



The Hidden Boundaries of Everyday Places: Migrant Women, *Homeplace* and the Spatial Practices of a Small Swedish Town

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Abstract

This article presents a project that focuses on the multiple ways recently arrived migrant women position themselves, and are positioned, in relation to an urban community in a medium-sized town in central Sweden. The research draws on theories of place and social relationships in order to analyse how accessibility of place is structured and explores the tensions in the production of places. Special attention is paid to variations in narratives collected from participants about living in the town and to how the narratives influence the migrants' experiences of everyday places. The results shed light on the importance of social boundaries and of weak hegemonic relationships in generating a sense of *homeplace*, the ways our informants construct places in their everyday lives, and actions – or inactions – that result from ways that everyday places are constructed.



Introduction

In this text we consider hidden boundaries within the mid-sized Swedish town of Sundsvall (estimated population 96,000) from the perspective of recently arrived migrant women in order to gain deeper understanding of the evasive nature of power in migrant women's place making.

Research on ethnic segregation and integration has, in a Swedish context, tended to focus on larger cities where the levels of residential segregation are high, and the physical socio-economic distances between neighborhoods make encounters between residents from different areas rare (cf. Velásquez 2005, Andersson 2003, Sernhede 2002, Ålund 1999, Molina 1997). To tackle these problems, official policies have attempted to ensure that immigrants are introduced to and 'integrated' into a Swedish way of life as quickly as possible. Courses in Swedish for Foreigners/Immigrants (SFI), in which recently arrived immigrants over the age of 16 are entitled to basic Swedish language training, are one measurement of 'integration'. The SFI is independent of the traditional school system and aims to provide adults with the tools necessary to exercise their rights and fulfill their obligations as citizens. Apart from teaching the language, the SFI instructors also teach basic knowledge about Swedish society. Each municipality is responsible and obligated to provide and organize SFI for those immigrants who have a residence permit (Carlsson 2003).

Some attention has been paid to the way residents themselves are involved in the production and use of the places where they live (Ålund 1997; Sernhede 2002; Nylund 2007) and the importance of place for integration processes (Gustafson 2004). Places are the arenas where everyday processes marginalize and stratify the lives of the people present.

We position ourselves within a growing body of research that views ethnic segregation as part of a broader process of racialisation (cf. Pred 2000, Andersson & BråmÅ 2004, Molina 1997). From this perspective, relations of power and hegemony are of central importance for perceptions of places, for those who have the ability to appropriate them, and for those who have not. The so-called 'immigrant' areas are a part of larger urban areas and should not be viewed as independent of their connections with other parts of the town, or indeed of wider issues linked to the racialisation of society. What is more, structures of power are reproduced and experienced in daily life in often contradictory ways (Klein 1993, Haldrup et al. 2006). It is therefore important, we argue, to look at the everyday experiences of women in order to understand the times – and the places – in which we live.

Migrant women in particular are often represented as passive victims of exploitation on different levels, be it family life, social life or the economy (cf. Velásquez 2005, Åhlund 1999 for a critique), and issues of safety, empowerment and everyday life are often described as problematic. It is important to acknowledge, however, that there are great variations in life experiences among

migrant women and that social transformation of migrants' lives over time often takes place. Moreover, it is important to point out that in interpreting issues such as the particular problems of a minority group, the complex relations that cut across Swedish society, as well as the manner in which such groupings are socially constructed, are underestimated.

Although a large proportion of the Swedish population does not live in large cities, there have been few studies regarding similar processes in smaller cities and towns. In this article we take as our starting point the experiences of a group of recently arrived migrant women taking an SFI course, and we focus specifically on the ways these women make sense of and use places in their everyday lives. As our theoretical starting point we consider the concept of representational space, looking specifically at experiences of safe places in everyday surroundings. The analysis then moves on to the participants' representations of space, mapping them out as spatial practices. Our overall aim is to explore hidden urban boundaries from the perspectives of recently arrived migrant women in order to uncover patterns that might not otherwise have been revealed in discussions or interviews. Photographs and images were used to mirror how our participants' safe places appear in spatial practices. Earlier research has shown that picturing the places where everyday life is situated enhances the understanding of how place is related to experience (cf. McIntyre 2003).

