Jeffrey C. Alexander, Anna Lund & Andrea M. Voyer (eds.), The *Nordic Civil Sphere.*

Chapter 8:
Immigrant incorporation in Education: High school students' negotiation of belonging

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> I mean, I think the biggest shock wasn't so much the school but, I mean, the students. At my compulsory school most of the students had an immigrant background. Here there are lots of Swedes from nice neighborhoods. I'd heard it was different, but the shock was that it was so very different. It was the social rules that were hard to learn. Not the school and the studies, but how you're supposed to act. I didn't act like them. You're not as open when you talk, you say one thing but maybe mean something else, or you say it without actually saying it. It wasn't that way at my old school. There it was more direct (. . .) No, I'm never going to be just like them. I did get into this school and the rules that are here. But the majority of the students have always lived with it. I can adjust to it and learn it. But I'll probably never be able to be like them . . . it's not going to be just like turning on a faucet (Paula, high school student, City Academy).

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to use Jeffrey C. Alexander's (2006) theory of incorporation into the civil sphere to analyze how high school students identify, negotiate and reflect upon symbolic boundaries of belonging. Through an analysis of immigrant students' stories of becoming and being a high school student, I emphasize how civil values, norms and student characteristics are expressed through students' school choices and practical experiences of belonging and not belonging. I interviewed students at City Academy, a prestigious high school located in the city center of Malmö. City Academy attracts mainly middle class and native-born students with very high grades, which can lead to culture shock for high-achieving immigrant students like Paula, who is quoted above. Belonging is about the ongoing negotiation over what Alexander calls the: "affective and moral meaning of 'us'" (2013: 536). The negotiation of belonging takes place on a daily basis in high schools like City Academy. And, as Paula describes, belonging is not a static position, but a process. How you define yourself in relation to others can vary in time and place (cf. Alexander 2006, Yuval-Davis 2006). From a civil sphere perspective, school choice and formal schooling are crucibles for the development of civil solidarity and incorporation. Schooling is, like in the initial quote from Paula, about fostering or denying civil relations.

The field of education research has been dominated by post-structural and cultural sociological perspectives. Educational choices, schooling, and their interactions with context as well as with class, ethnicity, and gender are centrally important for and in the generation of social equalities and inequalities (cf. Gewirtz et al. 1995, Ball 2003, Reay et al. 2011, Dahlstedt & Fejes 2018). Researcher has shown that, by increasing the freedom for individual school choosers, school choice places the responsibility for educational success and failure to these self-governed individual school choosers (Apple 2004, Fejes et al. 2018), and that the educational system in a broad sense ameliorates the class struggle by promoting social and cultural reproduction (cf. Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). But, school choices and schooling may also hinge on cultural and social values that establish and reflect symbolic boundaries that define the borders of belonging. A civil sphere perspective, therefore, exceeds typical views that see school choice and students' experiences of schooling as a principally ongoing *competition* for achievement/social reproduction. Instead, following Alexander´s (2006) civil sphere theory, in this contribution I focus on *we-ness/belonging* as a fundamentally structuring force in schooling, a process that includes both the solidaristic dimensions of incorporation and processes of exclusion.

Immigrant incorporation

Democratic societies include a civil sphere that: "…defines itself in terms of solidarity, the brotherly and sisterly feeling of being connected with every other person in the collectivity" (Alexander & Tognato 2018: 17). The civil sphere is held together by a sense of solidarity and feelings for the other in a specific time and place. Thus, the civil sphere can change. It can enlarge or decrease, depending on the binary discourse and collective sentiments associated with the symbolic distinctions between 'core' and 'out-groups'. Those who belong are associated with acceptable values, manners and characteristics (Alexander 2006).

The we-ness of a civil sphere takes shape through the core group's norms, values and practices, and works as a structuring force in immigrant incorporation. "Feelings for others matter, and they are structured by the boundaries of solidarity. How solidarity is structured, how far it extends, what it´s composed of – these are critical issues for every social order" (Alexander, 2006: 3). But the cultural structure of the civil sphere is organized as a binary discourse. Meaning is relational and the "…sacred qualities are always paired with their antagonistic opposites, opposing meanings that constitute the absence of civil capacity" (Alexander & Tognato 2018: 18). The symbolic distinction between sacred and profane characteristics defines which individuals and/or groups that are worthy of incorporation and which are not (Alexander, 2006: 55). In this sense "belonging" can, and should be understood as a structuring aspect in human life.

Three modes of incorporation

Social incorporation of immigrants and other previously excluded groups is thus, not only about indicators of structural inclusion such as citizenship, access to a welfare system, educational attainment, and labor market participation. Civil inclusion reflects an individual´s chances for and feelings of belonging. According to Alexander (2006), there are three modes of incorporation in the civil sphere: assimilation, hyphenation, and multicultural incorporation.

