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The art of choosing the right tram: Schooling, segregation and youth culture

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Abstract
In this article, we study how young people with an immigrant background (first and second generation), which attend schools that can be considered more 'Swedish' experience the transition from a 'multicultural district' to the city centre. The empirical study was conducted in a large Swedish city, where the students attended two different programmes. In the analysis, we take a narrative approach, with student movements in time and space analysed in relation to concepts such as territorial stigmatization, alienation, bodily practices and identity positions. Findings show that the students often compare the city school with other schools – the city school described as a 'white' school, the other schools as 'immigrant schools'. The different schools are clearly placed on a status hierarchy, with the city school at the top and other schools somewhere below. The students have confronted and succeeded in transgressing social and cultural boundaries. However, the feeling of otherness that originates in housing conditions, experiences of exclusion and the everyday life of many immigrants is transposed, so to speak, to the school area and transformed into strategies for handling exclusion and otherness.

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Introduction

The open unemployment rate in Sweden increased considerably during the period 1991 to 1993 from 2.9 to 8.2 per cent (Hjerm, 2002), and, although affecting the entire labour market, immigrants were more vulnerable to the resulting societal changes. At the beginning of the 1990s, 65 per cent of immigrants originating from outside the Nordic countries had paid work, whereas the corresponding number three years later was only 43 per cent (Hjerm, 2002). Studies have shown that immigrants have a weak position in the Swedish labour market, although there is considerable variation depending on variables such as class, ethnic and national backgrounds, language skills, years spent in Sweden, age, and so on (see, e.g., Bekhtoui, 2006; Brinbaum and Cebolla-Boado, 2007). When all these factors are taken into consideration, however, the general pattern of exclusion and marginalization remains clear.

Since the 1990s, an increasing number of people in Europe have been pushed into a position of marginalization, and today we are witnessing increasing social polarization. The Swedish cities of Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö have the largest proportions of young people with an immigrant background living in districts characterized by a high degree of unemployment, social welfare dependency and poverty (Andersson, 1998; Sernhede, 2005). These suburban places are often stigmatized and portrayed in the media as dangerous and hostile environments. The people living there have to deal with these conceptions of their local communities and also with discourses of exclusion and alienation. On the one hand, there are those who defend their neighbourhood and, on the other, those who want to escape from social exclusion and poverty. These tendencies seem to interrelate and can be interpreted as different ways of coping with a stigmatized position.

Earlier research has shown that place and the local living environment have a significant impact on young people's self-perception and identity[1] (Back, 1996; Sernhede, 2005; Shildrick, 2006). Young people are in the process of finding their position in society, and they are constructing their identity as an ongoing project. In multi-ethnic areas, constant encounters with young people from other cultures, with Swedish society and with today's multifaceted, global and media-based youth culture show that new hybrid and global points of departure are being created for identification processes, which are by necessity embedded in work on adolescent identity (Mulinari and Räthzel, 2006; Sernhede, 2002). In these multi-ethnic areas, new identities are also influenced by experiences of segregation and social exclusion. Discussing young immigrant individuals' ways of coping with and handling social exclusion, Sernhede uses a conceptual framework that includes terms such as territorial stigmatization and nationalism of the neighbourhood (Sernhede, 2002; Wacquant, 2008). One way of handling and coping with stigmatization related to territory and the feeling of being excluded from the majority society is thus to develop a strong affinity with the local district – a kind of local patriotism. This compensates for the feeling of living in an area inhabited by failures. However, there are also other and more ambivalent ways of relating to social exclusion and urban districts. For example, stigmatized individuals can sometimes *dis*identify the stigmatized position, i.e. dissociate themselves from others who experience the same stigma. This strategy seems to be an indirect way of repudiating subordination (Hammarén, 2008). Thus, tensions and intolerance between different groups are likely to increase in some areas. Wacquant (2008) believes that there is a tendency for people to give themselves value by discrediting their neighbours and their area.