We argue that, by entertaining the possibility of conceptualising experiences of place from the point of view of the women involved, the common negative understanding of migrant experiences can be questioned (similarly cf. Bhabha 1990, Bauman 1991, Ang 1996, Rätzel 2008). In this article we therefore analyse space as three distinct but intersecting levels that are socially produced simultaneously (Lefebvre 1991; Soja 1990:1996): the first level, *spatial practice*, consists of material and concrete practices related to space; the second, *representations of space*, is related to its meanings, imaginations and discourses; and lastly, *representational space*, also described as *third space* or *lived space*, consists of intersecting experiences, imaginations, and everyday life-practices, materially as well as socially constructed.

The women taking part in this study were all attending the Level 2 in the SFI classes, designed for literate students without higher education degrees (Vuxenutbildning 2010). In the project, we used photo elicitation to gain insight into the multiple ways in which Sundsvall was experienced by our participants. In doing so, we aimed to gain a deeper understanding about the complexities in the social relations taking place (e.g. the simultaneous processes and experiences of integration and segregation, inclusion and exclusion). In what follows, we develop our conceptual framework, before turning to an account of our methodology, and our findings.

Theoretical Framework

Researchers have studied the ways by which power structures place, emphasizing that space is not encountered as a transparent or objective ‘reality’ but as a construct of social practice. Space and place must thus be theorized accordingly (cf. Soja 1996; McDowell 1999; Gieryn 2000; Paulgaard 2002; Katz 2007). To analytically explore the evasive nature of hegemony in migrant women’s place making and the hidden boundaries of everyday places in a Swedish medium sized town, we have applied critical spatiality of place. Following the tradition of ‘thirthing-as-other’, which will be expanded on below, we will elaborate on the relationship between inclusive and exclusive spaces where marginality, as Soja (1990; 1996) and hooks (1991: 149–150) write, can be so much more than a site of deprivation. Indeed, in this paper we suggest that marginal spaces may be sites of radical possibility because they are key locations for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse. In this way the production of space, as it is theorized by Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1996), together with hooks’ concept of *homeplace*, can shed light on both the specific relationships of (and between) our participants and, on a more abstract level, the spaces our participants occupy in relationship to Sundsvall and Sweden as a whole.

Lefebvre’s project, as well as those of his followers, brings together formal abstractions about space with the physical and social spaces in which we live. In his view (Lefebvre 2008), the everyday should be considered an analytic level consisting of both repetition and creativity. On the one hand it is externally structured; on the other, individual social actors actively construct it. For this study this means that we hold *place* to be inseparable from its material form and the interpretative understandings and experiences of social actors. It is in the intersection between social institutions, discourses, and interactions that the everyday lives are lived and it is in the lived experiences of particular spaces that we can best study the ‘dominant spatial ordering system that produces moments of exclusion and/or inclusion for particular social groups (Valentine 2007:19).

In order to capture the production of space it is possible to differentiate between three different modes of spatiality; *lived*, *conceived* and *perceived* space (compare Soja 1996, Lefebvre 2008). *Perceived space* (first space), refers here to the space that is materialized and as such can be perceived in the location, sites and concrete geography of people’s daily lives. As a materialised spatial form, it focuses on things that can be observed empirically both as a surface of appearance and as spatial explanation for example by class and race analysis. In this way it is possible to study first space as the concrete and “mappable” geography of lived places. *Conceived space* (second space), is referred to as symbolic representations of space. Lefebvre (1991) describes conceived space as an abstract and discursive space, propelled for example by planners and social engineers. Compared to first space, conceived or second space is more abstract and imaginative. In this study we relate to second space as the idealist and discursive production of Sundsvall and its signs and symbols. *Lived space* (third space), on the other hand is the space

belonging to its inhabitants. It is the emotional experience of space that develops through the imaginary and lived experiences of perceived and conceived spaces. It represents a person's subjective experience of space in everyday life and in order to understand migrant women's place making it becomes important to emphasize Soja's concept of third space and its relation to hooks' concept of *homeplace*.

Edward Soja (1990; 1996) draws on Lefebvre (1991) to develop his theories on space but he extends the understanding of spatiality in several ways that have proved valuable in this study, especially to our understanding of lived space. For instance, he spells out the importance of positions that are simultaneously centred and marginalised. Under the heading of 'third space', he incorporates some of the feminist and post-colonial criticisms of postmodern geographies (Soja 1996) by embracing issues articulated in the works of bell hooks and Gillian Rose, among others. These understandings are related to local doings and practices that constitute the conditions for being or living in a specific locale, and which might serve both to enable and restrict the scope of action for the town residents. Drawing on hooks' (1991) concept of *homeplace* he links issues of marginality and identity to issues of space and place. hooks (1991) defines *homeplace* as a site where one can freely confront issues of humanisation and can strive to be a subject. She uses *homeplace* to describe potential sites of resistance that also, we argue, brings understanding to migrant women's place making since in her account this task of making *homeplace* is related to the construction of safe places.