Assimilation is a form of incorporation based on a one-sided form of adjustment and learning. In order to be part of 'us', you need to learn to be like us. In other words: "…persons can be incorporated, but not their qualities" (Alexander 2013: 532).

In hyphenation, various ethnic groups “melt” together into a more collective identity category. For example, school institutions may give children with different ethnic backgrounds and cultural identities the opportunity to interact and communicate regularly. As a result, children of the majority group may come to perceive children from stigmatized “other” groups as more familiar and similar. Children from excluded groups can also find strategies to overcoming stigma. Thus, the divided cultural identities are united through the process of learning to know the other, and through the development of a more general willingness to accept a broader spectrum of values, norms and social characteristics. However, Alexander (2006) argues that hyphenation is normatively problematic because there is still a hierarchy between minority and majority groups. The majority has the power to define which values, actions and manners that are esteemed or disgraced while the individuals in minority groups are shouldered with the burden of adapting to the norm that majority teachers and students represent.

By contrast, the multicultural mode of incorporation entails solidarity, sympathy and understanding of “the other” that transcends the boundaries between majority and oppressed groups. Multicultural incorporation implies an inter-subjective learning process: “This idea of a more symmetrical bargain implies mutual learning. It is not only the incoming group that changes, but the morals and manners of core groups” (Alexander 2013: 532) and “individuals are accepted *because* their qualities are also accepted” (Kivisto and Sciortino 2015: 22). Alexander (2006) argues that multicultural incorporation is a normatively desirable form of incorporation because it combines justice with integration.

Incorporation in education

Educational institutions should on the one hand guarantee the reproduction of knowledge and on the other “promot[e] democratization through the development of individual autonomy,

active participation and respect for minorities and cultural diversity" (Izquierdo & Minguez, 2003: 36). Indeed, in democratic societies in general the drawing of boundaries of solidarity are crucially "facilitated through educational curricula" (Honneth 2015: 90), and through the social interaction taking place between students in multicultural schools (Warikoo 2010, Pérez-Izaguirre 2018). This makes school institutions and schooling a central object of inquiry for studies of exclusion, school segregation and reproduction with far-reaching consequences for equality and the increasingly divergent life-chances of young people (e.g. Dovemark & Holm 2017; Ambrose & Bunar 2016; Bunar & Sernhede 2013; Reay et al. 2011), but also for different modes of incorporation in the civil sphere.

Schools can thus be seen as "interstitial institutions" that mediate between the civil sphere and non-civil spheres (Alexander & Tognato 2018:10, Thumala Olave 2018:67). A theoretical focus on belonging as a structuring force for incorporation within and through schools can lend nuance and shed new light on incorporation. For example, Warikoo´s (2010) study of schools in London and New York shows that students in ethnically mixed schools change their ways of thinking and acting in relation to the "other". In education and formal schooling there seems to be an actual possibility of reducing the impact of ethnic boundaries (cf. Wimmer 2013). As Warikoo (2010: 445-446) remarks, "…reducing prejudice (and in this case, blurring the boundaries between ethnic and racial groups) is aided by institutional supports such as customs of racial interaction, and by 'true' rather than 'casual' contact…".

In this chapter I will interpret and analyze immigrant incorporation into the civil sphere through a contextual analysis of students at City Academy. Students interpret their high school choices and school experiences through feelings of belonging and not belonging at school. Their descriptions of belonging and not belonging display deeper meaning structures

concerning values, norms and student characteristics regarded civil or non-civil. I show that students with immigrant background experience school culture within the frames of different modes of incorporation. Students' descriptions of their feelings of belonging and not belonging are not only contextualized expressions of being a good student who belongs at a specific school. These descriptions also speak to their sense of belonging and not belonging in Sweden, thus revealing the overlap between the educational sphere and the civil sphere (cf. Tognato 2018, Park 2018).

Swedish high school policy as a back drop

Two broad policy intentions are written into Swedish education. First, Swedish school policy emphasizes equality and equal rights to education. By law, education should be equally distributed between regions and communities, and schools with more disadvantaged students receive increased funding. Second, schools are charged with the development of children's values and moral fitness for active and independent participation in democratic society: "respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society rests" (SFS 2010:800: § 4). The balance between these two broad policy intentions has changed over time.

In the beginning of the 1900s students studied in a differentiated educational system that aimed at social groups' pre-defined "needs" for education. Working class children attended a six-year primary school and often completed their education at 12–14 years of age. In fourth grade in primary school, students regarded as especially gifted were selected for studies in junior secondary school, which enabled further studies in high school. The majority of the selected students were upper- or middle-class.