In the present article, we study how young people with immigrant backgrounds in 'multicultural' suburbs handle and cope with this new social landscape of segregation and exclusion.[2] How does the general image of the situation of immigrants in Sweden and in the labour market affect

young people's career moves and transitions in time and space? How do they navigate and relate to different urban environments? In particular, we focus on young immigrant individuals living in multi-cultural suburbs who have deliberately chosen a high school with few immigrants located in the centre of a major Swedish city. How do these choices influence their thoughts on integration, segregation and exclusion? Are these movements in time and space new strategies of integration in Sweden? Does spatial dispersal solve the problem of spatial segregation and exclusion?

Early in the year 2000 the Swedish government changed the admission rules to high schools. Previously, young people applied to go to schools within their own neighbourhood, but this system of admission contributed to increased segregation. Young people living in 'multicultural' districts tended to stay there, and successively this led to distinct and strong patterns of segregation. However, even though the mobility of students across urban boundaries has increased, and though we now see more and more immigrant youths applying to central schools, research has shown that the overall pattern of segregation and exclusion still prevails (Bunar, 2008a, b; see also Ball et al. (1997), Plank and Sykes (2003) and Young and Clinchy (1992) for similar discussions on international conditions).

Earlier research on young people's educational and career moves has focused on different barriers and supports. There are, of course, strong connections between parents' economic and cultural capital and young people's academic careers (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2000[1977]). However, other supporting factors include contextual support (relational and community resources), psychological assets, successful earlier learning experiences, teacher support and a high degree of individuation (Garcia-Reed et al., 2005; Jackson et al., 2006; Lopez, 2001; Perry, 2008). In similar ways, a lack of supportive factors can be viewed as potential barriers to an educational and academic career. Other important factors often mentioned as barriers to an educational career are deficient language skills and discrimination.

Here, we are interested in how young people experience the transition from a 'multicultural district' to a city centre. How do they relate to and experience the new physical environment? To what extent are the barriers created related to style, taste and youth culture? We focus on the physical, material and symbolic barriers. In what ways have these young people handled various obstacles successfully, and what can we learn from this?

In the next section, we discuss some central and key methodological and theoretical considerations. In the further four sections we present and analyse the empirical material. Finally, we conclude and discuss what we can learn from this particular approach to schooling, segregation and the strategies of young people.

Methodological and theoretical positions

The empirical study was conducted in a large Swedish city with a great number of schools: 40 altogether, of which 25 are independent high schools and the remaining municipal. We have focused on one particular school situated right in the city centre. The school building is quite old, with high ceilings and classical architecture. It is located close to one of the main streets and the University, and the marks required for submission are high. The majority of the students have a 'Swedish' background and most live in the city centre or the more affluent suburbs. A minority of the students travel from multicultural suburbs. We call this school The Cathedral School (see also Johansson and Hammarén, 2010).

We chose to focus on one type of trajectory between multicultural suburbs and a central high school. The sample consists of 11 individuals, one of whom was interviewed three times over a

period of two years. His particular life trajectory is reported and analysed in another article (Johansson, 2008). The core material of this study is interviews with six young men and five young women at the Cathedral School and carried out in the school environment, in classrooms and other locations. The students attended two different study programmes, namely natural science and social science.

A narrative approach is used in the analysis. Our attention is directed towards the relation between young people's stories and a societal, cultural and physical context (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Clandinin, 2007; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Lightfoot, 2004; Wodak and Krzyzanowski, 2008). The interviews focus on the young people's experiences of school life, friends, educational achievement, urban experiences, relation to their neighbourhood and other aspects of everyday school life. From this comprehensive material, we chose to focus on potential barriers, possibilities and experiences of alienation and integration. In these experiences it is possible to find explanations of why many immigrant children in multicultural suburbs refrain from applying to inner city schools. In the next sections, we look more closely at the following questions:

1. What happens when young people travel across the city from the multicultural suburbs to the inner city district? How do they experience and view different places in the city?
2. How do the students look upon the school environment?
3. In what ways do students discuss and relate to different youth cultures and styles?
4. Is there a relation between styles, gender and ethnicity?

