is a very common dish in Norwegian households, particularly on Fridays, so this was something the pupils could relate to. He explained that in order not to mix dairy and meat in the same meal, he used plant-based products instead of dairy products. One pupil asked follow-up questions about what the pathfinders eat instead of the sour cream and the tortillas, apparently struggling to understand the kosher guidelines in practice. The pathfinder clarified that a common way of following the kosher guidelines is to not eat 'regular' sour cream based on dairy products but to use sour cream made of entirely plant-based ingredients. In the break afterwards, one of the pupils approached the pathfinder who had said that he does not keep kosher. The pupil was eager to know if the pathfinder eats bacon or not. The pathfinder confirmed that he eats bacon and basically everything else. Subsequently, this pupil moved from his seat at the back of the classroom to right in front of the pathfinder, where he remained for the rest of the session.

According to the pathfinders, these kinds of situations represent a key element of what they do when they visit classrooms. Even if the pathfinders are different from each other, all of them use their own stories and knowledge about family and friends to convey the diversity of how Jewish life and identity is lived in Norway. The pathfinders' personal narratives show that multiple factors are of relevance when a person describes their social condition, which confirms Vertovec's perception of the necessity of approaching diversity beyond ethnicity as primary marker. Thus, apart from ethnicity, other factors seem to determine pathfinders' understandings of what it means to be Jewish, such as family relations and family traditions, and the community of people that matter to them – which for some, but not all, includes the ethnic aspect.

During these and several other occasions, it was clear that the pupils were preoccupied by the pathfinders' daily lives as both Jewish and Norwegian. The reactions and interest from the pupils indicated that they were unfamiliar with how diverse, and even superdiverse, people who identify as

Jewish can be. As such, classroom interactions in which the pathfinders explained how they live as Jews in Norway had some similarities with the learning mechanism Akkerman and Bakker identify as *reflection* (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 144–145). Yet, Akkerman and Bakker underscore that reflection involves *perspective making*, where both parties realise and explain differences between the practices involved and thereby learn something new about their own and the other's practice.

Reflection as a mutual exchange, with the pathfinders and the pupils sharing their reflections of living in Norway, did not play out during the classroom interactions. Yet, reflection took place in the sense that the pathfinders explained how, for instance, they negotiate kosher, and this made the pupils realise something new about daily life for Jews in Norway. Thus, the interaction on issues that the pupils could relate to – taco and bacon – made it possible for the pupils to grasp more of the differences existing between how Jews practise Jewishness in everyday life. In that sense, the interaction involved a *perspective taking* in which the pupils took 'the other perspective into account, in light of a reflexive knowledge of one's own perspective' (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 144–145). As such, we argue that instances in which the pathfinders talked about everyday life as Jews in Norway can be described as boundary crossing, with the pupils learning about Jewish superdiversity beyond ethnicity as the only essential marker.

However, even though everyday life as Jews in Norway was the key theme, the terror attack in Israel and the war in Gaza were addressed in nine out of ten of the observed classroom sessions. During the observed classroom sessions, the events in Israel and Gaza came to the fore in two ways, either during a 'round of questions' where the pupils were asked to pose questions to the pathfinders, or as part of an exercise that involved creating a mind map that illustrated the pupils' associations with the term 'Jew'. The following analysis has three parts: the first section analyses the kind of interaction that was most prevalent, and the two last sections analyse two instances where the interaction differed significantly from the overall pattern.

Boundary acceptance

Of the nine incidents explicitly addressing the terror in Israel and war in Gaza, seven were raised by pupils during the 'round of questions' exercise. Among numerous questions, no more than two were related to the conflict in each session. All these questions followed the guidelines defined in a letter from the Jewish pathfinders prior to the visit. This letter informs the schools that the pathfinders are not visiting schools to discuss politics related to Israel, but that the pathfinders are willing to share personal experiences on how the terror and war has affected them personally or other young Jews in Norway. As the quotations below show, most of the questions from the pupils followed the guidelines provided in advance:

What are your thoughts on how Jews are portrayed considering Gaza? (pupil, school 1, session A)

The war between Israel and Palestine – has the war affected you negatively? Have people been rude to you? (pupil, school 1, session B)

