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Children's Reproduction of Power Relations in the City

Cities, due to unprecedented migration, are undergoing major changes in population demographics. The settlement of immigrants in particular urban regions is affecting the history and identity of these places. As Doreen Massey (1994) argues, place identity is the product of social interactions. The significance and meaning of a place therefore vary depending on the specific expressions of the social relations that exist there. An interesting aspect of place identity is how changed population structures affect relations between people in a particular place in connection with the balance of power. As Lisa Hanley et al. (2008) point out, power relations shift and crack as divided cities reconstitute themselves under the pressure of newly arriving migrants demanding places in them. A relevant issue in this context is how city residents react to these changes. In this paper the children as residents are focused. The starting point is a small city in southern Sweden. It is a city that, in recent decades, has seen radical social changes in population structure due to substantial immigration. The demographic change has created a heterogeneous and complex social situation and in relation to this there is a strong and dominant narrative about 'us' and 'them', relating to the categories 'Swedes' and 'immigrants'. Both children and adults in the city are coming in contact with the narrative, and the aim of the paper is to explore how children act and reflect upon it.

Theoretical framework

The analysis is inspired by the sociologist Norbert Elias's (1987–1990) figurational sociology and the childhood sociology perspective on children. From a childhood sociology perspective, childhood is a time of participation in social life and involvement in creating norms and values. This perspective includes a view of children as actors with a capacity to shape and actively influence their own and surrounding lives (James and Prout, 1990; Qvortrup, 1994; Lee, 2005; Corsaro, 2005). Children are seen as agents who actively construct their social place (Corsaro, 2005). However, as Jens Qvortrup (1999) points out, children are also formed by the social context of which they are part. Childhood and children's everyday lives are embedded in social structures that include categories such as social class, gender, and age group, so the arrangements of these categories and changes in them affect

children and their lives. The lives of children, and of adults, are embedded in structures or, as Elias (1978, 1994, 2009) would call them, figurations.

According to Elias (2009), human beings exist only in figurations, such as families, social classes, ethnic groups, and nations, that consist of particular forms, have structural peculiarities, and represent orders of particular types. Elias (1978) argues that people cannot be thought of as single and alone, but rather as interdependent and interwoven into a network of people. For Elias, the concept of figuration replaces that of structure: figurations are structures that can only be understood as constituted by acting human beings (van Krieken, 1998). Elias uses the analogy of dance to illustrate the figuration concept. No one can image a dance as a structure existing outside people. Dances can be danced by various people, but the frame of the dance cannot easily be changed. Figurations, like dances, are thus relatively independent of the specific individuals forming them, but not of individuals as such (van Krieken, 1998). Elias maintains that socialization, that is, children's acquisition of the adult standards of behaviour and feelings prevalent in their society, is central to maintaining existing figurations (Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998). As children grow into human figurations, they learn the existing patterns of self-regulation and the specific symbol worlds within them (Elias, 2009). From this perspective socialization is a process through which children learn to conform to social norms and to contribute to the maintenance of the existing figurations. Children are 'seen as something apart from society that must be shaped and guided by external forces in order to become a fully functioning member' (Corsaro, 2005:7). This is a deterministic way of defining socialization. According to Corsaro (2005) two different models of the socialization process have been proposed: a deterministic model and a constructivist model. In the first children play a passive role and are seen as 'novices' with the potential to contribute to the maintenance of society. Focus is on their social development and the internalization of adult skills and knowledge, while children in the latter are seen as active agents who actively construct their social world and place in it (Corsaro, 2005). In this paper the focus is on how children, together with their parents, share, reproduce and reflect upon the narrative of 'us' and 'them'. The focus is then on a constructivist model of socialization where children's negotiation, sharing and creation of culture with adults and each other is central (Corsaro, 2005; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). From this point of view figurations and the power relations within them can change due to children's involvement in the wider society.

All human figurations, according to Elias (1978), contain unevenly distributed power relations. His point of departure is the concept of function, understood as a concept of relationships. People or groups who have functions relative to each other (e.g. family members or residents of a city) form interdependent figurations in which they exert mutual constraints. Power is a relational concept, and as such it works reciprocally, binding the more and less powerful to each other (van Krieken, 1998),

as those who are less dependent have power in relation to the more dependent. Power is thus a structural characteristic of all human relationships and, in this respect, must be seen as giving rise to balance in which the powerful can withhold from others the things that they require (Elias, 1978). In this context, it is misleading to use the word 'power' as if it were a thing that people or groups carried about in their pockets. Power is not something that a person or group possesses, as power is often conceived (Elias, 1978; Kaspersen and Gabriel, 2008). On the contrary, power balances, as well as figurations, according to Elias, are not timeless states or conditions but dynamic and changeable due to the 'unplanned and unintended outcome of interweaving of intentional human actions' (van Krieken, 1998:49).

