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Los Angeles

Reviving Social Democratic Solidarity in Precarious Times: Community, Care, and the Politics of Well-being in Swedish Popular Adult Education

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

by

Carolyn Rebecca Merritt

2020

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Reviving Social Democratic Solidarity in Precarious Times:

Community, Care, and the Politics of Well-being

in Swedish Folk High Schools

by

Carolyn Rebecca Merritt

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Linda C. Garro, Chair

Amid twin processes of large-scale refugee resettlement and rapidly growing far-right xenophobia, rhetoric of “democracy in crisis” has taken hold in Europe. Even in Sweden, which has long been held up as a moral bastion of solidarity and asylum, the extreme right anti-immigrant Sweden Democrat Party has surged in popularity and power. This reflects in part how, in an era that has ushered in Trump and other far-right nationalist leaders, far-right discourse has come to offer a mainstream vocabulary for articulating frustration with the damaging effects of ongoing neoliberal reforms; In Sweden, decades of such policies have increased socioeconomic divisions and weakened social protections, leading to widespread feelings of social isolation and vulnerability. This dissertation examines how the Swedish welfare state is responding to these interlinked forms of social fragmentation – increasing mental ill-health, waning civic engagement, a need for migrant and refugee inclusion, and the rise of the far-right – by investing in projects of social care at the country’s 150 “folk high

schools" for adults. Drawing on 11 months of ethnographic fieldwork in a Swedish folk high school in 2016-18, I argue that these schools are using a local, social democratic framework of care and well-being as a tool to intervene in ongoing debates about who should be included in Sweden's "imagined national welfare community."

Swedish folk high schools provide an arena for attempting to (re)kindle collective solidarity and participation by bringing a range of marginalized and disaffected Swedes and newly arrived Syrian migrants together in community-based high-school completion courses. In folk high school classrooms, largely white, middle-aged teachers, who grew up at the height of postwar social democracy, negotiate social democratic "pedagogies of care" with their diverse young adult students, who have come of age in a very different historical present. The aim of these caring pedagogies, which emphasize face-to-face encounter across difference, is to get differently positioned students to recognize and care for one another, fostering experiences of well-being that are tied to emotional investments in a social democratic politics of universal inclusion. In spite or because of their cultural rootedness in a social democratic past, however, these projects of care and well-being do not always produce their intended consequences. Practices of care, while significant and needed, may not be a viable match for the larger structural forces driving rising political apathy and antipathy in the current global moment. Further, subtle dynamics that shape how care and wellness projects materialize in interaction may inadvertently reinscribe the very notion of racialized differentiation in imagined national belonging that they are meant to contest. In the tradition of psychological and medical anthropology, this research contributes to anthropological scholarship that casts care as a linchpin between intimate relations and larger socio-political structures, and extends this literature by illuminating the promise as well as the peril of using care as a political intervention in an era of advanced capitalism and accelerating polarization.

The dissertation of Carolyn Rebecca Merritt is approved.

Douglas Hollan

Keith Murphy

C. Jason Throop

Linda C. Garro, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

For my grandparents

Contents

Abstract of the dissertation *iii*

Dedication *v*

List of figures *vii*

List of people *viii*

Acknowledgments *xi*

Vita *xiv*

1 Introduction: The stakes of care and well-being at Sweden's "second chance schools" in precarious times 1

2 "1+1=3": Pursuing social (democratic) emplacement through a "pedagogy of care" 35

3 Was "one person's gain…always for the good of the whole collective"?: Social immersion as a rocky road to realizing mental health 73

4 "Getting people to care": Efforts to revive civic participation through mutual recognition 118

5 "Being seen" through colorblind lenses: Refugee participants' ambivalent experiences of social emplacement 176

6 Whose recognition?: Caring for and against the far-right 227

7 Conclusion: "Epidemics of well-being" 272

Bibliography 281

List of figures

Figure 1, A dorm kitchen 20

Figure 2, Dorm fika 20

Figure 3, A dorm living room 21

Figure 4, Responsible waste 21

Figure 5, The library 21

Figure 6, Student art 21

Figure 7, Winter view 22

Figure 8, Oak tree 22

Figure 9, A forest path 23

Figure 10, "Pinnebröd" 23

Figure 11, Chanterelles 23

Figure 12, The "Hug Heart" 24

Figure 13, "Johari Fönster" 63

Figure 14, "Like a hospital" 106

Figure 15, Heart offering 239

Figure 16, Elsa's postcards 250

List of people

National-level administrators

Astrid: An administrator at the National Folk Education Council

Birgit: A former folk high school teacher who transitioned to working with folk education at the Popular Movement Folk High Schools' Interest Organization

Sigge: An administrator at the National Folk Education Council

Vidar: An administrator at the Popular Movement Folk High Schools' Interest Organization

Oak Bay staff

Åsa: A friendly, short-statured woman who has taught high-school completion courses at Oak Bay for over a decade

Elsa: A warm, intuitive teacher with salt and pepper hair, sharp blue eyes and a rotation of large, colorful sweaters; having taught high-school completion courses at Oak Bay for many years, in 2017-18 she was one of the three main course teachers for "Being Human" course

Erik: A high energy teacher with a contagious zest for life who has white hair and a white beard and who grew up near Oak Harbor; Having taught in Oak Bay special courses and high-school completion courses for several years, in 2017-18 he was one of the three main course teachers for "Being Human" course

Hans: A teacher with white hair, bright blue eyes, abundant energy, and good-natured goofiness who grew up near Oak Harbor; Having taught in special courses at Oak Bay for many years, in 2017-18 he was one of the three main course teachers for "Being Human" course