In this paper we use this notion as an analytical handle on 'third space', using it to find the places in a Swedish town where our non-Swedish respondents experience a sense of safety. We use 'thirthing-as-other' (cf. Bhabha 1990) as a way to go beyond simple binary opposition of margin and centre, letting margin not only to be defined by its relation to centre, by proceeding from lived space, via conceived space, to perceived space. Analytically, this meant that we let the lived safe places of our participants lead us through other spaces. As such, we maintain that the spaces occupied in daily life should be understood by their relationship to other spaces and to places within them. In line with hooks (1991), we argue that a key to any understanding of the structural dimensions of spatiality is the hierarchy between majority (singular) and minorities (plural), where the dominant majority is structurally placed in a position of power.

Third space, however, derives from Lefebvre's argument that the power inherent in everyday discourse comprises not only of 'the space of common sense, of knowledge, of social practice, of political power', but also; the space of the 'commonplaces' (Lefebvre 1991: 25). Third space is not just a passive stage on which social life unfolds; instead, it represents a constituent element of social life. Therefore, social relationships and lived space are undeniably linked in everyday life. Power dimensions have specific effects within different spaces because of the specificity of social relations and their spatial ordering within those places.

Empirical Research

Visualising the places where daily life takes place makes a special contribution to understanding how place is related to experience (cf. Dumreicher & Kolb 2008, Kolb 2007, Célé 2006, McIntyre 2003). Power (2003) argues that visual methods, where participants themselves have the possibility to influence the course of the study, give researchers the possibility to access different stories, as this makes it possible to communicate experiences that are difficult to put into words. In this study, photographs were used to discover themes that may otherwise not have been revealed in discussions or interviews. Although there is a vast amount of research that analyzes pictures, much of it tends to focus on pictures taken either by professional photographers or by the researcher her-/himself (cf. Becker 2000, 2004, Eriksson 2004). In the project discussed here, our participants have been asked to take pictures of their everyday lives and have therefore played an integral part in the collection of data (cf. Rishbeth 2005). By sharing and talking about their photographs, the participants are given the opportunity to use visual images to communicate their life experiences (cf. Kolb 2007, 2008, Rose 2007, Wang & Burris 1997, Gaventa & Cornwall 2001, Collier & Collier 1991). We argue research that utilises photo elicitation in this way can make an important contribution to the study of the everyday experiences place making among subordinated groups. Experiences of recently arrived migrants are difficult to research since recent arrival often brings communication difficulties. By taking multiple standpoints into consideration, and by letting participants determine the collection of empirical material, it was possible to focus on the multiple ways in which they position themselves, and were positioned, relative to the urban community.

In our study we have used a participatory photo-interview method. According to Kolb (2008), there are four important phases in a photo-interview project; *the opening phase*, *active photo shooting*, *decoding phase* and *analytical and scientific interpretation* (cf. Giritli Nygren & Schmauch 2011, 2012). The photos taken by the participants can be seen as direct answers to the research questions, and as Kolb (2008) emphasises, the importance of letting the categories for coding the visual material emerge from the empirical data itself.

Our research project was set up in an SFI school in a class with recently arrived migrant men and women. The basic education in SFI-schools is made up of three tracks, each including two courses. Track 1 is designed for students who are illiterate or have very limited knowledge in reading and writing in general. Track 2 students learn how to speak, read and write Swedish, in order that they can get along in everyday life while Track 3 provides more advanced skills in Swedish and in how to read, write and understand different types of texts. After Track 3, there is the possibility to continue studying Swedish as a Second Language from basic to high school level. This is however conducted outside of the SFI education system. The school is located outside the town centre, in a building that also hosts other adult education classes, small businesses and a lunch restaurant. Although many

different people visited the building, the facilities used by the SFI department were only accessible to staff, students and invited visitors. As such, the SFI facility can be considered a rather segregated place.