The Swedish school system was reformed in the 1950 and 1960s. Nine-year unified compulsory school was established in 1962, and was followed by a new curriculum and organization of upper secondary education (Lgy 70). The underlying goals of these reforms were creating an institutional space in which children and youth can meet. Reforms emphasized equality and equal opportunities to education with the goal of increased social mobility and socializing democratic citizens.

An important aspect of this policy process was the introduction of meritocracy. According to the former social democratic Prime Minister Tage Erlander, meritocracy was a way to give "everyone" equal opportunities to form their educational- and career trajectory:

> Society with its blunt instruments should no longer sort the students. This principle of free choice has profound consequences for the whole view of schooling. It will be decisive for the construction of school organizations. It occurs in the strong emphasis that school is to give everyone an opportunity to develop one's personality and special talents (…) Throughout the 1960s the social democracy will put education at the center of our society's development which means that we step by step will broaden the personal freedom in an area of crucial importance for each individual: the choice of education and occupation (Erlander 1962: 68).

Thus, education policy during this period aimed to abandon the earlier fragmented educational system and, in its place, create an equal and cohesive educational form though the introduction of meritocracy in combination with individuals' opportunities to "free choice" of education (Lund 2006). The various educational reforms during the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s did away with the parallel school system that had to a great extent sorted students based on gender and social class. As a result of these reforms, educational opportunities were expanded for social groups previously excluded from selective academic programs and prestigious schools like City Academy.

But what of that other goal of policy, educating independent and democratic citizens? According to high school curricula, schooling should not just educate the children and youth in democratic governance but it should also be conducted democratically, based on collaboration and solidarity in both a local and international context (Lgy 70). This policy was built on the assumption that: (i) students should be given equal rights to develop knowledge and competence important for their active participation in a democratic society (ii) and, students would learn democracy through experience and social interaction, in order to develop their ability and willingness to take personal responsibility and participate actively in community life. These policy ideas about the interconnections between "public education and democratic participation" can be traced back in history (Honneth 2015: 91). As Dewey once wrote:

> A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of other to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity (Dewey 1916: 101).

In Sweden, school policy has long had strong moral ambitions as both a force for equality and as a source of civic education (cf. Honneth 2015, Tognato 2018). Public education is regulated by school law, state-governed curricula, equality, inclusiveness and without charges. Its emphasis on equal distribution of knowledge, "free" choices, reducing the boundaries between different groups (during this period explicitly related to class and gender) and an overruled ambition to educate students that willingly: "...engage in public discourse and question authority" (Tognato 2018:151), has been of both ideological and practical importance for the making of educational policy in Sweden (Lund 2006). Thus, educational policy has been characterized by a broad intention of establishing a multicultural mode of incorporation, taking place in regard to curricula, content and teaching goals, but also in

relation to the ambition of establishing a cohesive upper secondary education where students from various backgrounds can meet and interact.

Decentralization, free choice and educational markets

In the 1980s and 1990s decentralization, school choice, independent schools and market competition where introduced into the Swedish school system. These reforms were built on a belief that richer opportunities to choose school would provide a more efficient and better education for all children. These reforms thus aimed to broaden the range of options for students when selecting school, program and courses within upper secondary education. The transfer of responsibility for education from central government to the municipalities began in 1988 (Daun 2006) and in 1991 municipalities were given a single grant to finance obligatory services, including the organization of upper secondary education. Independent schools received similar financial support as those in the public sector. Both municipal and independent schools receive a comparable sum of tax-money based on the number of students (private vouchers). Furthermore, no school charges are allowed, but the independent schools can be profit driven (Lund 2008).

Two major arguments supported this educational policy agenda. The first policy argument behind the reforms was that they would create a more democratic educational system by linking the political steering closer to local conditions in the municipalities, the schools' pedagogical development and parents' and children's educational interests and aspirations (Hwang 2002). The expanded range of opportunities would, it was assumed, reinforce students' motivation to study, increase social mobility and increase the possibilities for students with different social and ethnic backgrounds to meet in school contexts (SOU 1996:1, Government Proposition 1997/98:169). Thus, it was believed that school reforms

would increase social interactions and promote social solidary among students (cf. Lund 2006, Lövheim 2016). The second policy argument postured that school competition would result in a more effective use of financial resources. Pressure would be put on less successful schools to improve their educational standards and students' school achievement (SOU 1996:1, Government Proposition 1997/98:169). Thus, school choice and school competition in the long run would reduce costs, increase students' educational opportunities, and educational quality and efficiency.