How is it to be a Jew in Norway and take a stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict? (pupil, school 1, session C)

Have you experienced prejudice because of Israel-Palestine? (pupil, school 2, session A)

The following excerpts are representative of how the pathfinders responded to these questions from the pupils:

After 7 October I know about young Norwegian Jews that are afraid and are no longer as open about their Jewish identity as they used to be. They hide their Jewish identity by for instance not wearing Jewish symbols, but this varies from person to person. (pathfinder, school 2, session A)

It is a good and difficult question at the same time. Being a Norwegian Jew and taking a stance on the conflict is challenging for many. The war is a major topic in Norway, and that makes it challenging to know how to approach it. It is important to differentiate decisions made by politicians and ordinary people's standpoints. This is the case everywhere in the world. (pathfinder, school 1, session C)

In the classroom, we do not discuss politics – the war is tough for many, us too. We are here so you can meet a Jewish person and have a dialogue, but we are not representatives for the politics enacted by Israel. We wish more than anything that the conflict would come to an end, because it is terrible. (pathfinder, school 2, session C)

The interactions between the pathfinders and the pupils had a low emotional intensity. The pupils raised questions in a curious, straightforward manner, and the pathfinders responded similarly. Throughout, the questions concerning terror, war and conflict were posed by the pupils and answered by the pathfinders in the same way as any other questions related to daily life, faith, and ritual observance. Thus, the topic was raised, but it was not given more attention than any of the other topics. Moreover, the pupils did not ask follow-up questions related to the conflict. In sum, the pupil's reactions and pattern of behaviour during and after interaction related to the conflict were similar to other topics. Neither the pupils nor the pathfinders showed noticeable signs of physical, verbal or facial expressions indicating altered emotional conditions. Each of the seven incidents in which the terror attack in Israel and war in Gaza were mentioned was marked by calmness and was dealt with effortlessly, with neutral or friendly facial expressions between pupil and pathfinders.

Related to Akkerman and Bakker's definition of boundaries as socio-cultural differences that lead to discontinuity in action and interaction, the letter explaining the rules for interaction about Israeli politics can be understood as taking control over the boundary between the pathfinders and pupils. The pupils are instructed in advance what kind of questions the pathfinders will allow and the kind they will disregard. As seen from the material, the pupils do not confront the rules set by the pathfinders. Their questions follow the rules set out by the visitors. As such, the terror attack in Israel and the war in Gaza were present as boundary objects linking the social worlds of the pathfinders and the pupils, but the meaning of the objects was restricted so that it followed a prescribed route. Thus, taking control over the boundary object in advance is a way to ensure that the pathfinders are allowed to focus on their mandate, which is to give pupils a chance to hear how young people who identify as Jews live their everyday lives in Norway. However, on the other hand, this act of controlling the boundary object might also explain why the interaction between the pathfinders and the pupils followed a somewhat standardised question-and-answer format. At the very least, the fact that the pupils did not ask any follow-up questions – as they did in interactions concerning, for instance, keeping kosher – indicates that the space for *dialogicality* allowing 'multitudes of multi-voiced meanings' was limited (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 136).

This way of structuring the interaction as a simple question-and-answer session resembles the learning mechanism Akkerman and Bakker term *coordination*. This kind of boundary learning is characterised by cooperative and routineised exchanges between practices. In this environment, effective methods and procedures are used to enable different practices to cooperate efficiently, even without consensus (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 150). Symptomatically, coordination as a learning mechanism flows smoothly, and goes often unnoticed by the participants because it is part of an automatised routinisation within the practice (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 143–144). As seen from the excerpts, this description comes close to how the pathfinders and the pupils interacted about the situation in Israel and Gaza. That means, most of the interaction about issues related to Israel and the conflict in Palestine followed a pattern of cooperative and routine exchange. Because this kind of exchange is among the most common ways to facilitate classroom interaction, most pupils were ready and willing to enter the conversation with the pathfinders according to the set rules, and probably did so without even noticing it.