After receiving permission of the principal of the school to conduct our study we contacted two teachers who were willing and able to help us. Since the students did not understand much Swedish, the teachers promised to help us explain to the students who we were and why we were there. In the *opening phase* of our research project, i.e. first meeting with the participants, our interest was focused on understanding how migrants were positioned and positioned themselves in relation to the urban population. We wanted to focus on places where our participants felt happy and safe and to provide them with an opportunity to tell *their* story about the town. Fourteen migrant women of all ages and backgrounds chose to participate. Although some men also participated, in this article we only discuss the pictures taken by the women. The women participating in our study were originally from a number of different countries, including Iraq, Russia, Somalia and Thailand. The women were between 20 and 50 years old. Even though they were all in the same SFI class (Level 2), the length of time they had been in Sweden and attending the SFI classes varied according to their earlier educational experience, maternity leave and time waiting for residence permits.

During our first meeting, disposable cameras were distributed and the participants were asked to take pictures of happy places where they felt safe (cf. Wang 1999). It soon became clear that we lacked a common language. With the help of the SFI teachers we were, however, able to describe who we were and what we were interested in studying. We also explained that those who chose to participate would have full anonymity, and that they could leave the study at any time if they chose to.

The second phase of the research project, *active photo shooting*, lasted one week, during which our participants each had the opportunity to carry a camera with them and take whatever pictures they wanted in order to show the social and material surroundings they feel safe and happy in. Thus, although the participants were given some directions, they were still free to determine what places to photograph and how to frame them. In their choice of motif and perspective these photographs reflect not only the photographer's way of looking at the world (cf. Berger 1972), but also the world he or she wishes to show the researcher. Thus it is important to note that we do not see their pictures as materially objective, but rather as the product of the participants' attempts to make explicit the perspective they want to show us (cf. Becker 2004).

Once the pictures were developed, we went back and gave our participants one copy of each of their photos, at which point the third phase began. The participants were asked to select two pictures they felt best matched the description 'The places I like best.' The chosen pictures were given titles explaining what the pictures represented and why they had selected them. During this part of the

project, *the decoding phase*, it became obvious to us that the language barrier was again a considerable obstacle to completing photo-interviews since we did not have access to interpreters. This is one reason for us having relatively little information on the specifics of the respective backgrounds of our participants. The decoding phase is supposedly the moment when participants play an expert role as they describe their photos (Kolb 2007). The extent to which we actually made them feel like experts or communicated as equals is difficult to evaluate. However, we do believe that the language barrier paradoxically focused our attention on the actual content of what the participants were saying about their experiences of the town rather than on the specific wordings of their comments.

It is of course impossible to eradicate the differences in power between researchers and the researched inherent in the research process (Acker et. al 1991). However, the use of photographs made it possible for us not only to communicate with people who, while fluent in one or more languages, had a limited Swedish vocabulary. We were also able to grasp aspects of everyday life that would have been unavailable using traditional qualitative data collection methods. The participants, thus, started the data collection process before more specific research questions were formulated. The kinds of stories we expected to hear when we embarked on the study were not the ones the participants chose to tell us. Therefore, we argue, photo elicitation can be used to avoid the trap that Lather (1991) calls the 'imposition and reification on the part of the researcher' in praxis-oriented research where researchers tend to, in the name of emancipation, impose their own interpretations rather than constructing meaning with the very people they intend to emancipate (ibid. p. 59). This, of course, does not mean that we could, or should, abandon our positions as researchers and allow ourselves to be co-opted by the participants in the study (Greenwood & Levin 2003, see Giritli-Nygren & Schmauch, 2011 for further discussion on the methodology of this project). That is why the fourth phase plays an important role in our study, and it is also in this phase that our theoretical framework comes into play.

The first part of the fourth phase, *analytical scientific interpretation*, consisted mainly of a location and content analysis. Our content analysis emphasises the photo motifs as representations of a specific local spatial situation (cf. Rose 2007). Overall, our material consisted of approximately 70 pictures taken by the participating women (cf. Giritli Nygren & Schmauch 2011, 2012). However, in this article we focus on the two pictures (of 28 altogether) each participant selected, and the reasons for participants' choices. These are pictures of different locations showing similar topics, and pictures of the same locations showing different topics. The categorisation of the photographs is determined by the empirical material itself. According to the visual content and/or the story behind the picture, we have divided the 28 pictures into 4 different groups: home, school, city centre and nature. Table 1 shows the number of photos taken by category and provides a summary of the photo contents.