When discussing barriers to integration, we often focus on language skills, cultural capital, supportive environments and other more obvious and distinct aspects that have an impact on educational achievement. In the present study, we chose instead to look at how young immigrants experience the transition from multicultural districts and schools to an inner city urban school and district. Can this movement in time and space give us substantial information about segregation, alienation, integration and identities?

The young people's movements in time and space are analysed in relation to concepts such as: bodily practices, the phenomenology of 'being stopped' and ambivalence. We connect with Ahmed's (2004, 2007) theories of bodily practices, emotions and whiteness in order to understand how certain bodies are distinguished and made visible in public space, and therefore risk exclusion. According to Ahmed, certain bodies and embodiments move and glide more comfortably through space and time than others. Ahmed suggests different fits between bodies and space. Whiteness tends to include people, whereas black bodies (i.e. visible minorities), for example, lead to exclusion. Thus, having the right passport, right colour and right citizenship makes it easier to pass through different 'stations' and meet different challenges in society. Certain bodies are more inclined to being stopped than others are. These material processes have a great impact on the emotional aspects of fitting into and feeling comfortable in a specific situation and society. There is, of course, dynamic interplay between what is regarded as 'inside' or 'outside', and what it means to fit in or not. These material, social and spatial dimensions are also strongly connected with economic and social processes. A phenomenology of 'being stopped' helps us to get closer to young people's feelings and experiences of exclusion.

Ahmed (2007: 159) writes: 'Bodies stand out when they are out of place. Such standing re-confirms the whiteness of the space.' The fact that certain visible bodies stand out and 'are stopped' reinforces representations that other bodies (white) embody normality and vice versa. Normality indicates not only the ordinary, but also an ideal, and thus the invisible and indefinable. It is in relation to this dimension that the (imagined) deviation is referred to and visible. Following young people's bodily movements through space and place, we acquire information about their experiences and relations to certain significant places. When do they feel 'at home', and when do they experience being stopped or 'out of place'? When we 'read' bodily expressions, we also get a reasonably clear picture of how societal institutions and structures work, and how they contribute to the subordination of individuals. An important question raised in this context concerns the possibilities of resisting power. Reflexive knowledge of how the power system works can be used to develop strategies of resistance and transgression.

Choosing the right tram

The young people interviewed have quite a clear, well-articulated and divided image of the city. On the one hand, we have the 'poor' districts of the city, the multicultural suburbs, and, on the other, the 'rich' parts, consisting of the city centre and the more affluent suburbs. Districts, streets and places are often saturated with symbolic meanings and labelled in different ways. The young people's image of the divided city can be read as a mental image of how districts and people are distributed and spread across an urban social and economic map. The young people interviewed also have a clear image of where it is possible or almost impossible to find immigrant populations. And even though researchers and postcolonial theorists are critical of labelling people as 'immigrants', young students often have no problem doing this. In their subjective world, the term immigrant is of great significance. However, as we shall see, the concept is tricky and slippery.

The construction of the divided city is not merely a collective representation; it is largely also a physical and bodily experience (cf. Ahmed, 2004). Many of the young students describe vividly and colourfully how the trip to school on the tram every morning becomes a movement between two different social realities:

> Interviewer: What do you feel and experience when moving between your home and the school?
> Dina: It's like an abrupt and sharp curve. If you take number nine or four to the central station, you will notice that there are much more immigrants than Swedes on the tram, but when you change at the central station and take number two or three, the majority is Swedish. Sometimes I feel that they are watching me and staring, but nevertheless I now feel at home here.

When moving from the suburb to the city centre and to school, Dina experiences a clear line of demarcation. The trip on the tram can be read as an impressionistic sociological study of segregation and urban differences. The urban journey raises questions about ethnic differences and inclusion and exclusion. Many of the young students describe their trip from the suburb to school in terms of movement from the segregated and stigmatized districts to the affluent and 'white' parts of the city. The trip is not merely a movement in time and space, it is also a trip saturated with symbolic meanings with connotations such as status, class, cultural capital, ambitions and urban distinctions. Travelling through the city is also an emotional and physical experience. Dina describes in a distinct and beautiful way that travelling from a multicultural suburb into the city

centre can be a physical experience of standing out and being different, i.e. experiences of having a body being made visible.