Johanna: One of the school principals, a new mother recently back from maternity leave who had an easygoing, engaging presence

Karin: A direct and funny teacher who has taught in Oak Bay's high-school completion courses for many years

Lars: A friendly, down-to-earth Oak Bay administrator who wore earth tones

Jörgen: The chair of the Oak Bay school board, a warm, energetic man in his 60s

Marta: A teacher who also served as the "health inspirer" (*hälsoinspiratör*) on the student support team (*stödteamet)*

Per: A long-time and well-loved Oak Bay teacher whose unhurried manner put students at ease

Rikard: A friendly and lanky administrator who always welcomed students into his office

Ulla: The school counselor, a white Swedish woman in her forties who had long brown hair,

kind eyes, and a patient demeanor

Ulrika: A warm and reflective language teacher with piercing blue eyes and a collection of beautiful hand-knit scarves

Oak Bay high-school completion course students

Abdul: A gregarious student in his early thirties who had arrived in Sweden from Syria the year before and had a gift for music but struggled to communicate as he was still beginning in Swedish; lived on campus

Aisha: A laid-back and friendly student from Syria in her early twenties who often sported pop band T-shirts as a fan of American culture and music; lived on campus

Alice: A student from Jönköping (central Sweden) in her mid-twenties who was in her third year in the high-school completion track at Oak Bay and who brought an artistic flair to everything she did; lived on campus

Ebba: A self-confident student in her early thirties with long braids, who grew up in rural northern Sweden and was at first skeptical that the folk high school would be too "hippyish"; lived off campus

Eleonora: A tall, graceful, and reflective student in her mid-twenties with a warm smile who grew up in Sweden and whose parents were from Bosnia; lived off campus

Elias: A sweet, shy student in his mid-twenties who struggled with self-esteem, who always wore a hat over his thick light brown hair and had grown up around the corner from Oak Bay on Sweden's east coast; lived off campus

Fahim: An intellectually curious, relatable, and well-liked student from Syria in his early twenties who found social conflict stressful and hoped to avoid clashes with his peers; lived on campus

Helena: A petite, pale student in her early thirties from central Sweden whose appearance contrasted with her fiery, passionate advocacy for social justice issues; lived off campus

Jakob: A student in his early twenties with tousled hair and a quick, mischievous smile, who often projected an air of relaxed calm despite his struggles with social anxiety; lived on campus

Julia: An energetic and spunky student in her mid-twenties with pink-streaked hair and a kind word for everyone, who struggled with the challenges of ADHD; lived off campus

Kaspar: A softspoken, gentle participant in his early twenties who was very attentive to those around him and struggled with depression; lived on campus

Kiki: One of the youngest students in the class, in her late teens, who seemed less sure of

herself; lived off campus

Leilah: A composed, self described “Type-B personality” Swedish Iraqi student in her mid-twenties whose neatly-pinned headscarves often coordinated with her outfits; lived off campus

Lidia: A warm, extroverted student in her mid-twenties studying visual arts at Oak Bay, who had completed her high-school requirements at Oak Bay the year before; lived on campus and was friends with many high-school completion students in the dorms

Lukas: A student in his mid-twenties from Stockholm who was quick-witted and often joking but also guarded and sometimes abrasive; lived on campus

Matteo: A student in his early twenties who had experienced familial trauma in his childhood that had deep and lasting impacts on his mental health and his ability to build trusting relationships; lived on campus

Max: An easygoing participant from southern Sweden in his mid-twenties with shaggy blond hair who walked everywhere listening to music in his headphones; lived off campus

Mira: A fashion-conscious, outspoken student in her early twenties who grew up in Sweden and whose family was Christian Lebanese; lived off campus

Nina: One of the youngest participants in the class, in her late teens, who held far left political views but rarely expressed them; lived on campus

Noor: A philosophical student from Syria in her early twenties who had her heart set on becoming an academic; lived off campus

Olivia: A shy student from northern Sweden in her late twenties who struck up an immediate close friendship with Ebba; lived off campus

Olle: A white, self-identifying conservative student in his mid-twenties with wavy blond hair and an eagle tattoo; lived off campus

Silvia: A student in her late twenties with long dyed black-and-purple hair who had had a traumatic early childhood in foster care and then a great deal of stress in the family and at school as she struggled with ADHD and anxiety and underwent teen pregnancy; lived on campus

Sofia: A student in her mid-twenties with bright red hair who was at once intuitive, serious and reflective as well as spontaneous and playful; lived off campus

Yussef: A kind and diligent student in his early twenties who was always punctual and sharply dressed, but also a lighthearted and playful class clown; lived off campus

Zahra: A bubbly and kind student in her early twenties who had fled to Sweden three years earlier from Syria with no one but her older brother; lived on campus

Acknowledgments

Arriving at this moment and completing this dissertation, which for the past seven years has felt just barely imaginable, has only become possible because of the support and encouragement of so many people in my life. All of my research mentors and interlocutors who have inspired me with their ideas and their unique lenses, teachers who have nurtured my love of learning and teaching, friends old and new who have provided restorative laughter, and my family, who have given me a safe harbor and taught me to venture out from it to engage the world with curiosity and compassion since long before this particular research journey started.