Researchers who have followed Swedish high school reforms argue that the introduction of school choice has reinforced social and ethnic school segregation. There are clear indications that the schools' ethnic composition of student body, symbolically produce rumors that influence parents and students school choices (Barmark & Lund 2016, Ambrose 2016, Voyer 2018). School choice has a weak relation to school organization and students' academic results; instead rumors, school location, and student body guides and restricts parents and students school choices (Kalstenius 2013). In general, the popularity of a school is related to the ethnic composition of student body where: "immigrant background is devalued and Swedishness is desirable" (Voyer 2018: 13) and white native born middle-class students avoid schools with 'too many immigrants' (Bunar and Sernhede 2013). Meanwhile, high achieving immigrant students tend to avoid schools with "too many posh middle-class Swedes" (Lund 2015, Ambrose 2016). Schools with increases in the proportion of students who speak languages other than Swedish at home are subject to rumors that the school has a messy work atmosphere and poor educational quality, while schools with high proportions of "Swedes" are rumored to be uncomfortable settings for immigrant students (Lund 2015, Dovemark & Holm 2017).

On the other hand, a number of studies also point out that school choice reforms have opened up prestigious schools and programs to "socially disadvantaged" students and increased the possibilities for immigrant minority groups and working-class students to participate in educational milieus that were out of their reach in the previous system (Walford 2003, Lindbom & Ahlgren 2007, Barrera-Osorio & Patrinos 2009).

In sum, educational institutions can have a strong or weak overlap with codes from the civil sphere depending on the civil sphere's main function and purpose within the educational system (Tognato 2018). As I have shown, school choice and decentralization has reinforced school segregation and compromised the potential of education to be a common ground for groups to meet and achieve solidarity (cf. Bunar & Sernhede 2013, Lidström et al. 2014, Dovemark & Holm, 2017). On the other hand, there are also strong empirical indications that present educational reforms seem to work beneficially for students of immigrant background, as leverage for leaving stigmatized communities (Nechyba 2000). City Academy and it´s multicultural student body relate to this second research position. Students that have chosen and been accepted at City Academy (based on their grades from public school), can from this overall point of departure be seen as active (ambitious, motivated, high performing) and rational (choosing one of the best high schools in the region). Still from this overall perspective, the qualities of City Academy as a functional institution, is, in the words of Parks (2018:44), seen as: "... promoting excellence, diversity, and equality over downward equalization, uniformity, and inequality".

City Academy

City Academy is a public upper-secondary school located in the city center of Malmö, Sweden's third largest city, situated on the southern border of the country. The school offers

Natural and Social Science programs. At City Academy 25 percent of the 750 students are immigrants, 75 percent of the them have at least one parent with a university degree, and 92 percent of have parents who work full time. Students from approximately 40 compulsory schools are accepted to City Academy's two programs. City Academy admits students on the basis of their previous compulsory school performance. At the time of the study, City Academy student's average admission points where 263.5 of maximum 340, which is the second highest in the region (Skolverket 2018).

We interviewed students from City Academy as part of a research project conducted in Malmö during 2011-2013. [1] Most City Academy students of immigrant background we interviewed live their lives in socioeconomically poor and segregated neighborhoods. They attended compulsory schools where the majority of their classmates did not get high grades. On the basis of their enrolment at City Academy, these students now attend a high school where the majority of students are Swedish, live in privileged neighborhoods with single-family housing, and attended compulsory schools where most students meet the state educational objectives. City Academy is thus a site for the social reproduction of students with strong social resources, but it is also a place where high-performing and study-motivated students from segregated neighborhoods are given the chance to develop academically and socially (Lund 2015).

[1] The research project is *An Educational Dilemma: Multicultural Incorporation and School Achievement* (2010–14), financed by the Swedish Research Council (VR Ref Nos. 90615201). See publications Lund (2015), Lund (2017), Lund & Lund (2016), Barmark & Lund (2016), Lund & Trondman (2017), Voyer (2018), Voyer and Lund nd. "'They're immigrants who are kind of Swedish': Universalism, Primordialism, and Modes of Incorporation in the Swedish Civil Sphere". Anna Lund´s and Andrea Voyer´s chapter in this volume, uses data from the same research project. I also would like to thank Carolin Valizadeh and Mats Trondman, working within the same project, for sharing some of their interview data with me.

The school culture of City Academy

Paula is a second-generation immigrant whose parents moved to Sweden from Argentina. In deciding where to go to high school, Paula felt it was important to attend a school with selective admissions and a reputation for being an orderly school with high achieving students. City Academy was her first choice. Like many students who were interviewed, she appreciated the way the teachers and classmates at City Academy support her high ambitions ". . . when they come to work they see all the students as high-performing. And because they have this view of the students, the students perform better." She also appreciates that they make sure the classroom is peaceful, which she believes is conducive to studying. It is primarily their schoolmates, the classroom environment, and the teaching that immigrant-background students described as the greatest differences between City Academy and their compulsory schools.