The public image of the multicultural suburb is often complex and ambivalent. On the one hand, we have the stigmatized and racialized urban space where the population almost exclusively consists of 'immigrants'; on the other, we have an exotic place filled with life, movement, happiness and love. Obviously, the young students develop different strategies for dealing with the image of the stigmatized suburb. One way is to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' immigrants. On the one hand, we have the bad, lazy, criminal and dysfunctional immigrant, and, on the other, the good, ambitious and more 'integrated' immigrant.

This complex division and attempt to reconcile the split image of the suburb and its citizens is nicely represented in the quotation from Antonia:

> Interviewer: How do you experience travelling between these different urban places?
> Antonia: It's much nicer here in the city, all the cafés and surroundings. There are more educated and social people. Where I live you have lots of street kids, people smoking, and you easily get a bad reputation there, but it's different here.

> Interviewer: Bad reputation?
> Antonia: If you, for example, walk around with someone who does not fit in, you will get a bad reputation. It's quite easy to get a bad reputation in the suburbs. Everyone knows you. If you do something incorrect, then! You are more free and easy here / . . . / But I could never live here, I would be bored. It's so quiet here. At home young boys and girls stroll around, listen to music, dance, and play basketball, but not here!

This is a story of urban space, street life, bodies, social status and control. It contains a complex and subtle discussion on how to relate to different spaces and people. We can see a clear division between the school environment, with connotations such as urban café life, cultural capital, social skills and silence, and the suburb, which is portrayed as a bit rough, prejudiced and a colourful place. Even though the suburb is described in negative terms, this is balanced against a more positive description of street life. The emotional affinity with the suburb is quite strong, even though there are some difficult things to handle, like rumours and the 'street kids'.

The city in which this study was conducted is a highly ethnically and socially divided city, and some areas, especially those defined as 'multicultural', are often conceptualized in the media and the public debate as problematic and uncivilized. The territorial stigmatization of the suburb and of the young students' home environments is overwhelmingly present in the narratives of space, place and identity. The image of the suburb is complex and often conflict-ridden and it contains stories of love and hate, of black and white colours and of ambivalence. These young people have chosen to cross physical and cultural barriers and to distance themselves from old friends and affinities. Some of their old friends feel abandoned, some do not. Dina tells us that her Kurdish friends often say she has become 'Swedish'. Several of the young students point out that their educational ambitions are often interpreted as an attempt to become more 'Swedish' or develop a high status. Consequently, status, class and ethnicity intersect. However, the students interviewed do not agree with these polarized descriptions. Their narratives often show how they identify themselves by a kind of 'both-and' or 'neither-nor' position, and consequently challenge the rigidity of dualism (further developed in the section entitled 'The body and ethnic enclaves'). The students show a reflexive awareness of what it means to travel through urban space. The narratives are saturated with

strategies for handling exclusion and feelings of otherness. These young people also have to deal with a kind of double belonging. At the same time as they struggle to inhabit spaces of whiteness, they show strong affiliations to the suburb.

The school as a physical and social space

The students often compare the Cathedral School with other schools. They stress an obvious inter-sectional relationship between schools, ethnicities/race, status and place. Their school is described as a 'white' school, while others are portrayed as 'immigrant schools'. The different schools are clearly placed in a status hierarchy, where the Cathedral School is somewhere at the top and other schools below. The students are fully aware of status distinctions and power hierarchies. Their choice of school is often seen as an integral part of their educational ambitions, and as a move towards university studies and a good job.