Akkerman and Bakker claim that experiences of discontinuity are an essential and even constitutive part of boundary learning. For boundaries to be a site for learning, there needs to be interaction where both parties – in our case the pathfinders and the pupils – are challenged to learn something new about one another (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 134). Since the smooth interaction between the pathfinders and the pupils does not appear as boundary crossing, we will term it *boundary acceptance*. Rather than a situation where both parties interact across sites, the pupils accept the boundary set by the pathfinders and communicate about the terror attack on Israel and the war in

Gaza accordingly. Hence, the interaction facilitates pupils to learn about the ways different Jews in Norway have reacted to the terror attack and war in Gaza, but no boundaries get crossed. Although it is valuable to acquire knowledge about Norwegian Jews' different perspectives, the restrictions on interaction might have prevented both parties from learning something new about the issue at stake, about themselves, and about Jewish superdiversity. Thus, the conflict situation in Israel and Gaza serves as a boundary object, but the bridging function of the interaction is limited to cooperative and routinised exchanges.

Boundary closure and barrier objects

Out of the nine incidents where the terror and war conflict were brought to the fore, two cases differed significantly. This section will analyse the first of these incidents.

Like the incidents analysed in the previous section of the analysis, this situation took place as part of a 'round of questions' exercise in which the pupils were encouraged to ask questions. The situation went smoothly in the beginning, but then one pupil asked a question without following the pathfinder's guidelines about how to address the issue:

What are your standpoints regarding what's happening in Palestine and the ongoing mass murder? Do you think there is a way out? (pupil, school 2, session B)

Apart from the pupil's question, his bodily language, high-pitched voice, and intense look signalled that he was in a state of anger. In addition, the pupil was wearing a black and white keffiyeh over his shoulders. According to the teacher, this was the first time he had worn a keffiyeh at school. The teacher believed this was a conscious choice, as the pupil is known to be politically engaged. Sitting right in front of the pathfinders, the physical space between the pupil and the pathfinders was minimal.

In some sense, the action of this pupil can be analysed as an example of boundary crossing as the pupil initiated a transition from a situation where the conflict was being spoken about in general terms, to addressing it directly with the pathfinders. The question was not formulated in the same way as in the previous instances, where the focus was on how the conflict affected the pathfinders or Norwegian Jews. Rather, the pupil's question stressed how the pathfinders as individuals positioned themselves to what was going on in Palestine, applying the term mass murder to identify his own standpoint. As such, this initiative was not only an example of boundary crossing but also of a pupil crossing the predefined boundaries set by the pathfinders.

Furthermore, in this situation the keffiyeh added extra meaning to his verbal and non-verbal communication. As Akkerman and Bakker note, boundary objects are artefacts that can fulfil a specific function in bridging intersecting practices, because on the one hand they are 'plastic enough to adapt to local needs' and on the other 'robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites' (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 134). As such, because the keffiyeh is commonly known as representing the Palestinian struggle for liberation, the presence of this object in the classroom facilitates a transformation through which the Jewish pathfinders are identified as representatives of an oppressive political system.

For their part, the pathfinders reacted by referring to the overarching aim for the visit, and how political accusations making Jews responsible for what is taking place in Israel have been dealt with within the Jewish community in Norway:

Usually, we don't discuss politics and what is happening in Israel and Palestine because the aim of our visit is to talk about our life as young Jews in Norway and make room for dialogue. Obviously, the situation has put a strain on young Jews in Norway as they are more anxious about being open about their Jewish identity and we gather more within the Jewish community. Amongst us, there are enormous disagreements regarding politics and what is happening in Israel and Palestine. The disagreements are easier to address within the Jewish community than with my friends outside the Jewish community. (pathfinder, school 2, session B)

In this response, the pathfinders repeat that they prefer not to discuss politics, stressing that their aim is to discuss daily life as Jews in Norway and to promote dialogue. However, instead of acknowledging that the situation in Gaza is dreadful, they stay within the predefined guidelines, turn the class's attention to how the current situation between Israel and Palestine has become an extra burden for them as Jews in Norway, and mention that several find it hard to discuss the conflict with people other than those who belong to the Jewish community. In Akkerman and Bakker's terminology, the pathfinders try to avoid the transition evoked by the pupil by turning the question about the killing of Palestinians into a question about how the war has negatively affected Jews in Norway. After the session, one of the pathfinders said that it was challenging to answer the question because the pupil seemed to be asking the question in order to provoke an argument. According to the pathfinder, it would have been different if the pupil asked out of curiosity, and with the intention of establishing a dialogue. In contrast to Akkerman and Bakker's optimistic description of boundaries as potential sites for learning, this incident exemplifies a tense and conflictual boundary situation where it is difficult to find ways to communicate across boundaries.