Number of photos	Category	Contents
8	Home	4 Children and family 2 Living room/TV 2 The building
10	School	8 Friends and teachers 2 Empty classroom
6	City centre	2 Local town square 1 Pedestrians 1 Park 1 Monument 1 Cultural centre
4	Nature	1 View of trees 2 Middle of a wood 1 Crossroads in the wood

Table 1: The safe, happy places in town

As already noted, in analysing the pictures we were inspired by Lefebvre's differentiation between three dimensions of space. We have used these dimensions as analytical tools in the tradition of 'thirthing -as- othering' (1990; 1996). Our ambition was to start out in the lived spaces of our respondents in order to put everyday life in the centre of our analysis (see hooks 1984). Third space or lived space is represented by the pictures our participants have taken of safe places looking specifically at the type of social relationships that are represented in them.

To illustrate second space, another set of data was used, partly consisting of group projects in which our participants focused on presenting the town to friends and family by combining both text and images to produce a poster presentation. Second space or conceived space could theoretically be described as an abstract and discursive space, understood as a reflexive and symbolic representation of space. The posters were produced independently of our research. In order to practice their oral presentation skills, each group carried out their presentation in Swedish. As the posters gave us insight to the makings of second space they were photographed and included into the project. In order to compare our participants' perspectives of the town with dominant perspectives, we also analysed the official

description used on the town's official website, thus giving us an opportunity to capture the makings of second space from two different angles.

In order to understand the materiality of space, first space, and the hidden boundaries in everyday life experienced by our participants, we analysed the relationships between the places that were described in the pictures, posters and on the official town website. By pinning them out on a map we aimed to form an understanding of the places that were highlighted and those which were not included and in what ways they were related, or not, to each other. Thus, while third space is represented in the pictures taken by our participants, second space is illustrated by images from two different presentations of the town; while first space or perceived space is analysed as the concrete locations of third and second space on a map that mirrors specific spatial practices in the town.

Findings

Lived space

As described previously, four different categories of places were present in pictures of the safest and happiest local places chosen by our participants: school, home, nature/forest and the town square. Some of the nature/forest images were described as places related to family activities such as "This is a forest where I like to go with my family," or, "This is a playground where I go with my daughter. I like this place because my daughter can play there and it is a beautiful, quiet place, and I think that it's important for children to play." Some of the pictures of the town square were also linked to other – anonymous – people for reasons such as "I have chosen this picture because I like to look at people there."

Places are used and imbued with meaning in accordance with the social relationships that take place in them or with the disconnection from personal relations. Several of the pictures taken of the town centre, on the way to school and of residential areas were all pictures of places devoid of people. In the two other sets of pictures the opposite feeling was strong. Pictures of home and school often depict smiling faces, sleeping children and friends with their arms around each other. The pictures were explained along the lines of, "Here I meet my friends". Home and school thus seemed to be places of love, friendship and close personal relationships. When choosing two pictures of her favourite places in town, one participant chose a picture of her classroom and another of the television set at home, with the explanation, "This is where I live my life". In the pictures of home, although children are portrayed, there are few other people around.

School, we could also see, had different meanings for different students – one participant spoke about what motivated her to choose the photo she took of her school, saying the school gave her the chance to communicate with students from different countries in a common language; another that "I like my school because I want to learn Swedish and I like to be there. I meet friends and I would like to continue studying since I never had that opportunity in my own country." Another

stressed friendships with her teacher and classmates, while a fourth talked about her chances of learning Swedish in order to go on to higher education. While there are differences, the women's photographs and texts highlight the importance of school as a site of friendship to which they are connected.

The pictures and texts shown indicate that many of the participant's social relationships are located in the school setting. Here friendships between women of different religions and ages, regardless of ethnic background and reasons for migrating, are pictured. Furthermore, the pictures illustrate that the school is at the centre of their existence outside the home and a place where they have created a safe and happy space in their daily lives. Of course, part of the reason why pictures of school were taken in the first place might be related to the fact that the project was introduced in a school setting. However, the very motives of the pictures suggest that it was the social relationships that were central in their experience of the school. An example of this was that few of the pictures depicted the actual teaching position. For example, few of the pictures depicted the teaching situation although this was stressed in the titles the pictures, were given.