Data collection

The data of this paper is a part of a larger project that aimed to explore social relations in the city in focus. The fieldwork was conducted from May 2008 to June 2009, and the approach was ethnographic, as it involved long-term presence in the city, the use of several methods, and a reflexive attitude (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Interviews in the larger project were conducted with three major categories of residents identified as central actors for the social relations in the city: 1) people who came to the city in the 1980s and afterwards as refugees or as subsequently immigrating relatives of such refugees; 2) people from other countries who came to the city between the 1950s and the 1970s to work (labour migrants); and 3) people of Swedish background. A total of 38 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 56 people. The interviews were conducted with different arrangements of interviewees, for example, single people, couples, and parents with children, mostly in the interviewees' homes. The interview questions focused on the interviewees' own experiences of everyday life in the city, positive and negative aspects of life in the city, and relationships with other city residents. Results of the study have been previously reported (Harju, 2011, Harju forthcoming).

The results of this paper are based on interviews with parents and their children, and includes five occasions when six children aged eleven to sixteen (three boys and three girls) were interviewed with their parents. Two of the families belonged to category 1 above and three families to category 3. All of them lived in highly segregated areas; the former in an ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged neighborhood, and the latter in homogeneous, white ('Swedish'), affluent neighborhoods. The former families lived in rented apartments and the latter in owner-occupied houses or condominiums. The parents in all five families were working.

One reflection on the approach is that it in interviews with adults and children always is a risk that parents dominate the content of the conversation. It was therefore important to ensure that the participating children felt comfortable in offering their view of the social relations in the city. As

interviewer I deliberately turned to the children who showed that they both agreed and disagreed with their parents. However, the results do not reveal the participants individual opinions, on the contrary, they are a result of the interaction between children, parents and the interviewer.

Results

The city in focus is located in southern Sweden, and it had during the time of the fieldwork approximately 40,000 inhabitants. Previous studies indicate that the city, formerly having locally and nationally prominent manufacturing and a shipyard, has steadily declined in economic importance since the mid-1970s, leading to high unemployment and considerable population losses (Johansson, 2011; Scarpa, 2011). Today the city, which is located in the economically dynamic Öresund region, has not benefited from its location to the same extent as have other cities in the region. On the contrary, it has higher-than-average unemployment and higher social assistance reciepience than elsewhere in the region (Scarpa, 2011), while inequality in household economic and living conditions has increased (Salonen, 2011). During its period of economic expansion, 1950–1970, the city attracted labour immigrants, mostly from Finland and southern Europe. Since the 1980s it has experienced new population gains by receiving refugees and by attracting internal migration flows of foreign-born citizens (Johansson, 2011; Scarpa, 2011). People of foreign background accounted year 2009 for approximately 30 % of the population (SCB 2011). The demographic change has created a heterogeneous and complex social situation with physical and mental residential divisions as one outcome (Salonen 2011). The mental division between citizens has in recent years largely been based on a dominant narrative related to the categories ‘Swedes’ and ‘immigrants’, the latter being given ‘problematic’ attributes (Wiklund, 2005; Burcar and Wästerfors, 2007, Harju, 2011; Johansson, 2011; Viscovi, 2011). It is in this context that children and their parents were reasoning about social relations and their life in the city.

Children as reproducers

When asked about their life in the city, feelings of insecurity, largely related to the category ‘immigrants’, was expressed by both parents and children. The insecurity was closely associates with young male immigrants. Perceived behavioural factors such as involvement in violence and criminality were often, regardless of the family’s background, cited when the category was described, as was bad behaviour such as rowdiness and loudness. In an interview with a mother, Liri, originally from Kosovo and her two daughters, Flora (aged twelve) and Marsela (aged sixteen), the daughters over and over again mentioned the bad behavior of young male immigrant. They talked about ‘gangs’ that treat people badly. When asked more precisely about the ‘gangs’, one of the daughters, Marsela, referred to immigrant boys who from her point of view are threatening girls bad by screaming, hitting and raping them. Her mother and sister agreed and they added:

Flora: I barely go outside, it happens a lot of things here and it is dangerous to go out here. They, really, almost shoot you. Then you hear cars and they shoot people here too, so you are afraid

Mother: Every day in the newspaper something happens, every day I come with the newspaper and tell 'see what happens, do not go at night, please'.