However, the way to success is not uncomplicated. These students share almost the same story and experience of attending a 'white school'. Even though they come from many different countries and backgrounds, they have one thing in common – they are often identified as 'immigrants'. The majority society's perception of the students as immigrants influences the youngsters and has different effects. Sometimes the feeling of being in a minority position is an almost physical experience. Dina went to an independent high school for a few weeks before she felt that she just could not stay there. The physical experience of being different became too much for her:

> Dina: One felt singled out at the school. At this school there were even fewer immigrants than at my present school.
>
> Interviewer: Singled out?
> Dina: You were identified as an immigrant!
>
> Interviewer: How did you feel about that?
> Dina: You saw the huge difference in the classroom. We were four or four and a half immigrants.
>
> Interviewer: Half?
> Dina: Half Chilean. They looked at us and whispered. I changed school and I have stayed on, but in the beginning it was difficult. Will I fit in here?

When listening to Dina, it is easy to understand why a child from an immigrant background chooses to go to a school with a large population of immigrants. Even though it is difficult to actually observe and identify the social and racial barriers, these obstacles to an educational career sometimes stand out as almost material and physical. Descriptions of being watched, stared at and singled out as different frequently recur in the narratives. Ahmed (2007) describes how non-white bodies sometimes become hyper-visible. In a 'sea of whiteness', certain bodies tend to fade into the background; when people whisper and gaze at you, the emotional and physical experience of being different is sometimes overwhelming.

There are also other narratives and stories that follow up this theme. For example, many of the students describe the physical environment at the school as cold and sterile. They compare it with other schools, where there are places you can play music and just hang around. The Cathedral School is described as an exclusively academic environment. There is a clear lack of a feeling

of being 'at home' at the school. According to the stories, the identity and position as an 'immigrant' is gradually reinforced. The expression 'immigrant', in this context, is a synonym for being excluded. Generally, the stories are not about open prejudices or racism. The mechanisms are more subtle and complex. However, even though there is no open racism, the students feel alienated and in some ways express what could be described by the metaphor 'homelessness':

> Interviewer: Do you notice any forms of prejudice at this school?
> Ajna: Extremely. For example, when we sat on the sofas over there, had a laugh, some loud music and had fun, then a teacher approached us and said – 'This is no fucking Los Angered school' (Suburb).
>
> Interviewer: Who was there then?
> Ajna: It was only people with immigrant backgrounds.
>
> Interviewer: Do you suspect that was the reason for the comment?
> Ajna: Yeeeees, I think so (smiles).

The students sometimes regret their choice of school. Even though they point out that the Cathedral School is a high quality school with skilled teachers, there is also strong competition between students and no real student community. They tend to describe a continuum between the Cathedral School as a 'cold place', and the other, as they put it, 'immigrant' schools as 'warm places'. Here we have a similar polarization as the one pointed out in a previous section between the multicultural suburbs and the city centre. In the quotation above, the teacher says, 'This is no fucking Los Angered school', and is thereby drawing a sharp line between 'us' and 'them', thus reconstructing hierarchies and intersectional relations between schools, places, status, styles/behaviours and ethnicities. Segregation is recreated within the school through this sharp confrontation between the 'sea of whiteness' and these young immigrant people. Naturally, the feeling of being excluded, or of 'being stopped', has an impact on their motivation and self-image.

Youth culture as a potential barrier

Recent youth culture studies have shown a renewed interest in class, neighbourhood and material aspects of youth culture. Many of the questions raised by the Birmingham School seem to have become reactivated (Shildrick, 2006; Willis, 1977, 2004). Questions around class, however, seem to have become more complicated and are often related to the construction of ethnicity (Back, 1996; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1996). Style and other attributes and artefacts are often interpreted as parts of homogeneous identities. However, it is also possible to interpret and analyse how style and the construction of a certain symbolic surface can be seen as a feature of a complex and ambivalent identity.

As discussed earlier, the young students feel alienated in their new school environment, but they have already crossed a barrier and are now struggling to become 'achievers'. One strategy used to cope with alienation is to create 'ethnic enclaves'. When asked about friends and group affiliations, the students tell us that they of course have 'Swedish' friends, but their best friends and the youngsters they have frequent contact with during the day are all 'immigrants'. This is expressed in different ways. Style, for example, becomes a key marker of affiliation and identity. There is also a hierarchy between different styles in the school. The most dominant styles are also the most visible, according to the students:

Elena: Sometimes I think I should have gone to that other school.