According to Paula, students who do not meet these high demands do not fit in at City Academy. She believes it is this difference that causes students to out of City Academy to schools without the same academic orientation. Krisztian, who came to Sweden from Hungary as a boy of 15 years, says that those who want to fit in have to constantly bear in mind the school's academic culture:

> Since the school has a reputation of being a good school, smart students and blah blah, that everybody studies, nobody dares to stand out because they think "If I stand out in some way, if I'm funnier than the others, maybe they won't accept me because they're always studying".

Krisztian's talk of being "funnier" than other students at City Academy is explained somewhat through Livia's (second-generation immigrant of Rumanian background) descriptions of the regulatory demands on students' behavior. Similar to the majority of the students at the school, she has high goals for her studies. The students' academic goals also

mean that they cannot behave in just any way, according to Livia. They have to be disciplined, hardworking and concentrated, and enjoy learning new things. Livia details what is needed for students to fit in to City Academy's school culture:

> If you play hooky, come late and aren't very talented, you end up being left out. Then there are the ones who don't study at all, but are super smart. But if you think it's not cool to study and don't do well on the things you're given, it's then that you're a little strange because it's all about . . . it's like a prerequisite among the students that you have to be talented.

When the students describe the academic school culture at City Academy, they often compare their environment with previous experiences from compulsory school: "It's totally different from my old school. There, some lessons but mostly the breaks were chaos. I mean, the students at this school always behave themselves. They're simply calm" (Livia).

Previous studies have shown that students, teachers, and other personnel in the education field often associate Swedishness with successful school performance and an orderly and calm study climate, and that students of immigrant background are often associated with the opposite behavior: for example, low study motivation, lack of ambition, and rowdy behavior (Bunar 2001, Runfors 2004, Gruber 2007, Kallstenius 2013). As I have shown in previous work (Lund 2015), the results of these former studies must be adjusted to some extent. In general, students at City Academy, regardless of their ethnic background, are motivated learners with high ambitions in school and in relation to future participation on the labor market. The triggering point for these students is related to the social manners that define the symbolic notion of Swedishness. Within this educational context, calm and orderly manners work as a regulating force that students melt into or have to adjust to. Calmness, it´s associations with being Swedish, and how students of immigrant background have to negotiate to this norm in order to fit in will be discussed next.

Negotiating Swedishness

Despite her academic aspirations and orientation, starting at City Academy was a shock to Paula. Especially so, because of the way's students were supposed to act. When she started at the school she thought all the students were Swedish, but when she later talked to them it turned out that many were of immigrant background. The other "immigrant girls" in her class do not act like immigrant girls, she says: "It's hard to explain, but it hasn't been so much how they look but rather how they act."

Asif, who was born in Sweden and whose parents came to the country as refugees from Pakistan, says that students coming from ethically segregated schools and neighborhoods often have developed manners that they bring with them to new environments:

> You live in the "suburbs", you're just that way. It's normal to be a little loud, you talk a little loud, you play around. That's just the way it is, you grow up that way . . . It's something you've gone through your whole life. It's not like it starts today or started yesterday, it's the way it's always been. Swedes are a little calmer and they take it easy. That's how it's been for them. I mean, it's at least just as hard for us to be like a Swedish guy as it is for them to be like an immigrant (. . .) that's just the way it is.

Asif continues, suggesting that cultural and social background defines how easily or hard it is for students to adjust to the school culture at City Academy. He believes Swedes have already adopted the manners required:

> Maybe their compulsory schools are so, there's no difference between their compulsory school and City Academy. Maybe that's it. For me there's a difference. There's no difference in Asif, but there's a difference in the environment, the students and what's all around.

Asif argues that it is people's experiences of growing up in different environments that form their social manners. Thus, students from segregated suburban schools are in his mind generally behaving in a specific way. They talk loudly and are noticeable in the public space. In his fieldwork in Denmark, Jenkins (2016:263) noticed similar distinctions made by his

native-born interviewees: “If there are five Palestinians coming along, they seem to fill the space in a different way. There might be ten Danes but you just don´t notice them”. According to Asif’s understanding, many of the Swedish middle class students at City Academy have different experiences that lead to the development of different social manners. They are low-key, reserved and calm. They are Swedish. In other words, immigrant student’s self-confirmation seems to be closely related to the core groups understanding of what actually makes the differences between “Swedes” and “immigrants”.

This binary discourse of how social manners are related to different student groups produces boundaries of belonging in City Academy. When coping with the potential of cultural exclusions based on manners, students can do as Asif does and recognize it is an issue of context that has nothing to do with who he is. Others make different interpretations when their manners don´t match this cultural structure.

Livia describes how the school culture of City Academy drives students to change school. Two of her friends recently moved to a different school. Zahra and Samia, both first-generation immigrants from Iraq, started at City Academy, but changed to Langlet High (a school with the same programs as City Academy, but with more than twice as many students with immigrant backgrounds) during the first semester:

> Zahra and Samia feel more at home with the other students at Langlet, and their school performance has also improved since they changed from City Academy. There’s nothing right and wrong here. It’s really just about whom you belong with that matters (. . .) But I will say this: the thing that really matters is if you feel Swedish or not Swedish.