The family lived in a city center neighbourhood which in the local narrative was described as dilapidated and dangerous; for example, it was singled out in the police's citizen survey (2010) as being perceived as the least safe place in the city, due to the fear of being attacked or robbed. It was also a neighbourhood with low employment, high social assistance recipients, and many residents who are newcomer immigrants. The both daughters were very clear with that they wanted to move out from there. Feelings of insecurity, connected to this specific neighbourhood and the category of 'immigrants', was also expressed by parents and children living in an affluent, white ('Swedish') neighborhoods. In an interview with a couple and their daughter, the mother, Monika, explained the reason for the feelings of insecurity that many residents express:

Monika: Because I think that the problem, the fact that many people feel insecure, has to do with immigrants.

Interviewer: Is there a connection?

Monika: Yes, I think so, and the statistics show that a lot of the crimes committed are connected to the fact that there are far more immigrants here perhaps than there have been, than what you find in other cities of the same size.

What Monika is referring to is a dominant narrative of 'immigrants', which was repeated over and over again in the city. Behavioural factors such as violence, bad behaviour and criminality were used when the group was described. It was especially the young boys from newcomer families who were assumed to be criminals and make the city unsafe (see also Wiklund 2005, Burcar and Wästerfors 2007, Viscovi 2011). Monikas daughter, Lena (aged sixteen), also referred to young boys when explaining why people in her generation do not interact so much with 'immigrants':

Now anyway, it's like oh everyone is like so tired of them ['immigrants']. They just screw up and love to mess with you and beat you, and especially the guys usually say fucking whore and so. They have no respect for girls.

The reason according to Lena is that the 'immigrant' boys can't behave, and this is why there is minimal interaction with them and others defined to belong to the category 'immigrants'. Her mother asked her whether 'Swedish' boys behave in the same way, and Lena's answer was that they treat girls better. She gave an example from school:

No, it's not like Dino that was in my class, like you just walked past and he said 'fucking whore'. At least not the ones [swedes] that was in my last class. They [immigrants] do it without a reason. It may well be that you had a fight, but then with some Swedish guy maybe then they say those words, but not that they're saying that without it happened something.

For Lena there is a difference in why the boys use bad words; the 'Swedes' has a reason for it while the 'immigrants' do it for no reason. Her statement could be interpreted as a way of differentiating between the two categories; a differentiation where 'Swedes' are good and 'immigrants' are bad. Marsela and Flora, the sisters in the family above, did this differentiation when asked about the relationship between 'Swedes' and 'immigrants' in the city:

Marsela: That's how it is, swedes going by themselves and immigrants going by themselves, that's how it is.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Marsela: They [Swedes] are afraid of immigrants, they [immigrants] don't want to be with swedes. They [immigrants] are cocky against them [Swedes].

Flora: There is nothing wrong with Swedes.

Marsela: I know, that's what I am saying.

Flora: It is better to be with Swedes.

Interviewer: Why is it better to be with them?

Marsela: They behave better.

Flora: You learn better Swedish.

As illustrated in the quotation, there are, from the sister's point of view, various reasons to why it is better to socialize with 'Swedes'. One reason is that they behave better than 'immigrants'. Again then behavioral factors were pinpointed and used to differentiate. The same differentiation was done by parents. Floras and Marselas mother, for example, explained that she preferred that her daughters socialized with 'Swedes':

Mother: But boyfriends, I've said it many times, go with Swedes.

Marsela: I'm allowed to go out with Swedes but not Albanians, and what's wrong with Arabs?

Liri: I don't think Arabs are good. I'm a Muslim, but it's not the same thing as them. Arabs are totally different. /.../. I was really sad, I thought you went with Arabs and listened to them.

The family, which is originally from Kosovo, came to live in Sweden and the city in the early 1990s. The mother was in effect telling her daughter that having Swedish male friends is better, and in explaining why she preferred 'Swedes', she implied that they are better people. The mother was thus referring to the ambient negative beliefs about the category to which she is defined as belonging. In doing so, she was effectively accepting the status and characteristics attributed to the category and at the same time reproducing them.