Interviewer: Do you regard this as a more high-class school?
Elena: Yes, it's sad, no benches and only one smoking area, no café, the students just sit there in the staircases. Here we have the Emo-stairs and over there the Punk-stairs.

Interviewer: So, where do you sit then?
Elena: In the 'Black skull' sofa!

Interviewer: Do you use the word as something disparaging?
Elena: No, there is a difference between 'black skull' and the word immigrant. When you say 'immigrant' it is more disparaging, but 'black skull' is soft and friendly. However, it depends of course on the person using the word. If a Swede uses the word, it's not that good, but an Arab who says 'Hi there black skull', that's okay.

Earlier research on how youth label and distinguish between styles and groups shows that words with obvious negative connotations can be used in quite the opposite way, in order to fight back and strengthen identity (Hammarén, 2008; Jonsson, 2007). Certain oppressed groups use derogatory words, but charge them with new meaning as a way of changing them and resisting repression. Compare this with 'black' people using the word 'nigger' or 'homosexuals' using the word 'queer'. Through this semiotic play and redefinition they try to deconstruct stereotypical categorizations and weaken their stigmatizing effect. The derogatory expression 'black skull' means different things. Sometimes it can be racist, while other times it is used to signal group affiliation and a 'strong' identity. If we look more closely at the quotations above, we can see that the word 'immigrant', which is actually used all the time by the young students, is regarded as derogatory. Even though this is rather confusing, the most important dividing line and explanation here seems to be who says what and when. The young ambitious students tend to talk about 'other' immigrants who are lazy, not ambitious and sometimes even criminal. The words 'black skull' and 'immigrant' are both contextual, used in different ways and with various purposes.

Style matters – When talking about the school environment, staircases, styles and artefacts, the students are indirectly talking about belongingness and affiliations.

Elena: The students here, no harm meant but most of them are Emos or Punks and so on. I simply do not fit into that!

Interviewer: Is style important?
Elena: It varies, I would not colour my hair green. It feels like I'm in a graveyard sometimes . . . LAUGHTER . . .

Different styles are described as signs of different group affiliations and identities. The expression 'black skull' is often used as a strategy to counteract racism. But this construction is complex and fragile. In the context of the present article, 'black skulls' are situated in relation to the dominant styles (emos and punks). The potential subordination is counteracted by active use of the label, but also by the use of distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' immigrants. Ethnic enclaves are formed in order to create a feeling of being at home and of belonging. However, these strategies also bring forward clear lines of demarcation between the students from the suburbs and the 'white' inner city students. These distinctions between youth styles have to be read in relation to class,

status hierarchies and dominant styles, such as Emo and Punk. In the context of the Cathedral School, hip-hop is clearly a subordinated style connected with immigrant youth and working class; Emo and Punk are connected more with white middle class.

The body and ethnic enclaves

Immigrant students interviewed at the Cathedral School are well aware of their privileged status. They also have a clear picture of belonging to a 'minority' of students with immigrant backgrounds, often clumped together to a unity of 'immigrants'. Experiences of being a minority and the 'other' lead to different reactions, one of which is to join the public criticism of immigrants, disidentify subordination and construct a successful 'immigrant'. For example, the students often compare themselves with other immigrant youngsters at other schools. Their image of 'other' immigrant kids is often quite negative. They talk about the 'other' immigrants, who are criminal, messy and who have developed a particular immigrant lingo. They clearly distance themselves from 'these immigrants'. At the same time, they do not want to become 'Swedish'. Thus, they have to form their identity somewhere in between these different and narrow positions. Consequently, they have aspirations to construct identities that are not limited to the rigidity of dualism, such as 'Swede' and 'immigrant'. Other studies show how young people from ethnic minority backgrounds identify themselves with a kind of 'both-and' or 'neither-nor' position, and consequently sometimes challenge the rigidity of dualism. Thus, they can identify with both 'the host society' and 'their origin' or with neither 'the host society' nor 'their origin' (Andersson, 2003; Fangen, 2007; Hammarén, 2008). The 'origin' is also sometimes synonymous with feelings of being 'an immigrant' or 'an outsider'. The different positions can be occupied by the same individual in different contextual settings and are often dependent on the way in which the individual copes with attributed or self-imposed categorizations (Hammarén, 2008; Wikström, 2007).