A similar argument is put forth by hooks (1991), who stresses the potential for inclusion and belonging in segregated settings. In the *homeplace*, she argues, the risk of racial discrimination is kept to a minimum and the experience of everyday racism is not questioned as frequently. Ethnic segregation is often explained in terms of a desire on the part of ethnic minorities to live close to other members of their ethnic group. Our finding here suggests, however, that it is not ethnic belonging itself that is stressed, since our participants come from several ethnic groups, but rather a feeling of belonging in a multi-ethnic environment. This suggests there are other common grounds for the sense of belonging rather than ethnic identity or common heritage. While the women's photo-texts reveal the significance of home and school as arenas in everyday life, the connection to families and friends and to personal positions, they also reveal a collective story. Although there are differences between the pictures taken and the stories they tell about the women's lives, we can see an overall description of the school and home setting as everyday safe places. Most of the participants who chose the school as their favourite place were women who shared a common experience of having migrated and being positioned as 'immigrants'. Even though this is a highly stigmatised status in contemporary Sweden, it is a status taken for granted in the SFI setting. In earlier research, we found that socialising with others of (different) migrant backgrounds was used as a strategy to avoid everyday racism and exclusion from the Swedish majority population (Schmauch 2006).

Furthermore, our findings indicate that the sense of belonging is highly gendered. It is interesting to note, for example, that no men are portrayed in the pictures of school settings chosen by the women. In our meetings at the SFI department many of the men did not participate in our discussions as enthusiastically as the women. The social relationships at school the women chose to portray are mainly social relationships between women. Although men also

attend the SFI classes they appear not to take part in the close personal relationships the women portrayed. This can also be related to the fact that most of the teaching staff at the school, as in other schools in Sweden, mainly consisted of women. The fact that we ourselves are women has probably also contributed to the stronger interest in the study from the women than the men.

The SFI setting is often studied as a disciplining and normalizing institution of the welfare state where discourses of Swedishness are reproduced (cf. Osman 1999; Carlsson 2003). Although there is nothing in our study to indicate that this is wrong, our participants tell a somewhat different, and less negative, story. For them the most important places in their daily lives seem to be their homes and the school itself, indicating that not only are physical places *per se* important, but so too are the social spaces within them where relationships are formed and influenced. The SFI locale, however segregated, has also become a place where women can reassert control in a racialised society (cf. Bijoux & Myers 2006).

Thus, it is not ethnic or cultural differences in themselves that make inter-ethnic sociability problematic, neither does the commonly held belief that migrants need to change in order to make integration possible have any bearing. Instead, the findings confirm the view that issues of ethnic inclusion and exclusion are linked to issues of ethnic hegemony rather than difference itself. They also suggest that it is the groups in power, in this case the Swedish majority, which are lacking in their degree of ethnic integration and that it is this very absence which allows our participants to be identified as individuals rather than as ethnic others. We argue that this shows that it is the racialisation of Swedish society that needs to be addressed, rather than the issue of difficulties of “getting along” over ethnic lines.

Conceived Space

Second space, or conceived space, could theoretically be described as an abstract and discursive space understood as a reflexive and symbolic representation of space that we have captured from two different angles. Firstly using the posters our participants made in order to present the town to their friends and family and secondly, the images collected from the presentation of the town on the local council’s official website. In comparing the two we are interested in the position our participants construct for themselves and how they, in turn, are positioned in the official discourse of the town.

Informants informing friends and family

One striking difference between the photographs of daily life our participants took and the posters they constructed was that school and the residential areas in which they live, were absent from the posters. Although the posters showed some ‘typically Swedish’ aspects of life, such as cinnamon buns and ice hockey, the main focus was on public places such as the town library, the town centre, and other tourist attractions. This is perhaps not surprising given that participants were asked to describe the town, not necessarily their life in it. However, and more

interestingly, a majority of the places pictured in the posters – the coast, the casino, luxurious hotels, the town museum, Swedish Christmas traditions, and winter sports – were absent from their pictures of daily life. This suggests that although the feeling of belonging was strong in the school and at home, the feeling was not as common in relation to some of the public places.

There are several possible explanations for this. One is to be found in the social relationships in the places themselves, and how our participants are positioned within them. Irrespective of what explanation we choose, it is clear that our participants do not have a strong sense of belonging there – these are not the happy places in Sundsvall they choose to highlight. Massey (2005) introduces the concept of *relational* space in order to analyse how spaces are simultaneously produced by their relation to other spaces and to the social relationships within them. Sundsvall, like most Swedish towns, is ethnically segregated in the realms of housing, labour markets, and incomes. We therefore have reason to believe that our participants would find themselves in a subordinate position within the geometry of power in such places, with limited possibilities to influence social relationships and practices. Since the areas they portray are often ethnically homogenous, they would probably have difficulty in being seen as individual subjects, but rather would be highly visible and othered as ‘immigrants’. On a more general level this indicates a sense of dis-connection between the perceived conceived space of the town on the one hand and the places where everyday life is lived, on the other. We can see therefore, that the participants construct their own position as rather separate from the town as a whole.