No other pupils asked follow-up questions regarding the conflict, but the following interaction shaped the confrontation. The body language of the pupil wearing the keffiyeh continued to seem angry and targeted towards the pathfinders. Avoiding eye contact with the pathfinders, and at the same time rolling his eyes and crossing his arms when they spoke, he continued the interaction non-verbally. In addition, the same pupil started to use his mobile phone to communicate with some of his classmates. Several times, the pupil wrote something on his phone before putting it away, followed by other pupils picking up their phones, observing the screen, often reacting by laughing, before typing something and then putting the phone away again. The pathfinders, for their part, showed signs of emotional distress during this interaction, frequently establishing eye contact with each other, breathing heavily and not responding as instantly to questions as they did before the mass-murder question was addressed. Observing the digital communication taking place in the classroom, the pathfinders notified the two present teachers and expressed that the use of phones was disruptive, but the teachers did not take any action to stop it.

In contrast to the reflection and coordination as learning mechanisms, this classroom interaction has most in common with the learning mechanism Akkerman and Bakker term *identification* (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 141). According to them, two characteristic processes typically take place as part of this learning mechanism. The first is *othering*, which means that practices get defined in light of another, delineating how one practice differs from the other (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 142). The other dynamic is *legitimizing coexistence*, which is often related to politically sensitive matters for those involved (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 143).

The othering dynamic is evident in two ways. First, othering took place when the pupil identified the Jewish pathfinders as somehow being responsible for Palestinians getting killed in the war in Gaza, and second incident of othering occurred when the pathfinders identified the pupil as someone who contributes to make young Jews in Norway more anxious about being open about their Jewish identity. In terms of legitimating coexistence, it is more questionable whether the involved pupils and pathfinders reached any kind of mutual understanding. In any case, the emotional distress and the digital communication between the pupils indicate that the boundary conflict between the two parties was left unresolved. Contrary to legitimating coexistence, the course of interaction pushes the practices apart and seals the boundary to further crossing.

Thus, instead of Akkerman and Bakker's concept of boundary crossing, we term this incident as an example of *boundary closure*. This is a situation in which the two parties are prevented from being a relevant site for negotiating different types of Jewish superdiversity. Furthermore, Akkerman and Bakker refer to boundary objects as artefacts with a bridge-building function because they link different sites together. This part of the analysis indicates that the conflict, represented by the keffiyeh as boundary object, had more of a barrier-creating function than a bridge-building function. Therefore, rather than Akkerman and Bakker's concept boundary object, we will characterise this as an occurrence of a *barrier object* – an object that prevented further dialogue and coexistence.

Following Vertovec, we find that this situation exemplifies a situation in which questions about diversity get reduced to an issue about belonging to different ethno-religious groups. Thus, the polarised dynamic between the pathfinders and the pupils strengthens Vertovec's argument for a more multifaceted concept about diversity. However, we also find that Vertovec's emphasis on superdiversity as constituted by a wide spectrum of identity factors might reinforce a predefined understanding of the Jewish pathfinders and the pupils as representatives of predefined categories of a Jewish minority and a Norwegian majority, which we will develop further in the next section.

Boundary crossing

The last incident where the conflict in Israel and Gaza was brought to the fore was in a group consisting of pupils with a short residence period in Norway, several having status as refugees and asylum seekers. Presenting themselves to the Jewish pathfinders, several pupils emphasised a plethora of both ethnic and religious backgrounds. As seen from the previous sections of this analysis, exercises prompting replies or suggestions from pupils are regularly applied by the pathfinders when they visit schools. This also took place in this session. Early on during the session, the pathfinders asked the pupils what they could do to prevent the negative use of identity markers. One pupil raised her hand and said:

As long as we have the freedom of speech, we can basically say whatever we want to say, and no one can change that. (pupil, school 1, session D)