When listening to the young students, it is obvious that they have to navigate between different possible positions. Sometimes they feel uncomfortable with their immigrant friends; at other times they feel like they 'play' at being Swedes, which underscores the interesting conception that only 'Swedes' can be Swedish, while immigrants 'play' Swedish. An 'immigrant' or 'Swede' who tries to be anything other than what he/she is presumed to be is not true, which leads to the following conclusion: it is when the 'play'/staging is visible that it is considered to be false and vice versa. This construction thus requires the idea that the gap between 'Swedes' and 'immigrants' cannot be bridged:

> Ajna: At my former school I only socialized with Swedes. There were immigrants also, but they were messy and I did not want that. Then I started here, and I have never been ashamed of being from another country, but at my former school I played Swedish, you know. At that time I had not found myself. When I arrived here I noticed that the Swedes had prejudices against us. So it was easier to be with people who knew me, the way I am, so I socialized more and more with immigrants.

The construction of identity is strongly dependent on contextual factors. Sometimes the young people repudiate the 'immigrant' position and 'play' Swedish, while at other times they distance themselves from 'Swedishness' and do 'immigrantness'. In this way, identity is of course not a fixed position, but rather a constant materialization of different positions and possibilities. The interplay between various 'ethnic' positions emphasizes reflexivity and an ability to navigate in a complex cultural landscape. The images of 'Swedes' and 'immigrants', respectively, are often

polarized, but keeping up this polarized world is demanding and difficult. When we try to press the youngsters on their explanations and world-views, the picture is more complex. Images of the young immigrant man are, for example, full of contradictions. The young immigrant man is street-smart and self-confident, but he is also ambitious, career-oriented and a good person. Toughness is obviously a line of demarcation between Swedes and immigrants. But Juan also shows a certain ambivalence when it comes to toughness:

> Juan: We have different interests. Swedes play badminton, whereas we immigrants play basket ball and soccer, everyone. If I talk to a guy in the class, who does not have a clue about soccer, he obviously does not want to talk to me. You have to know what you're talking about. / . . . /

> Interviewer: What would be the major difference between Swedish and immigrant boys?
> Juan: Immigrants want to show off, be tough and smart, whereas Swedish guys are more reserved.

> Interviewer: So are you a tough guy?
> Juan: No, but when playing soccer, yes, but that's different.

> Interviewer: Do you have any 'Swedish' friends?
> Dennis: Not that many. I do not think a lot about this, but my personality, the things I like to do, there are more immigrants than Swedes.

> Interviewer: How come?
> Dennis: It's much easier to talk about a soccer team with an immigrant guy, we share the same interests. Right now most of my friends are immigrants, from different cultures.

Belonging to a minority also creates certain bonds between young people. Whiteness is sometimes a line of demarcation, an exclusive marker, and a reason to create ethnic enclaves. In the 'sea of whiteness', immigrant youths (visible minorities) from very different backgrounds seem to find each other and create communities. When talking about differences, this is often tied to different bodily practices. Here, the construction of an immigrant position is tied to soccer, soccer teams, toughness and smartness. Swedish masculinity is described as weaker and more feminine. Loading 'the immigrant' position with toughness and high status and criticizing and excluding 'Swedishness' can be a way of coping with the experience of being the 'other'. Talking about 'Swedishness' as 'bad' constitutes a position from which 'immigrants' can see themselves as 'good' and respectable. Many of these constructions of identity positions are temporary and related to contextual factors. Still, they serve a certain purpose. In a 'sea of whiteness', they create communities and identities, and even though these identity positions are temporary they seem to be badly needed in order to create some kind of counterbalance to whiteness.