Another explanation is that our participants do not have the material, financial, or other means to enjoy facilities and events that take place in the town. Several establishments are expensive (hotels, the casino), while others are located outside the town and are accessible only by car (e.g. the coast), making them inaccessible for people on low incomes, such as many of the SFI students in our study. The importance of financial means is also indicated by the fact that none of the women took pictures of places connected with consumption. Spatial practices such as mobility are therefore connected to other kinds of practice, for example concerning incomes, housing policies, and so on. Although we do not have any information about either the present income level of our participants or their class background, it has been shown elsewhere that the class structure in Swedish society is, to a large degree, being racialised privileging the native majority on the expense of people with migrant background (Neergard & Mulinari 2004).

A central factor in the creation of discursive boundaries is the local political administration, which in Sweden is responsible for urban planning and accordingly has considerable influence over who is allowed to be included into the towns’ collectivity? (Yuval-Davies et al. 2005). We now turn to the imagery of the local administration.

Official information to the public

Official depictions of Sundsvall focus on a number of places that are not present or were not focused upon by the participants in their pictures. Official pictures, which were taken by professionals who put a lot of thought into what places to portray, present a story about a general image that town officials would like to construct. There are striking similarities between the official pictures and the posters our participants created, which suggest that the latter are well aware of the town's official discourse. The geographical location of the town, on Sweden's east coast between two mountains, has become a strong symbol of the town, and is very much present in both angles on second space. On the north mountain there is a folklore centre and on the south mountain a wildlife reserve and winter sport centre with a panoramic view of the town. Similarly, there is also some correlation between the official pictures and the places our informants "liked best", yet it is the differences that are worth analysing further.

The most striking difference is that the official pictures represent a reality in which there are no boundaries – the sun is shining, and the chance of a happy, peaceful, and active life is open to everyone visiting or living in the town. When looking more closely at the descriptions of attractions in the town centre, it is clear that while both the official tourist profile and our participants refer to the main square and its immediate surroundings, they describe different activities. While our participants stress the opportunity to see people walking by and enjoying the parks, the official tourist profile highlights shopping and having a cup of coffee in one of the many coffee shops. One reason for this is, of course, the desire from town officials to attract visitors who spend money and in that way increase tax incomes. The boundaries in the town, not only the ones between 'immigrants' and 'Swedes', are therefore not consolidated to issues of ethnicity alone. Issues of class need also to be taken into consideration in the production and maintenance of hidden boundaries in Sundsvall.

In summary, we draw the conclusion that the posters created by the participants are very similar to the official presentation of the town. Many of the participants' own lived spaces are absent and no counter hegemonic discourse is visible. It is clear that the position constructed for the participants, both by themselves and the town officials are positions either on the margins of, or completely absent in relation to the conceived space of the town. This, once again, indicates the absence of our participants in hegemonic discourses of the town.

Perceived Space

Thus far we have shown that the SFI environment is of great importance for the social integration of our participants; a place of friendship and safety. This shows that the places where native Swedes are absent are also, and at the same time, places where the recently arrived migrant women in our study, live their lives, feel safe and experience moments of (ethnic) inclusion. The places portrayed in the posters, on the other hand, are portrayed by our participants as 'impersonal' since

inclusive, they are all places where interactions with strangers are kept to a minimum – where people may be present at the same time but do not engage with one another. It is therefore likely that the interpersonal contacts between our participants and the Swedish majority population are kept to a minimum. Therefore, our participants can go relatively unnoticed (see also Giritli-Nygren & Schmauch 2012).

This raises questions about what places are available for appropriation as *homeplaces* by migrant women. Looking closer at the intersections between lived and conceived spaces by marking out the places on a map of Sundsvall, it is striking that large areas of the town are blank. Apart from industrial areas, they mainly consist of residential areas for middle- to upper-middle-class families. Our interpretation of this is that officials are keener on advertising the parts of the town that are easily accessible for tourists. Although some participants did take pictures in suburban areas these are located in other, less affluent, parts of the town. Unfortunately we do not know if our participants have visited these areas or not, and if having done so, what their impressions might have been. The fact that our participants chose not to include them among their safe and happy places is however an indication that they are not included in the social relationships located there. These residential areas are also relatively homogeneously ethnically Swedish areas. As several scholars have shown (e.g. Fahlgren et al. 2011, Pulido 2000, Nash 2003) a central part of the maintaining of ethnic/racial privilege is being perceived as “normal” and/or “unmarked”. The hidden boundaries that make them inaccessible for appropriation allow them to be maintained as exclusive, in the double sense of the word. It is once again clear that the racialisation of space is not only linked to issues of ethnic belonging but also to how racialised relations of power are maintained through its intersections with class and gender relations, among others.