I give my deepest thanks to the administration, staff, teachers, and students who welcomed me into community life at the folk high school that I decided to call “Oak Bay.” Your friendship, trust, openness, kindness, reflectivity, humor, and generosity are the foundation of this research. In your company I felt *trygg* during my time in the field and got to experience for myself the sense of relational well-being that became so central in my analysis. I want to thank every single person from the bottom of my heart and in this short space give a special acknowledgment to “Elsa” and “Erik” who responded to my original email about this research with an enthusiasm and warmth that never waned. From my first visit to Sweden in 2015, your care, energy, and curiosity were absolutely vital in getting this dissertation research off the ground. To you both and to “Hans,” the privilege of seeing your unique, fully human ways of being with your students every day gave me so much to take with me into my own future work and life, long after I leave this dissertation behind. This study was also greatly enriched by the thoughtful and patient engagement of administrators and staff at the National Folk Education Council and the Popular Movement Folk High Schools’ Interest Organization, as well as teachers and students at other folk high schools all over Sweden that I visited as part of this research. Thank you all so much for allowing me to participate and observe as you went about your daily activities and for carving time out of your busy lives to share your perspectives with me on the larger meanings of the projects you were pursuing. Thank you for trusting me with translating

(literally and figuratively) what you communicated to me for this project.

I feel very fortunate to have connected with fellow scholars during my time in the field. The opportunity to talk with others examining folk education through the Mimer program for folk education research based at Linköping University was invaluable and also fun. Learning about the new projects you were immersed in and receiving your feedback on my developing research, at the conference in Gothenburg and Kungälv in November 2017 and at a research seminar in Linköping in May 2018, deepened my understanding of the field and greatly improved chapters 3 and 6 of this dissertation. Special thanks to Henrik Nordvall and Andreas Fejes for being such welcoming hosts during my visits to Linköping and to Sofia Österborg Wiklund for your suggestion that I engage with work on Swedish exceptionalism and critical whiteness studies in Sweden. Thank you also to the anthropologists at Gothenburg University, especially Maris Gillette and Staffan Appelgren, who provided yet another academic home away from home for me during my time in Sweden and also generously engaged with my developing work, helping me improve chapter 5 of this dissertation. Thank you to Brian Palmer at Uppsala University for meeting and talking with me about my work and inviting me to visit a retreat at Demokrati Akademin. I am so appreciative of the chance to engage with participants at that retreat, who deepened my understanding of popular approaches to building democracy through mutual care in Sweden and the challenges of building racially just forms of democratic inclusion in face-to-face encounter.

I am so grateful to my committee members who have all left deep imprints in my approach to ethnography and thinking. To my chair Linda Garro, whose first phone call with me as an applicant to graduate school put me immediately at ease. Thank you for your belief in my ability to do this, for your patience with my getting you drafts far too close to the deadline more often than I can count, and for thoughtfully engaging with my writing and sharing insightful comments, which I have always felt helped me articulate what I originally wanted to say, but much better. To Doug Hollan, who was willing to sponsor my application to UCLA without ever

having talked to me, and who I have enjoyed many conversations with since. Your steady mentorship has fueled my confidence in my own ideas and inspired me to explore new ways to think about the intersections of psychic and social life. To Jason Throop, your careful engagement with philosophy and the complete presence you bring to classes and meetings have been formative examples for me as a researcher, teacher, and person. To Keith Murphy, thank you for being such a patient sounding board and for taking time to share your perceptive feedback on my writing. Having your perspective on Sweden has been such a boon for my work. Reading the scholarship that all of you have produced has given me inspiring models for the kind of careful thinking and writing that I aspire to.

Thank you to my dear friends Sarah Kurz and Anna Ehrlich for being there through so much of life and for always checking in on how my writing was coming over the past two years; to the many amazing people I have met in graduate school who have helped me grow so much in this process and without whom making it through to the other side would not have been possible, including Kathryn Cai, Jananie Kalyanaraman, Claudia Huang, Yael Assor, Eva Melstrom, Alex Thompson, Gwyneth Talley, Addie Shrodes, and Abby Mack; to friends whose presence buoyed me so much in the field and who I am so glad to still keep in touch with afterward, Hanna Johansson, Eriko Ichio, and Allie Middleton; to Ama and Ampa, Grandma and Grandpa, Dad, Mom, Richard, and Jaime, who welcomed me into the world with care and who remain so present with your support and encouragement. It is no coincidence that so many of you are educators, and you have all helped me learn and be excited about teaching. To Jaden, thank you for your constant support, for helping me ask new questions and see so many dimensions of life in new ways – the best in this dissertation emerged through many conversations with you. It means so much to me that all of you have been there to celebrate the milestones in my life and most recently in writing, and to ponder the possibilities together for what comes next.

Carolyn Merritt
Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATION

PhD, Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles 2020

Graduate Certificate in Writing Pedagogy, UCLA Writing Programs 2019

MA, Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles 2015

BA, Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 2011
High distinction and honors

PUBLICATIONS

Book review for *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* of *Not Tonight: Migraine and the Politics of Gender and Health* by Joanna Kempner (Univ. Chicago Press, 2014) 3/2015

INVITED TALKS

Department of Pedagogy and Adult Learning, University of Linköping (Sweden): "Det handlar om mötet (It has to do with the encounter)" 5/2018

Department of Anthropology, University of Gothenburg (Sweden): "Projects of existential wellness, social care, and inclusive democracy at a Swedish folk high school" 3/2018

SELECTED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Paper: "How a Swedish folk high school shapes refugees' aspirations for social emplacement," Society for Psychological Anthropology, Santa Ana Pueblo, NM 4/2019

Paper: "Caring for and against the far right at a Swedish folk high school," American Anthropological Association, San Jose 11/2018

Paper: "Vad kan hända när vi är nära? (What can happen when we are present?)" Mimer doctoral symposium, Gothenburg, Sweden) 11/2017

Paper: "Education as 'social work': Social conceptions of care and wellness in Swedish folk education," Society for Psychological Anthropology, New Orleans 3/2017

Paper: "Self and social democracy: Promoting mental health in Swedish folk education," American Anthropological Association, Minneapolis 11/2016