The choice of school has to do with social belonging and young people’s feelings of fitting in at one school but not the other. The ethnic composition of the school and whether students “feel” and “behave” Swedish or not Swedish is a central aspect of students’ school

experiences. In order to develop the significance of what she means by being Swedish or not Swedish, Livia compares City Academy with her experiences of studying at compulsory school. In her age group there had been only ten Swedish-born students with both parents born in Sweden, and although most of the students of immigrant background had been born in Sweden they did not feel Swedish:

> What's interesting is that the students at my old school, though they were born in Sweden, always said they came from their parents' home countries. At City Academy it's the complete opposite. Students with an immigrant background say they were born in Sweden if that's the case, and then they mention that their parents moved here from another country. If you were born here, you say you're Swedish. And you know, if you – like the rest of the students – speak proper Swedish and behave like the other students at City Academy, they'll also define you as Swedish. At my old school the majority of the students with an immigrant background were born in Sweden but saw themselves as immigrants.

Livia feels that Swedishness, and its relation to different school cultures, influences students in their expressions of diverse kinds of cultural identities, as well as shaping their manners and self-presentation. Livia says that she has become more Swedish since she started at City Academy, and that she is proud of her development. She speaks excellent Swedish and has adjusted to the elite school culture. On the other hand, she is troubled that her appearance causes others to frequently ask where she was born: "I can never be as Swedish as you (talking about me as an interviewer), but still, I feel Swedish, I talk like a Swede, I have Swedish friends and I behave like a Swede".

When Radmila, a second-generation student from Serbia, started at City Academy, she immediately felt that she fit in—that she was part of the schools' core culture. Radmila explains that "people see me as Swedicized", and "I think they'd say I'm very calm". She compares herself with what she thinks symbolize immigrant women:

> I mean, I was never the typical immigrant girl. Like I said before, typical immigrant girls, they're very loud, they scream, they're to be seen, they're to be heard, that's what it feels like for me anyway, and I was never that type.

The school's boundaries of belonging define which student characteristics and social manners are desirable. These immigrant background students say that the ethnic majority of City Academy, the Swedish middle-class students from privileged neighborhoods, came from childhood and compulsory school cultures in which they developed cultural dispositions that lead them to blend in. But, for Asif, Paula and many of the other students of immigrant background, this school culture, in one way or the other, must be dealt with. Some of them feel at home for the first time. Others feel they have to change themselves to negotiate the very same boundaries of belonging and not belonging.

Tarek, who was born in Sweden to parents from Lebanon, says that some of the students with immigrant background do not dare to be themselves at City Academy. Many friends from his neighborhoods and who are of immigrant background have changed their social manners since they started attending the school:

> Yeah but there are these types, I think they want to adjust to the majority, I mean they want a certain ethnic group to think they fit in. I mean they do everything so that another group of people will think they're good and then they're not themselves, you know?

Asif, tells a similar story of how a friend of his changed after starting at City Academy:

> He had this extreme hip-hop style and wore his cap backwards and long shirts or sweaters, and t-shirts with his pants hanging down . . . He was social, he flipped [played up his differences rather than trying to tone them down]. Then afterwards he tried to adjust to how people, or how most of the people here at City Academy were. Then he was completely quiet. We asked "What's wrong with you?". He said "Nah, freak out doesn't work here" (. . .) Today nobody even knows anything about him. He's just one in the crowd.

In my interpretation, the school culture at City Academy and its boundaries of belonging affect different groups of high achieving immigrant students in four different ways. *First*, when entering the culture and practice of City Academy the boundaries of belonging push students to change school. In order to feel that they belong they have to leave City Academy. *Second*, some of the students are involved in a continuous assimilation process. They have adjusted their social manners in order to become "more Swedish" and fit in to the school culture. But when returning to their homes, neighborhoods and friends they "become themselves" again. *Third*, some students long felt alienated from the other students in their previous compulsory school environments, and feel that their academic aspirations and social manners are a good fit for the culture of City Academy. In this case, this means that they feel Swedish, have got new native Swedish friends that they interact with during school hours and leisure time, and that they feel comfortable with this development. *Fourth*, the students often reflect upon what Swedishness is, and how their ways of being and acting relate to such civil codes. These students, who talk about the split and tension between their private selves, which they think remain somehow immigrant, and the public selves they are displaying and want to learn to feel comfortable with, illustrate that the assimilation mode is neither satisfactory nor stable (cf. Alexander 2006).