Conclusion

In this article we have explored the hidden boundaries in the town of Sundsvall from the perspective of recently arrived migrant women. We found that the participants in our study are to a large degree segregated from large parts of the town. The places where the participants feel safe and happy are often in segregated residential areas with a high percentage of residents of foreign background or the SFI school setting where the teachers are the only ones of Swedish origin. Other places that are often mentioned are places where social interaction is at a minimum. In other words, they are places where their migrant background is either highly visible but not linked to experiences of subordination or places where it is possible to be relatively anonymous and therefore left alone (Bijoux & Myers 2006). We have argued throughout this article that this does not mean that our participants do not have access to *homeplaces*. These are located in settings where few ethnic Swedes are present. This is of course not a problem in itself, as people should be free to choose whom they want to spend their daily lives with. Yet this tends to reproduce the racialisation of the town and our participants' marginalised position

in it. Ethnic hegemony, although not strong within the narrow limits of the *homeplaces* themselves, tends to be reproduced through the mere fact that these *homeplaces* are excluded from positions where ethnic hegemony can be questioned and destabilised.

Our participants and the official tourist information alike present an image of a town in which ethnic minorities are nonexistent. Many of the towns' functions take place in places that our participants do not have access to. Frequently, the segregated residential areas and the SFI setting are portrayed as dull and fundamentally problematic (Tedros 2008). The pictures taken by our participants show that these are *homeplaces* and instead ethnically heterogeneous and experienced as inclusive in many ways (see R athzel 2007, 2008).

Using hooks' (1984) concept of *homeplaces*, we argue that one reason why this is possible is the relative absence of an ethnically hegemonic position, since those normally occupying the hegemonic position are absent, or at least relatively few. This makes it possible for our participants to be 'subjects' themselves and not (only) be defined by their position as 'immigrants'. Of course, this is not to suggest that their *homeplaces* are free from power or unrelated to the spaces surrounding them. Rather, it means that the mere multitude of ethnicities, religions, and personal narratives make hegemonic positions difficult to maintain. Further, it is worth noting the gendered nature of the *homeplaces* described here, i.e. although men did attend the classes and did take pictures of their favourite places, they do not seem to be part of the close personal relationships the women portrayed, either at home or in the school setting.

Also, describing segregated areas as *homeplaces* is not to suggest that exclusion automatically leads to political mobilisation against ethnic hegemony. Far from it. Although the social relationships of the *homeplace* give our participants a refuge from social exclusion, there is an inherent risk that the exclusion from large parts of society tends to maintain ethnic hegemony and privilege as the excluded groups have little say in the production of space. By using the three dimensions of the production of space presented by Lefebvre and others we have argued throughout this paper that a distance is constructed between the participants in our study and the Swedish majority population. This was clear in our analysis of perceived space as well as conceived and lived space showing that everyday life is intimately connected to official discourses, individual understanding of one's surroundings and the more general structures of society. Although these dimensions tend to be analysed separately looking at the relations between these dimensions of space and of different spaces in the city presents a more complex picture.

To say that a distance is constructed is however not to be interpreted as an absence of social relations between the different places altogether. While everyday relations on an individual level might be kept to a minimum, the segregated *homeplaces* of our participants are very much related to other places in the town of

Sundsvall as processes of racialisation are linked to inclusion as well as exclusion (Fahlgren et al. 2011). A question for future research would therefore be to look closer at the ethnic relations present in those places where dominant groups live their lives; places the participants of this study have not chosen to portray. This should not be seen as important in relation to the lives of migrants exclusively, but also in relation to wider processes of racialisation of life in Sundsvall, Sweden and beyond. In our walk from the marginalised position of recently arrived migrant women to the town centre, we have acquired a deeper understanding of the evasive nature of hegemony. We have also, and maybe more crucially, gained a deeper understanding of the implications this has for the boundaries in the spaces of everyday life. Such an understanding is crucial to destabilisation taken for granted or normalized conceptualizations about boundaries and everyday life.

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