CONFERENCES AND PANEL SESSIONS ORGANIZED

Co-organized panel, "Situated selves: Relating therapeutics, subjectivity, and sociality in context," American Anthropological Association meeting (Minneapolis) 11/2016

Co-organized conference, UC Los Angeles and UC San Diego Workshop on Culture, Mind, and Health (Los Angeles) 5/2016

UNIVERSITY AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Graduate Student coordinator, Mind, Medicine and Culture Interest Group, UCLA Department of Anthropology — 2018-19

Administrative Assistant, Society for Medical Anthropology — 2015-16

Secretary, Anthropology Graduate Students Association — 2014-15

Editorial Intern, *Cultural Anthropology* — 2012-13

SELECTED TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Sole Instructor

"The Social Life of Food Systems," First-year seminar — Sp 2019

"Worlds of Well-Being: Anthropological Perspectives on Health and Happiness," Seminar — W 2019

"Anthropology of Food," Lecture course — Su 2017, 2020

"Culture, Power, Gender," First-year seminar — Sp 2017

Teaching Fellow

Lemelson Anthropology Undergraduate Honors Program — F 2019 - Sp 2020

Dr. Jessica Collett, "Self and Society," UCLA Sociology — F 2018

Dr. Abigail Saguy (Sociology), Dr. Martie Haselton (Psychology), Dr. Eric Vilain (Genetics), Dr. Arthur Arnold (Biology), "Sex: From Biology to Gendered Society," Interdisciplinary Cluster, UCLA Undergraduate Education Initiatives — F 2017 - W 2018

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Dr. James Bassett, "Good Food for Everyone: Sustainability, Health, and Culture," UCLA Institute for the Environment and Sustainability — Sp 2016

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SELECTED AWARDS AND HONORS

Collegium of University Teaching Fellows, UCLA Graduate Division — 2019

UCLA Center for European & Russian Studies Dissertation Fellowship — 2017

UCLA International Institute Dissertation Fieldwork Fellowship — 2017

Society for Psychological Anthropology Lemelson Fellowship — 2016

UCLA Graduate Dean's Scholar Award — 2013-15

Dr. Ursula Mandel Scholarship, UCLA Graduate Division — 2013-14

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Anthropological Association — 2014 - pres.

Society for Medical Anthropology — 2014 - pres.

Society for Psychological Anthropology — 2015 - pres.

LANGUAGES

Swedish: Fluent (conversation, reading, writing)

Chapter 1: Introduction: The stakes of care and well-being at Sweden's "second chance schools" in precarious times

Chapter overview

This chapter introduces the overarching argument, methods, and setting of the dissertation research in Swedish folk high schools (*folkhögskolor*), a branch of Swedish popular adult education. It lays groundwork for the dissertation's examination of how folk high school teachers and their diverse structurally vulnerable young adult students negotiate projects of care, well-being and belonging in the "imagined national welfare community" in everyday classroom interactions amid large-scale social and political change.

Some immediate clarification is necessary given that folk high schools are most likely unfamiliar to most American readers. These schools are found across Scandinavia, but Sweden's loosely connected network of 155 folk high schools are unique in being funded both by popular movements and by the welfare state. Drawing on the German tradition of *bildung* (*bildning* in Swedish), or the holistic development of person and citizen through education, Swedish folk high schools provide tuition-free aesthetic, vocational, and high-school completion courses for adults in creative, caring, community-based settings with no tests or grades.

While "folk high school" is the most common English translation of the Swedish term *folkhögskola,* the connotation of a teenage student body from the English word "high school" is misleading given that only adults over the age of 18 can attend Swedish folk high schools, and the vast majority of students in high-school completion courses, which are the focus of this research, are between the ages of 20-30. While *högskola* literally means "high school" in English, in Swedish usage, *högskola* refers to "college"; thus, translating *folkhögskola* as "popular college" might more intuitively reflect for English-speaking audiences that Swedish folk high schools provide adult education. Further adding to the confusion, however, Swedish folk high schools provide both high-school level education, in GED-equivalent courses, and post-high school level education. While some have noted commonalities between Swedish folk

high schools and American community colleges, there is no analogous institution to Swedish folk high schools in the United States.

Throughout this chapter, I trace Swedish folk high schools' development and their role in reproducing Swedish national identity throughout their 150-year history, as well as illuminate the social conditions of increasing diversity and inequality, political polarization, and destabilized social democratic hegemony that characterize contemporary Sweden. Together with interviews with National Folk Education Council representatives, this literature review provides context for my overarching claim that the welfare state and many teachers see Swedish folk high schools as well-positioned to foster well-being, social cohesion, and national inclusion for today's structurally vulnerable young adult students through local practices of care. Photographs illustrate the primary research site in this study, which I call Oak Bay Folk High School, alongside a description of the study's secondary research sites and person-centered methods. Finally, I briefly review recent literature on care and well-being in anthropology to illuminate the dissertation's theoretical approach. This introduction ends with a summary of each of the dissertation chapters that will follow.