To be myself

Paula, who in my initial quote described the culture shock she experienced at City Academy, regularly reflects on who she is and can be in the school culture of City Academy. Her ways of being, acting and speaking correspond to the academic behaviors and social manners accepted by the school culture, while at the same time she cannot – as Paula puts it – fully be herself. She feels that her ways of communicating and interacting with people have to be re-learned. Many of the interviewed students feel that they live in two parallel worlds and that

they on a daily basis manage their lives in "the hood", residential and school segregation, bad reputation, and prejudice between immigrants and Swedes (cf. Voyer 2018). But they also tell stories about how something has changed since they started at City Academy and of getting new friends that they spend time with at school and during leisure time.

Bahar has a Kurdish background and came with her parents from Turkey. She lives with her parents in one of the immigrant-dense suburbs of Malmö. Bahar says that the social interaction with students at City Academy has been a learning process that helped broaden her knowledge of how to interpret difference and people's ways of thinking and acting:

> I have spent time with people from Rosengård and these if you could say so, "cool" people. It sounds a little bit racist, but these that are really ethnic Swedes (...) When people discuss this issue of immigrants and Swedes, then I used to think; I understand how the immigrant thinks in this situation. It might be because of his background, his culture... and yes, I can also understand how Swedes think, because I spend time with them also. Like that. That I can see things from both perspectives.

Dragan, who calls himself "a gypsy boy from Serbia", discusses how prejudice affects social interactions in school environments: "Yes, 'people' [referring to Swedes] judge immigrants beforehand to be noisy and blustering. That they are unpleasant and can´t talk Swedish. They can´t behave, things like that". When Dragan started at City Academy he decided to actively work against such prejudice: "I wanted to prove to them that I´m not who they think I am. So, I went straight on." Dragas ambition is to prove to others who he really is, with the hope of becoming a valid member of the school culture in which he spends most of his time (cf. Honneth 1995). He wants his capacity to be recognized as existing and developable by the school's core group, and to be an accepted member worthy of participation. Dragan believes he has accomplished this, and describes that learning the language is one important aspect. Another is to always adjust to the group that you interact and spend time with. He thinks it´s important to blend in and "talk to people". But simultaneously he does not want to change

who he really is. As Dragan says: You want to be as you are. You don´t change your opinions just because you have to go between different groups". Bahar makes a similar reflection and says that you need to keep your values intact regardless of context. "When I´m in school I adjust to things here. So, I´m Swedish here. But if I go down to my relatives in Turkey, then it is more... I try to talk to the old folks, and bring their values with me. I keep it in the back of the head so to speak".

Paula, Bahar and Dragan's reflections on the binary codes that structure we-ness and the boundaries of belonging in City Academy show that their experiences at school are closely related to the values and norms that they have developed in relation to their home culture. They believe that it is important to learn or try to learn the core groups social manners and ways of communicating, but they also believe that their own cultural understandings of what is right or wrong, how to treat and interact with people or how to live a good life is an asset, not a burden. They live their lives with a dual cultural belonging and have with more or less depth experienced what Alexander calls a multicultural mode of incorporation (Trondman 2016). They feel that they belong to the school culture, have developed a richer cultural competence, to a large extent are able to freely and openly interact with students of different cultural backgrounds (at school and during leisure time), and that their cultural identities at large are recognized and accepted by other students.

Discussion

The formation of belonging occurs in the local school context when students share certain common agreements, exhibited in their social manners and in what they value and prioritize in school praxis (Voyer 2013). The school culture in City Academy builds on common ground that forms a type of community that can be both incorporating and excluding

depending on the ongoing negotiation of binary codes structuring students' feelings of belonging. At City Academy students are expected to have an explicit desire for getting high grades, strive to get prestigious jobs, of being an active and interested student with an inner driving force motivating them to study and learn. The norm is that students' manners should be low-key, calm, orderly, self-controlled and concentrated on their assignments. When students' academic aspirations and social manners correspond with the school culture at City Academy, this also creates a feeling of belonging to a community and of being included in the we-ness of the school. Their experiences and interpretations tell them that this is how you should behave if you want to become a "good" City Academy student.

Feelings of belonging are also formed through the perception of "them". The student voices demonstrate City Academy's unifying meaning structure, as well as the values, norms and student characteristics that create incorporation and acceptance. These same voices offer examples of values, norms and student characteristics that are opposite to the school's we-ness (cf. Alexander 2013). The construction of unity and community thus also occurs through narratives of differences; the students deemed to not fit in at City Academy— those who are satisfied with getting average grades, have only mediocre goals for the future, and of being passive and dependent. The social norms at school hold that students who are loud and talkative, passionate and exhibit a general disorderly behavior in class or during breaks display polluted characteristics. As my analysis has shown, this binary discourse is expressed through intersubjectively shared meanings that define the school culture at City Academy.