Conclusions

When searching for explanations of why there is such a clear social and ethnic division between schools in bigger cities, researchers often tend to focus on language skills, grades, the families' academic background and a number of other stable and objective variables. Since the 1990s, we have witnessed a growing social and ethnic division in the Swedish society. Patterns of segregation tend to follow and accompany children and young people from the poor housing districts, often labelled as 'multicultural', to school and to the labour market. There is a vast body of

research showing that Swedish immigrants are discriminated against. This does not suggest, however, that all immigrants have exactly the same problems and social profiles.

In the present article, we have studied the ways in which young people from immigrant backgrounds experience their way into 'Swedish schools', and into a more career-oriented lifestyle. We have not primarily looked at objective factors, such as social background or language skills, and how they influence world-views. Instead, we have focused on how the students relate to and internalize the new cultural and material environment. We have also been interested in how style, interests and bodily practices intersect with and contribute to their construction of identity.

In many ways, the territorial stigmatization of certain neighbourhoods seems to 'travel' easily into everyday life and identity construction. Although there are voices critical of clumping people together and labelling them as 'immigrants', this is obviously what takes place in the lives of these young persons. The feeling of otherness that originates in factors such as housing conditions, experiences of exclusion and the everyday life of many immigrants is transposed, so to speak, into the school area and transformed into strategies. The young persons interviewed give a clear picture of being away from 'home'. The urban area surrounding the school, the school environment, youth styles and bodily practices are all parts of the creation of this feeling of homelessness. However, the urban area and the city school can also sometimes become a resource for certain individuals, through which they reject bad reputations and the 'immigrant' position.

The young students have obviously confronted and succeeded in transgressing the social and cultural boundaries present in certain socio-material conditions. However, in handling and relating to urban structures, youth styles and bodily practices, they have formed what could be called ethnic or immigrant enclaves. These group formations or subcultures are like small islands where the individual can be protected from prejudice and also and more importantly be confirmed and strengthened in his or her identity. Narratives about bodily practices and toughness all seem to end up in the construction of a 'strong' and vital identity as an immigrant. However, these positions are also temporary and contextual, according to the young people. They seem to be needed as a protection device in the 'sea of whiteness' and against the threat of being visible and stopped. But the young people are to some extent aware of the fragility of these narratives.

So what can we learn from this? Student stories about their new school, the other students' styles, sports and the overall feeling of being in the school environment are all part of a larger story of segregation, stigmatization and otherness. But this is not simply about being victims of societal structures, but also about the strategies used to handle the feeling of otherness. The critical question is whether or not these strategies are successful. The strengthening of identity may also have side effects; for example, creating a feeling of being 'unsuccessful' and not 'Swedish' enough to fit into certain career structures. Defending and identifying with the immigrant position implies a mobilization through which to exert resistance and react to stigmatizing categories, but it may also cause a problem. It is the image of power (the host society) to identify with, and thus hierarchies and boundaries between 'us' and 'them' may be reinforced (Azar, 2001). Moreover, such an approach tends to strengthen prejudice: 'immigrants are of course quite different and not like us'. These strategies are understandable and sometimes perhaps inescapable reactions to the feeling of otherness, but in particular they reveal and underline the responsibility of the host society about how to define, describe and categorize people from different ethnic backgrounds.

Notes

1. Here, we consider identities as interfaces between subject positions and social and cultural dimensions. They mark the ways in which we are the same as others who share a specific

position, and the ways in which we are different from those who do not. Consequently, identities are relational, and constructions of difference are established by symbolic marking in relation to others (e.g. race, gender, style, clothing, language skills, etc.).

2. Funding for the research leading to these results was received from the research project *The School, Freedom of Choice and Integration*, funded by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet), and EU-MARGINS, funded by the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement no. 217524.

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