The social life of Swedish folk high schools: "You shove people together and then they have to…become solidary"

Soft late-winter light came slanting through the windows of the cozy, open kitchen in the middle of the National Folk Education Council (*Folkbildningsrådet*)[1] office as Astrid pulled three Ikea mugs out of the cupboard and poured coffee for herself, Sigge[2], and me. We were meeting for an interview about their work at the Council, which oversees and distributes state funding to 155 folk high schools throughout Sweden. Separate from but complementary to the formal school system, this popular education network has grown and evolved over 150 years, in

[1] In English-language publications, Folkbildningsrådet refers to itself as the National Council on Adult Education. However, since there are multiple types of adult education in Sweden, including municipal adult education (*kommunal vuxenutbildning,* often shortened to *komvux)* and at vocational colleges (*yrkeshögskolor*), and this council only oversees folk education, I use the literal translation for clarity.
[2] These and all personal names in the dissertation are pseudonyms to protect participant confidentiality.

response to changing societal needs of the day. Swedish folk high schools provide tuition-free adult education, supported by state and local governments as well as a wide variety of popular movements (*folkrörelser*) and social organizations. Often providing a residential component, they employ humanistic pedagogy in community-based settings, offering a wide array of aesthetic, vocational, and "general courses" (*allmänna kurser*). General courses provide adults who did not finish high school with a holistic, socially-focused way to earn a GED-equivalent. These high-school completion courses, and the participants who found themselves there for a variety of reasons, were the focus of my dissertation research.

As we talked, Astrid and Sigge described numerous changes in Swedish folk high schools' funding and student body in recent years, including expanded state subsidies to address increased numbers of students needing support for social functioning, learning disabilities, and mental health, as well as learning Swedish.

Talking about the different types of state grants (*statsbidrag*) that subsidize folk high school activities, Astrid told me, "there's something called *förstärkningsbidrag* (strengthening/reinforcing funding), for participants (*deltagare*)[3] who have some kind of functional disability (*funktionsnedsättning*). That can be anything from some kind of movement hindrance, or something mental or psychological, or dyslexia – all kinds of things (*alla möjliga saker*)...And there's been a clear increase in the last twenty years in neuropsychiatric problems, which grew from 6% in the beginning of the 2000s up til something like 20% now. So it's a *big* part of the groups that have diffuse problems and difficulties interacting with other students, which becomes noticeable (*märks*) in the classroom." She explained, "We have a [Social Democratic-led] government right now that - many [of their] election campaigns have had the

[3] Given that folk high schools provide education for adults, administrators and staff seek to avoid diminutizing their students, and thus prefer the term *deltagare* (in English, participant) rather than *elev* (in English, student), a Swedish term that in common speech refers to elementary, middle, and high school students. The Swedish word *student* refers to a college or university student, and thus is not used at the folk high school. I use "participant" and "student" interchangeably in English throughout the dissertation since in English "student" does not connote "non-adult."

slogan, '*Alla ska med*,' (Everyone should come along/be included). They want to make sure that even those with functional disabilities should be able to keep up (*hänga med*) in the *kunskapslyft*[4] (societal raising of the level of education), so they [the state] gives more money to us [to distribute to folk high schools]."

Sigge jumped in, "And from 2010 onward, the government has also…built up a rather large operation (*verksamhet)* in tandem with the Swedish public employment service (*arbetsförmedlingen)*, so that now we have SMF [*studiemotiverande folkhögskolekurser* (courses to motivate students to return to studying)], *etableringskurser för nyanlända* [(establishment courses for newly arrived migrants)], and then the folk high school has started to work with SFI [*svenska för invandrare* (Swedish for immigrants)]. These are about 15% of what folk high schools work with today, so it's become rather large, for something that in 2010 was zero.[5] From an economic standpoint, though, expanding into new activities requires a strong economic investment to be able to meet those participants."

Astrid added, "And the big problem is just that they are small entities. The largest folk high schools have about 250-300 students, while there are formal high schools (*gymnasie skolor*) with 2,000 students. So 'big' for a folk high school isn't so big. It's harder to do things if

---

[4] Astrid refers to the Swedish state and local governments move to raise the level of education in society through massive investments in adult education, including folk high school education, as a result of changes in the international labor market in the late 1990s. A publication of The Workers' Study Association (*Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund*), one of the major Swedish study associations, another branch of popular education, explains that "The first societal raising of the level of education (*Kunskapslyftet*) was the 1990s' major adult education reform. In the beginning of the 1990s…employees in the private sector had a low education level as compared with other OECD countries…More and more jobs required higher education. Unemployment in Sweden had reached levels that hadn't been seen since the 1903s [when the Social Democratic Party began building the welfare state]. Between 1997-2002 hundreds of thousands of new adult education openings (*vuxenutbildningsplatser*) were created, primarily for the unemployed" (Rutgersson 2016: 15-16; my translation from Swedish, sentence order rearranged).

[5] In his comment following Astrid's reference to the heightened investments in adult education of the 1990s, Sigge points to how at present, "The Swedish state (*Regeringen*) is [once again] prioritizing education for adults in a new raising of the level of education (*ett nytt kunskapslyft*). This deals with both more permanent education openings (*utbildningsplatser*) and provisions for higher quality – at colleges and universities, at vocational schools, at folk high schools and in municipal adult education (*den kommunala vuxenutbildningen (komvux)*). Investments being made in education in SFI (*svenska för invandrare)* [Swedish for immigrants] also count towards the [new] raising of the education level (*kunskapslyftet*)" (regeringen.se 2015, my translation from Swedish).

you have a smaller economic mass – you become more vulnerable if you're small."

Laughing, Sigge said, "But maybe we're getting off track – now we're just talking a lot about money!"

Astrid responded, "But I think it's a good foundation to know, because money isn't given in order to– it's given so that the participants will feel well (*det ges ju därför att deltagarna ska må bra*). That's the whole point. The state actually thinks in that way, I believe. It's a Social Democratic government that has some kind of foundational mission (*grunduppdrag*) to see to it that those who are worst off should get the most (*ska se till att de som har det värst ska få mest*). We get this money to give out to folk high schools, because there are participants out there who need it in order to feel well (*må bra*)."