A seemingly strong symbolic coding of City Academy's we-ness is about being a good student. Being active, focused on their assignments and having an inner driving force that motivates the student´s to study and achieving high grades are values that uphold the school's

we-ness. In many aspects a school's reputation for having such a culture is what attracts students. In other words, self-selection into City Academy's academic profile is what brings these students together in the first place. More importantly for this analysis, in the multicultural classrooms of City Academy it is this overlap of interests that also produces intraethnic groupings including both "Swedish" and immigrant student´s (cf. Pérez-Izaguirre 2018). Academic interests and school performance unite these different groups of students in a cultural compromise: "...a consensus between individuals and groups endowed with different recourses is more likely to emerge if their interests at least partially overlap and strategies of classification can, therefore, concur on a shared view" (Wimmer 2013:98). On a daily basis City Academy students operate in a school culture characterized by face-to-face interactions and an ongoing negotiation and reflection over boundaries of belonging. Over time such a school setting can help overcome previous stigmas between majority and minority students.

My previous analyses have also exposed that students with immigrant backgrounds have to negotiate "Swedishness" in order to fit in to City Academy's school culture. Many of them do so willingly, as in the examples of Livia and Radmila. As mentioned, one possible interpretation is that the school culture forces these students to engage in an assimilation process. On the other hand, the social interaction between high-achieving and goal-oriented students opens up for an emotional identification of the other. The relocation of students from the "outside" to the "inside" of the school's we-ness can also provide pathways for stigmatized cultural identities to be represented and accepted (Lund 2015). Not only in the local context of the school culture of City Academy, but also in relation to civil values. Students with different ethnic backgrounds who are included within City Academy's we-ness are also given the opportunity to interact, communicate, and meet. This suggests an

interpretation that minority and majority students can potentially be attracted by each other's differences when negotiating the boundaries of belonging, at the same time that they perceive the other as more like them than they had thought (Alexander 2006). The deeper meanings of this ongoing negotiation of belonging reflect a hope for incorporation into the Swedish civil sphere generally. In a wider sense, the students do not just want to be good and high achieving students, they want to become good members of the civil sphere. In line with this, I would argue that multicultural institutions like City Academy are part of an ongoing change in the civil coding of Swedishness. Thus, hyphenation and multicultural incorporation go on at the same time as the assimilative mode. The concreate outcome of such "civil" processes depend on the institutional context and how students in such contexts establish genuine interaction and communication.

Tognato (2018) and Honneth (2015) have both argued that there is a boundary exchange between educational institutions and the civil sphere. In this overlap: "... an important institutional space emerges, whereby the creation of new knowledge starts to go hand-in-hand with the cultivation of citizens" (Tognato 2018: 171). This important analysis is closely connected to the history of Swedish high school policy and it´s long tradition of: "acclimating citizens to democratic political praxis" (Honneth 2015: 88). My ambition in this chapter relates to such arguments, but instead of analyzing curricula and school institutions' varying abilities to foster student´s development of individual autonomy, active democratic participation, solidarity and respect the recognition of others, I have explored how school choice and social interaction in the educational sphere can be part of such development. This overlap between the educational- and civil sphere occurs through the ongoing reflection and negotiation of civil values, norms and social characteristics that are transformed into

complementary understandings of what constitutes civil capacity (cf. Alexander & Tognato 2018)

Finally, my analysis of immigrant students negotiating of belonging offers an alternative to the Bordieuan and Foucauldian thinking that dominates this field of research (cf. Bourdieu & Passeron 1977, Gewirtz et al. 1995, Ball 2003, Apple 2004, Reay et al. 2011, Fejes et al. 2018). These highly competent and reflexive immigrant students are deeply aware of the "hidden" meaning structures that regulate what is valued as appropriate student characteristics and social manners in the school culture of City Academy. Their ongoing reflections on who they are and who they want to become in relation others is often neglected by the frequently repeated analysis of schooling and it´s relation to cultural and social reproduction. These students are aware of the distinctions made between types of schools within the local school market of Malmö, and how different groups of students´ apply meaning in school choice processes, and in pursuing formal education generally. These distinctions are deeply connected to the discourse of being a good and competent student, but are also conducive to in-depth reflection over students' cultural identities, hopes of recognition and feelings of belonging. Considerations of belonging are in this sense a vital aspect of the enlargement of common horizon of values and the establishment of mutual understanding of how to handle difference.

This is an important insight, gained from the application of civil sphere theory to education (Alexander 2006). Theories and methodologies of school choice and school segregation should thus expand a one-sided use of *competition* as a fundamental driving force in students' choice and schooling processes, and address *belonging* as an equally important basis for

young people' actions and social interactions. Like the rest of us, students are driven by a deep desire to belong and, in one way or the other, be incorporated.

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