While the category 'immigrants' were given characteristics and positions as trouble makers, the 'Swedes' were pointed out as the victims of their actions. In the quotation above, for example, with the sisters Marsela and Liri, they were reasoning about how badly 'immigrants' treat 'Swedes' and how 'Swedes' are afraid of 'immigrants'. The same kind of reasoning emerged in an interview with a twelve year old boy Marcus and his parents, Carl and Anna. The family lived in an affluent, white ('Swedish') neighborhood. When asking whether the family socializes with persons with immigrant background they claimed that they do not. The conversation then continued on about Marcus school and that there were few children with immigrant background. Marcus mentioned a boy in his cousin's class and explained that no one wants to fight with him. This because he will go for his older brothers and his friends. When asked if the boy has threatened to do that, Marcus answered:

Marcus: No, he does not threaten, but yes once he threatened that he would call on his brothers and cousins and friends, and with knives and stuff. Then I heard from one of my buddies, that another one that he knows, a buddy's buddy, he went for one of those immigrant guys because he had bothered him, and so a few days after that, his family or cousins came with knives and threatened him.

Mother: Yes it is terrible when you hear that they threaten with the family. /.../. It's probably because I have children, it doesn't feel safe.

To refer to things heard of, just as Marcus and his mother did, was common for participating parents and children when reasoning about feelings of insecurity and fear. The logic was that it is the 'immigrants' who are threatening the 'Swedes' and by that it is the 'Swedes' who are the victims. However, the narrative of 'Swedes' versus 'immigrants' can be interpreted differently through the

lens of Elias's concept on figurations and their power relations. As Elias (1978, 1994) argues, figurations profoundly influence members of their constituent groups, because personal identity is closely connected to the 'we' and 'they' relationship in a figuration and to the positions associated with them. The narrative can thus be interpreted as a figuration with a specific power balance where the persons defined as belonging to the category of 'immigrants', who are defined as 'them', are given a weaker power position in through the characteristics they are given. As Elias (1994) argues, it is the power to define the conditions of inclusion and exclusion that matters. The groups in control of the narrative have the power to define who the 'they' are and, accordingly, all other positions in the figuration. From this point of view it becomes relevant to take another look at who is a victim of whom.

One way of controlling the power balance and the positions is to socialize children into it. According to Elias, socialization is central to maintaining social positions in figurations (Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998; Elias, 2009). In his and Scotsons (1965) study of established and outsider relations, they themselves found that the social position of neighbourhood residents extended from the parents to their children, which affected the children's self-image and self-respect. This figuration also maintained the same social division among the younger residents as among the older generations. This is what Corsaro (2005) would call a deterministic view on socialization, that is, children seen as "novices" and in need to be shaped and guided to become fully functioning members of society and its figurations. Another perspective on socialization is the constructivist model, where children are seen as active agent who actively constructs her social place and her place in it (James and Prout, 1990; Qvortrup, 1994; Corsaro, 2005).

Children as agents

As has been mentioned it could be argued that the participating children are socialized into the figuration of the narrative. Figurations are however, as Elias (1978; 2009) argues, not static but dynamic and changeable due to the unpredictability of human actions. Likewise, socialization is not only a process whereby children learn to conform to social norms, but also a process whereby they create and influence their own and others' lives (James et al., 1998; Qvortrup, 1999; Lee, 2005; Corsaro, 2005). This implies that children are not only constrained by existing social structures but also agents in relation to them, which can affect the power balances in figurations.

The transmission of a figuration from one generation to another, on the one hand, and the changeability of figurations, on the other, is interesting to ponder in relation to the participating children's reflections on the dominant narrative regarding 'Swedes' versus 'immigrants'. The children were to some extent aware of that it is a narrative (and not the 'truth'), and they reflected on its

consequences. Marcus for example reflected on what Elias (1994) calls group disgrace, that is, that the narrative is based on the categories 'worst' members:

Marcus: Even if they're nice, even if I see a nice immigrant, I think about that [i.e. fighting].

Mother: So they give each other bad reputations.

Marcus: If I know someone – one or two guys, say, or maybe three, and we're just acquaintances, and I know they're nice people – when I look at them I'm thinking about fighting and stuff like that.

Marcus was aware of that he sees boys who are defined as belonging to the category 'immigrants' as potential troublemakers even though he knows that they are good people. At the same time, he was aware of his and others' prejudice towards people defined as belonging to the 'immigrant' category and what it does to him and them. Other participating children had similar reflections. In the interview with Lena and her parents, Lena reflected on the consequences of prejudices against 'immigrants':

Lena: That makes it harder for such a person to be accepted. They have to make an utterly fantastic impression for me to be able to accept them, for them to be accepted. So it's much harder for that person to be accepted.

Interviewer: And you think such prejudicial attitudes exist here?

Lena: Well most of my buddies are, you know, hesitant about immigrants.