"That's true," Sigge reflected. "People have understood that the folk high school has an ability to *save* people into further studies and into work (*folkhögskolan har en förmåga att* rädda *människor in i vidare studier och in i arbete*). And therefore one dares (*man vågar*) to give folk high schools an investment, because the folk high school succeeds in allowing many of these people who left high school in the past to go further anyway."

I asked whether they could elaborate on how contemporary political, economic, and social circumstances were relevant to their work on the Council, and for folk high schools generally in the 2017-18 school year. Astrid reflected, "What's influencing us - I'd like to say - that's something we're talking a bit about (*vi pratar en del om*). That's - there's a polarization process, politically (*en polarisering, politiskt*), in the whole world, à propos president Donald. There are people – the folk high school and folk education[6] in Sweden have, of course, an extreme *respect* (*har ju en oerhort* respekt), I'd like to say, from *many* parts of the population.

[6] Folk high schools are one branch of a two-pronged popular education system in Sweden meant to support democratic and cultural participation. The other branch is overseen by ten study associations (*studieförbund*) with ties to popular movements (*folkrörelser*) such as the workers' movement (*arbetarrörelsen*). They sponsor lectures, cultural events, and study circles, which are much smaller-scale and less institutionalized than folk high schools. Like folk high schools, study associations' popular education activities receive funding and support from both the state, via the National Folk Education Council, and popular organizations (folkbildningsradet.se 2018).

But then there's also a polarization. There's *one* party [the far-right Sweden Democrat Party] which actually wants to take away all of the [state] funding for folk education. Basically. Or at least convert folk high schools into their [party's] own idealistic spirit. And this polarization makes it so that it becomes more important what we [the Council] do with the money [state funding for folk high schools], and that we can show that we're doing the right things (*att vi kan visa att vi gör rätt saker)* with the money. So our job [of following up on how state funding is being used by folk high schools], one can say, has become more important...And we shouldn't do it for the state's sake. But rather we should do the job for the participants' sake. What's important is that it's the participants who feel well (*mår bra*), all the way down there at the bottom (*där längst ner*)...But I think that's influencing us."

I asked, "So now in a situation that's characterized by some political polarization, what do you believe is the right thing for folk high schools to do? What can folk high schools do, maybe to work against that?"

Astrid responded, "I think that we *are* a force working against it, in ourselves, actually (*vi* är *ett motarbete i oss själva, faktiskt*)."

Sigge agreed, "Yeah, I think we are."

Astrid explained, "Folk high schools and folk education have a democratic mission (*ett demokratiuppdrag*). Which is an antipole (*motpol*) to what we're seeing in 'alternative facts' and everything that that's going on. Trolls and anti– yeah, that's what it is, there's a kind of an *anti-democratic* movement (*en slags* anti-demokratisk *rörelse*), actually, that's what holds them all together, you could say. So in that way I think that we can– I think what you're experiencing[7], living in the dorms, that's a kind of counter-movement (*en slags motrörelse*). You shove people together and then they have to live together and become solidary with each other (*man föser ihop människor och sedan får de leva med varandra och bli solidariska med varandra*).

[7] Here, Astrid references my research methods, knowing that I was living as a participant-observer in a folk high school dormitory for the duration of the 2017-18 school year.

(laughs). In some way that's a counter-movement, I think. And maybe we should do more of that kind of thing. *How,* I don't know exactly how, but–"

Sigge interjected, "But they [folk high schools] are really good at that. I don't question (*ifrågasätta*) that at all."

Astrid affirmed, "Yes. Just that, they're very skilled at, I'd say."

"And," Sigge elaborated, "it really has to do with the idea of being able to include everyone (*det handlar väl ju egentligen om idén av att kunna inkludera alla*). That's really it. *Even* those that are against that (även *de som är mot det*)."

"Exactly, exactly," Astrid echoed.

Astrid and Sigge describe how a social democratic values framework in which "everyone should be included" (*alla ska med)* guides the National Folk Education Council in identifying how state funding for folk high schools should best be used at the contemporary moment. From this perspective, "the right things" (*rätt saker*) to do with state folk high school subsidies – now more than ever, in the face of growing xenophobia in Sweden – are to build inclusion, solidarity, and feelings of wellness by bringing diverse groups of students together on campus, including people who have functional disabilities, who have been outside of school or work for a long time, and who have just arrived as new migrants in Sweden. While each folk high school operates on the psychic and interpersonal terrain of their student body, working on a small scale to "*save* people" (rädda *människor*) and help them "feel well" (*må bra*), their work aims to contribute to a larger counter-movement against trends of social exclusion and societal polarization and toward efforts to build social democratic cohesion. As Sigge points out, however, building forms of solidarity that "include everyone" (*includera alla*) is challenging when some of the people in the group "are against that" (*är mot det).*

In this dissertation, I argue that Swedish folk high schools are using care as a political intervention in response to a range of large-scale contemporary issues in Sweden, including increasing mental ill-health, waning civic engagement, a need for migrant and refugee inclusion,

and the rise of the far-right. Folk high school care practices, rooted in idealized social democratic values, aim in turn at cultivating social democratic forms of well-being, tied to relational participation and collective solidarity. Teachers' attempts to foster this idiom of well-being among small groups of participants in the classroom is at the same time meant to help enact a broader social democratic vision of a "healthy society" based on universal inclusion and equality. Where staff see larger social structures as shaping participants' personal experiences, and in turn, use the landscape of participants' existential and relational growth as a way into affecting larger sociopolitical currents, I envision their work as unfolding at a "psychopolitical" nexus, dynamically connecting people with society through everyday interactions and encounters. Using ethnographic immersion to trace how students take up, respond to, and contest folk high schools' projects of care and well-being in real time, I examine the heightened stakes of these projects – and the challenges they face – at a moment when a social democratic national imaginary is no longer taken-for-granted, but rather under increasing threat from the rise of xenophobic sentiment and frustration with ongoing neoliberal reforms that have resulted in increasing socioeconomic divides.