The underlying argument of the pupil's statement is that freedom of speech prevents everyone from controlling negative use of identity markers. Following up, another pupil joined in and responded by stating that one way of preventing negative use of identity markers is to teach how to use identity markers in a non-harmful manner when people are young. Responding to this comment, the first pupil who had addressed freedom of speech, replied:

I don't have negative emotions about Jews, but I've got negative emotions toward Israel – and I can't change that. (pupil, school 1, session D)

Explicitly addressing negative emotions towards Israel could have spurred a boundary closure like the one in the previous section. However, this did not happen. Instead, the pathfinders kept their calm and friendly facial expressions, and one of the pathfinders picked up on what one of the other pupils had said about often being associated with drug dealers because of her Colombian background:

We might not be able to change everything, but we can definitely make a difference by thinking of what we say to others before we really get to know them. Like, it's pretty easy to assume that all Colombians are drug dealers, but then you might meet a Colombian and realise that they're not all the same. The same goes for Israel. We should try to approach people with an open mind and not jump to conclusions that everyone is alike or thinks the same way. It's super important to meet people with curiosity and a willingness to learn. (pathfinder, school 1, session D)

This exchange shares some commonalities with the learning mechanism Akkerman and Bakker describe as *transformation*. Such transformational processes are most often initiated by a *confrontation* where a shared problem forces the intersecting sites to reconsider their current practices (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 150). In terms of the described classroom situation, pupils who admit negative emotions towards Israel, but not towards Jews, challenge the pathfinders to reconsider their current practice of turning down initiatives to talk about politics related to Israel. In any case, the comparison between generalised assumptions about people from Israel with how Colombians are associated with drugs differs from the previous interaction with the pupil wearing keffiyeh. Instead of employing a rejecting manoeuvre, the pathfinder engages with the issue and applies a comparison that shows sensitivity towards the pupil's statement as well as to the Colombian pupil.

Then one pupil who had appeared attentive but not said anything during the session raised his hand. He said that the most important identity marker for him is to be Syrian-Palestinian. The pathfinders appeared a bit surprised at first, raising their eyebrows slightly, but then they smiled, and the friendly atmosphere continued. In the end, when the pathfinders thanked everyone for their attention and participation, this pupil appeared engaged and maintained a smiling gaze towards the pathfinders, as did the pathfinders towards him. On their way out, one of the pathfinders approached the pupil who expressed her negative emotions towards Israel to make sure that the pupil did not feel undermined by his response. As they spoke quietly, it was not possible to hear their conversation, but their body language seemed calm and friendly, and they faced each other with smiles. Afterwards, the pathfinder said that the conversation went well.

According to Akkerman and Bakker, the learning mechanism of transformation involves continuous joint work at the boundary and entails genuine dialogue between 'flesh-and-blood partners' on both sides of the boundary (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 149). This interaction demonstrates that the pupils and the pathfinders were eager to communicate in a dialogical manner. They appeared willing to be vulnerable and to listen to, as well as learn from, one another. This willingness is evident in their choice of words and is further reflected in their polite and respectful body language towards one another. However, there were no major differences in terms of exercises given to the pupils. The tasks concerned issues about identity and identity markers, as in all the other groups. Nevertheless, these exercises played out differently, representing a significant discontinuity compared to the other groups.

It might be that the interaction proceeded more dialogically because the question about identity went, as Vertovec argues, beyond ethnicity as a primary marker. From the moment the pathfinders entered the classroom and heard the pupils' presentations, it was impossible for them to assume a clear division between themselves as a minority and the pupils as a majority. Faced with a classroom situation in which the pupils – both explicitly and implicitly – showed that they were part of ethnic, religious and other kinds of minorities, the pathfinders were in a situation that was markedly different from the previous groups. While it was possible to interact as though the pupils in the other groups were part of the majority population, this last group did not allow such an approach. Although the Jewish pathfinders came as representatives of the Jewish minority, as 'born and raised' in Norway they are also part of Norwegian majority culture – which these last pupils were not.