Lena knew that her friends were hesitant to interact with 'immigrants'; at the same time, she reflected on the consequences of that hesitancy. She was aware that the prejudices can lead to exclusion at an individual level. Lena, and other participating children, was also aware of that the characteristics given to the category 'immigrants' do not concern everyone with immigrant background. During the interview it became clear that Lena had friends with immigrant background, and that she made a difference between persons in the group. She realized that her friends did not have the common attributes given to the category of 'immigrants'. When asked about her friends she, for example, said, "yes, but I have known Mila for ten years". By that Lena meant that she knew that Mila is not like 'them'. On the one hand Lena was talking about the category 'immigrants' as the troublemakers, on the other, she was differentiating within the category when talking about her friends. Her friends and their parents were identified as more alike Lena and her own family, for example her friend Mariam:

Yes, but she has no contact with them [immigrants]. Mariam is a little bit Swedish and her family too. Her family is so tired of all the immigrants who mess up, because they know that it is the immigrants who cause trouble. They're very tired of it, they get the shit for it, just because we [Swedes] will have prejudices even if they haven't done anything.

Lena is pointing out that her friend Mariam and her family are aware of the prejudices against 'immigrants' and the characteristics and position attributed to people defined as belonging to the category. Previous studies also demonstrate that adults and children defined as belonging to the 'immigrant' category are aware of the characteristics and position attributed to them (Elias and Scotson, 1965/1994; Gustafsson, 2006; van der Burght, 2006; Reay, 2007; Waquant 2007, Harju, 2011, 2013; Gilliam, 2013). This applied also to participating children and their parents. In an interview with Mohammad (aged 12) and his mother, Jasna, it was clear that Mohammed, whose family is originally from Bosnia, understood what the narrative says about him and his family. He was saying things like: 'they [Swedes] think that everyone is bad' and 'they don't give others a chance', and then he continued:

So they might see ten immigrants beat their children, yes ten times they have seen various immigrants beat their children, so when parents see me they might not dare to give me a chance and they do not want it for their own children. I mean all mothers and fathers are doing what they think is best for their children.

In the conversation his mother tried to tell her son that they [the 'Swedes'] can make a difference between good and bad immigrants by how people behave, that is, if you behave well then you will not be seen as a troublemaker. Mohammed himself thought that if he behaved well and spoke perfect Swedish, he would be identified as a Swede and as a respectable person:

Obviously, no doubt Swedish people think, when they don't know that I'm a nice person, they think I'm not nice. But then perhaps when they see that I behave well, sometimes they ask where I'm from and so on, then when they hear my pronunciation they think I'm a Swede.

Mohammed was taking responsibility for himself and for the category to which he is identified as belonging. (Agents who reflects and acts). Other studies also demonstrate that children in singled-out categories living in singled-out neighbourhoods take responsibility for improving their reputation.

In a study of children's geographies in segregated urban environments, van der Burght (2006), for example, found that children from stigmatized neighbourhoods took responsibility by behaving well.

Discussion

This paper has sought to understand complex and heterogeneous social relations in a city that has undergone major social changes in recent decades. It has focused on children's reproduction of and agency in relation to power balances by means of a dominant narrative figuration of 'us' versus 'them' related to the categories of 'Swedes' and 'immigrants'. Elias's figuration concept as well as childhood sociologies perspective has inspired the analysis.

For Elias (2000), childhood is the main 'transmission belt' for the development of the habitus characterizing any given society: human beings do not come into the world civilized, the individual civilizing process being a function of the social civilizing process. Socialization, according to Elias, is central to the civilizing process, as children acquire the adult standards of behaviour and feelings prevalent in their society (Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998). The studied children's lives are affected by the dominant narrative, which they use to position themselves in relation to others. The children are thus embedded in social structures that affect them and their lives. Elias's reasoning regarding children's role can be interpreted as supporting a deterministic model of socialization. As Corsaro (2005) argues, in a deterministic model, children play a passive role and are seen as a 'novices' with the potential to contribute to maintaining society. However, as has been showed the participating children are also a part of the production and reproduction of the narrative and its power relations, at the same time as they reflect and act upon it. This implies that children are not only constrained by existing social structures but also agents in relation to them, which in turn can result in changes of perceptions and thus in positions in the residential figuration. Elias argues that figurations can change in the course of unpredictable human actions (Elias, 1978, 2000), meaning that earlier figurations do not necessarily change into later ones (van Krieken, 1998). Based on Elias's reasoning and the present results, it could be argued that children play a crucial role both as reproducers and changers of residential figurations. For this reason, they are an important target group in discussions of power in today's complex and heterogeneous social relations in cities.

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