Cultural politics of care and well-being in Swedish folk high schools

Folk high schools are not unique to Sweden but rather are found across Scandinavia, having spread after their founding by theologian N.F.S. Grundtvig in late 19th century Denmark (Laginder *et al* 2013). Folk high schools across the region today share certain characteristics, including heritage from the German tradition of *bildung,* or holistic development as person and citizen through education (*bildning* in Swedish). Yet there are also key differences. For example, while folk high schools in Denmark originally emphasized a romantic-nationalist model based on the notion of 'one culture, one language, one people,' Sweden's model was less nationalistic (Gustavsson 2013). Indeed, "despite the fact that their original idea was based on [the Danish] concept, Swedish Folk High Schools very quickly adapted to the specific conditions and needs of their society," and were used to serve local political ends (Maliszewski 2014: 389). Emerging

alongside other forms of popular education (*folkbildning*) in the late nineteenth century, including "study circles, popular libraries, distance education and public lectures," Swedish folk high schools (*folkhögskolor*) "aimed at educating 'the broader layers of the people'" (Larsson 2013: 72). Who, exactly, "the people" targeted by folk high schools have been has changed through time, as Astrid and Sigge gestured toward in our interview, above, and as I discuss further below. Initially, Swedish folk high schools aimed primarily at rural populations, in particular "farmers, to educate their sons to participate in political assemblies" (Gustavsson 2013: 38). They were also used by popular movements, including the free (non-state) church movement, the temperance movement, and the labor movement, who "saw Folk High School[s] as an efficient tool for educating their activists" (Maliszewski 2014: 390). Drawing on the heritage of *bildung*, since their founding, folk high schools across Sweden have provided instruction in a creative environment without tests or grades. Swedish folk high schools have never been unified into a single cohesive structural network, but rather supported by a variety of unconnected sources outside the state including popular movements, religious organizations, and municipal councils; partly as a result of this, each school has developed its own thematic emphasis or profile.

The emphasis on care and well-being at Swedish folk high schools, which became the focus of my research at Oak Bay, has a long cultural history rooted in social democracy. Today, Social Democratic Party literature describes that, "Tax-funded welfare policy is based on [the principle of solidarity;] Education and care are fundamental to the welfare of the individual and therefore something that we as citizens mutually guarantee each other" (Carlsson & Lindgren 2007: 32). From the outset, early Social Democratic Party leaders painted social relations based on mutual care - fostered by welfare state infrastructure - as the bedrock of national belonging. The Party popularized a metaphor of the nation as family living together in the "people's home" (*folkhemmet*), whose foundation was "fellowship and feelings of togetherness" inspiring people to enact "equality, compassion, cooperation, [and] helpfulness" (Hansson 1928, cited in Schall

2016, 37). In this model, the belief that all members of society are equal and should be treated equally mandates the pursuit of social care and inclusion for all: “The good home doesn’t admit privilege or backwardness—neither favorites nor stepchildren…Adapted to the great *people’s* and *citizens’* home this would mean the breaking down of all social and economic barriers that now divide citizens into the privileged and the backwards” (Hansson 1928, cited in Schall 2016, 37, emphasis in original).

As welfare state infrastructure steadily expanded during the Social Democratic Party’s long stretch of unbroken rule from the 1930’s through the 1980’s, including increasing subsidization for a growing number of folk high schools, people came to inhabit a “welfare society” beyond simply a welfare state (Murphy 2015), coming to take for granted as structuring principles of social life “The *values* of Social Democracy—full participation, integrative democracy, solidarity, equality, efficiency, freedom, and security” (Tilton 2001: 421, emphasis in original). So, too, the social democratic emphasis on care, based in providing a pervasive sense of economic and social security/comfort (*trygghet*) and everyday environments supportive of affective well-being, became central to imaginaries of ‘Swedishness’ (Murphy 2015: 45).

Interestingly, however, while themes of home, care, and well-being became central to understanding Swedish national belonging through the rise of the welfare state, ethnographic work in Stockholm in the 1970s, at the height of the Social Democratic project, found that a “culture of indifference” to others reigned in shared public spaces (Daun 1974, cited in Gullestad 1989). This indifference was encouraged, ironically, precisely *because* of “the extensive public care in Sweden,” combined with a cultural emphasis on “the need for independence and self-sufficiency” and a “sharp boundary between the public and the private,” limiting personal expressions of affection to the space of home and a small, tight circle of friends (Daun 1996: 133). Perhaps paradoxically, then, in a system built up on values of care and welfare meant to provide for social well-being, acts of mutual care have not typically pervaded everyday social encounters with those outside of one’s immediate networks, but rather there has been an

assumption that social care will be handled by the state institutions. This dissertation contributes to exploring how, *inside* welfare institutions, relations of care may be differently constructed, so that for example, folk high school projects of care encourage students to expand their immediate circles, as well as ask students to extend the way they would orient to close relations to people outside of these circles.[8]

At the same time as the Social Democratic Party was crafting this rhetoric of social care, Sweden was transitioning from a globally marginal, largely agrarian society to a "modern nation…[and] an experiment in welfare society" (Frykman 1993: 260), making it a goal to establish that "'Swedes [be] viewed as standing at the forefront of the 'modern'" (Dahlstedt 2009: 384). Correspondingly, folk high school demographics shifted away from primarily rural populations starting in the mid 20th century, yet they maintained their political connections so that by the 1960s, "every fifth member of the parliament was a *folkhögskola* [folk high school] graduate" (Maliszewski 2014: 390). The state and popular movements have contributed to "modernization" efforts by using folk high schools as conduits to carry out "the important task of creating a *Swedish democratic citizenship*" (Dahlstedt 2009: 389, emphasis in original). Indeed, "regardless of all the other types of activities taken up over the years, [what has] always been their distinguishing feature and made [Swedish] Folk High Schools unique…[is] activities for civic education and democracy" (Maliszewski 2014: 393).