According to Akkerman and Bakker, transformation is a comprehensive and challenging learning mechanism process because it implies 'a substantial change in practices, potentially creating a new, in-between practice, sometimes referred to as a boundary practice' (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, 146–149). The presence of other minority pupils made parts of the majority position of the pathfinders visible. In addition, following Erdal (Erdal 2016, 156–157), the differentiation between majority and minorities was more ambiguous and blurred, and this situation of not knowing made it possible to renegotiate Jewish superdiversity beyond ready-made categories of the pupils as the Norwegian majority and the Jewish pathfinders as minority. To what extent the interaction between the pathfinders and the diverse – or even superdiverse – group of pupils will have a long-lasting effect on the pathfinder programme is beyond the scope of this study. However, we argue that the interaction between the pathfinders and the superdiverse group of pupils provides insights into the complexity of Jewish superdiversity.

Discussion and conclusion

This article has investigated two questions. First, how is Jewish superdiversity enacted in interactions between Jewish pathfinders and upper-secondary pupils in Norway? Despite turbulent and difficult geopolitical times, the pathfinder programme has not been severely changed due to the current situation in Israel and Palestine. The pathfinders have conducted their planned school visits more or less as they did before the terror attack and war. This has given pupils in upper-secondary schools an

opportunity to hear about how young people who self-identify as Jews live their everyday lives in Norway. Based on observations of ten classroom sessions with approximately 250 pupils in total, our study confirms that pathfinders have a significant impact on the pupils they meet (Gacic 2023; Hammer and Paaske 2018). Compared to more standardised teaching (Holmqvist Lidh 2016; Moulin 2015; Økland 2025) and textbook presentations (Bengtsson 2020; Herberger and Aschim 2021), Jewish pathfinders are able to enact a diversified, nuanced and personified representation of what it means to identify as Jewish today.

With few exceptions, the pupils listened carefully when the pathfinders shared how they personally negotiate their identities as both Jewish and Norwegian. By observing how the pathfinders taught the pupils something new about others and the pupils themselves, we argue that Akkerman and Bakker's learning mechanism of *reflection* captures a significant aspect of how pathfinders and pupils interact about everyday life in classroom situations. However, because boundary crossing also involves reflexive knowledge of one's own perspectives, it is less clear to what extent the pathfinders engaged with the pupils in ways that taught the pathfinders something new about the pupils. Ready-made assumptions about the majority might have kept the pathfinders from approaching the pupils in a more diverse and nuanced manner. Thus, the pathfinders represented Jewish superdiversity in accordance with Vertovec's understanding of the term, but they seemed to be less attentive to a similar kind of superdiversity among the pupils.

Despite the great deal of continuity in how the pathfinders' visits were conducted, the terror events in Israel and war in Gaza is a situation the pathfinders had to deal with in the classrooms. Yet, as shown, it is not new for the Israel-Palestine conflict to be brought up when Judaism and Jews are thematised in classroom situations (Ofsted 2013; Simonovits and Surányi 2019; Økland 2025). This has been something the Jewish pathfinders have faced as long as the programme has existed (Gacic 2023; Hammer and Paaske 2018). The shared strategy among the pathfinders has been to inform the schools that they avoid political discussions and that they will only answer questions related to Israel if those questions are related to how the conflict affects their lives as Jews in Norway. As the analysis shows, in seven out of nine instances the pupils accepted this guideline. The pupils asked questions about whether the pathfinders had experienced harassment or prejudices related to the conflict. In their answers, the pathfinders stressed how most people fail to differentiate between Jews and Israelis, and that harassment against the Jewish community has made them less open about their Jewish identity.

Since these interactions about the terror attacks in Israel and the war in Gaza proceeded smoothly with low emotional intensity, and without further questions, we have termed this type of interaction as *coordination*. As Akkerman and Bakker point out, this kind of cooperative and routinised form of exchange is the most common way to structure classroom interaction. This might indicate that the emphasis on nuances and diversity which is present when pathfinders and pupils talk about everyday life as Jews in Norway is less prominent when the interaction revolves around a politically contested issue. Hence, the tendency to apply a rule-based (Naeslund 2009) and fact-oriented representation (Holmqvist Lidh 2016; Moulin 2015; Økland 2025) is not only something that appears in textbooks and traditional teaching. It is also present when self-identifying Jews talk about the conflict in Israel and Palestine. Given that this pattern of communication was most prevalent, our overall finding is that the terror events of 7 October 2023 and subsequent war in Gaza have not led to a major discontinuity in how Jewish pathfinders interacted with upper-secondary classrooms about the Israel-Palestine conflict.

However, as shown in the analysis, two instances followed another pattern of interaction. The first situation took place in a classroom where one pupil wearing a keffiyeh did not adhere to the prescribed way of asking questions about the war situation in Gaza. Instead of asking how the Jewish community had been affected by the ongoing war, the pathfinders were asked about their personal views on the mass murder taking place in Palestine, and whether they thought it was possible to end the situation. The pathfinders answered this question by following a cooperative and routinised type of communication, emphasising how they as a community had been affected by the

situation, whereas this pupil, as well as most of the other students, including the teachers, passively and actively sabotaged the rest of their visit to the classroom in question.

Hence, due to this refusal to pursue the interaction, we describe this as an example of what Akkerman and Bakker term *identification*. Rather than a situation of mutual understanding, the situation where the Jewish pathfinders were identified as people who care about themselves more than the killings of Palestinians might confirm the existence of narratives that link Jews to conflict and hostility towards Muslims (Gacic 2023). At the same time, the reaction from the pupil, as well as the other pupils and teachers, may indicate that it is no longer easy to delimit the job as pathfinders from politics (Hammer and Paaske 2018).

The other instance of not following the prescribed coordinated pattern of interaction took place in a session where most pupils had only had a short period of residence in Norway and where it was evident that the group consisted of a wide range of ethnic and religious backgrounds. After an initial confrontation in which one of the pupils reacted to one of the interaction prompts given by the pathfinders, the session proceeded with careful listening and sensitivity from pupils and pathfinders alike. As in all the other sessions, this session included an exercise where the pupils were asked to name one identity marker that is important for them. When one pupil said that his most important identity marker was to be Palestinian, the Jewish pathfinders received him respectfully. Instead of avoiding sensitive issues, this session allowed more space to explore different opinions.

Hence, based on the efforts made to understand each other, both verbally and non-verbally, we have used Akkerman and Bakker's term *transformation* on this interactive situation. Moreover, one of the things that transformed the interaction the most was that the divide between minority and majority was less clear. Thus, even if the number of Jews living in Norway is small, this classroom session shows that future representations need to consider educational situations where many minorities are present at the same time, making it impossible to define anyone as the majority (Erdal 2016, 142).

Our second question has sought to examine how the boundary between upper-secondary pupils and Jewish pathfinders is a particularly relevant site for learning about Jewish superdiversity. During the analysis we have shown that potential for learning at the boundary is present, but that it cannot be taken for granted. We have shown two examples in which boundary crossing as a transition and interaction across sites did not take place. First, most interactions about the Israel-Palestine conflict followed a script that did not allow more than rather standard question-and-answer sequences. Since we do not perceive this as a boundary crossing, we have termed this type of interaction *boundary acceptance*. Second, in one situation where the pathfinders were asked to comment directly on Palestinians being killed in the ongoing war in Gaza, the interaction became particularly difficult. The presence of one loaded artefact – the keffiyeh – added further strain to the interaction. Since this overall situation did not allow any kind of bridge making, we refer to the artefact as a *barrier object* and the type of interaction as *boundary closure*. Regarding superdiversity, neither of these instances facilitate enactments of Jewish superdiversity.

Nevertheless, our material also shows two examples where boundary crossing took place. First, the classroom interactions where Jewish pathfinders talked about their everyday life as Jews in Norway, and second, the classroom interaction where the presence of many minorities made it impossible to identify one specific majority. In the first example, Jewish superdiversity is enacted as something the Jewish pathfinders embody through their own stories and other personal stories. In the second example, Jewish superdiversity is enacted through interaction with others with a minority position in Norwegian society, thus expanding Jewish superdiversity beyond notions of Jews as a small minority in Norway.

In conclusion, interaction between Jewish pathfinders and upper-secondary pupils may constitute a particularly relevant site for negotiating different types of Jewish superdiversity in some but not all cases. If sameness and continuity are treated as fixed identity markers, enactments of boundary crossing are prevented. However, when sameness and continuity are explored openly,

interactions at the boundary can be particularly relevant site to learn about Jewish superdiversity.

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