Research on historical crises of national closure in Sweden (Schall 2016) shows that the ideological bounding of the nation is an ongoing process, requiring continuous maintenance and subject to contestation by differently positioned social and political groups and actors. I suggest that folk high schools' activities in the civic and political arena as well as their role in providing social care have contributed to how those living in Sweden imagine themselves as part of a stable "sovereign governable communion of belonging," which can be thought of as an

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[8] Thanks to Keith Murphy for drawing my attention to this theme. I briefly revisit this point again explicitly in chapter four.

“imagined national welfare community,” even as in reality “the boundaries [of this community] are elastic, even inclusive and plastic” (Hort 2014: 31). Routing notions of national belonging through metaphors of the family and through an emphasis on modernity and citizenship has often served to disguise the racialization of Swedish pursuits of social care (Mulinari & Neergaard 2017). While racism has long been disavowed and highly taboo in Sweden (Pred 2000), whiteness has consistently been a central, yet unthematized, feature of national membership (Arbouz 2017), linked to notions of belonging in “the imagined moral community and the…welfare state as the incarnation of this community” (Gullestad 2002: 59). Swedish social scientists Dahlstedt (2009) and Osman (2013) argue that folk education has perpetuated racist ideas about ‘modern,’ ‘essentially’ democratic Swedes mentoring ‘backward’ racially- and culturally-marked ‘others.’ This dissertation explores how Swedish folk high schools’ social democratic foundations make them complex and ambivalent sites for both reinforcing and challenging these rhetorics in their attempts to advocate for those perceived as ‘outsiders’ to become included in the national imaginary through relational projects of care.

Throughout the century and a half they have existed, Swedish folk high schools have continuously evolved in tandem with broader social and historical changes in Sweden. In 1968, a major public school reform in Sweden threatened to make folk high school education redundant (Larsson 2013), leading Swedish folk high schools to ‘rebrand’ as “schools for all” which would focus on serving and integrating those at the social margins. In this turn, new groups of students included people with disabilities, migrants, and the unemployed (Maliszewski 2014: 392). Recruiting a variety of structurally vulnerable adults, including those with mental illness, long-term unemployment, and migrant or refugee status, folk high schools continued to use funding and inspiration from both popular movements and the welfare state in service of helping those at the social and economic margins participate more fully in societal life, drawing on alternative pedagogy movements such as those pioneered by Rudolf Steiner and Paulo Freire (1970) to center student experience and mutual encounter as important components in teaching and

learning (Maliszewski 2014, Paldanius 2014). Throughout the dissertation, as I examine how folk high schools' humanistic pedagogies are mobilized as practices of care in pursuit of a local vision of well-being, I develop a conception of their overall approach as being based on "pedagogies of care." As part of the post-1968 turn, this caring pedagogy took on an explicitly sociopolitical dimension, when – in addition to various optional vocational and "special" courses (*särskilda kurser*), including music, theater, journalism, youth leadership, and visual arts – all Swedish folk high schools became required to offer "general courses" (*allmänna kurser*), which enabled many in the new "target groups" delineated above to fulfill their high school requirements and receive qualifications for further study and work, thus avoiding compounded social and economic marginalization. The mandate for Swedish folk high schools to offer high-school completion courses, which, as Sigge mentioned above, "allow many of these people who left high school in the past to go further anyway," earned them the popular nickname of "second chance schools," a term used fondly by many of my interlocutors.

In spite of the diversity and variation among individual folk high schools, which are encouraged by the state to "have [their own] specific ideological profile" (Nordvall 2013: 139) in order to set them apart from formal education, the push to make Swedish folk high schools a venue for adults who hadn't finished high school to gain standard qualifications for further work and study created closer connections between popular education in folk high schools and formal systems of higher and adult education and made folk high schools more similar to one another, somewhat limiting the independent freedom to decide curricular structure and content that had previously characterized folk high schools. Increasing financial support from and oversight by the state (Nordvall 2013) may also have increasingly linked folk high school education to state goals and to a potentially more cohesive role in constructing national identity and social membership.

In this generalizing move, the National Folk Education Council (*Folkbildningsrådet*), the organization where Astrid and Sigge work to distribute state grants and evaluate the use of

public funds in folk high schools, has drawn on a social democratic ethos to craft key criteria that all folk high schools must meet in order to receive public funding. Governed by this value framework, in order to receive state subsidization, all Swedish folk high schools must:

1. support activities that contribute to strengthening and developing democracy
2. contribute to making it possible for people to influence their life situation and create participative involvement in societal development
3. contribute to levelling educational gaps and raising the level of education and cultural awareness in society
4. contribute to broadening the interest for and increase participation in cultural life (Folkbildningsrådet 2015: 4).

By framing folk high schools' main task as increasing socially marginalized participants' involvement in social, cultural, political, and economic life, the state itself links folk high schools' role in providing social care with their focus on forming democratic citizens (Laginder *et al* 2013). As a result, these guidelines capture the focal point of this study – how folk high schools' work is driven by these two interwoven social democratic projects.

Exactly how so, as mentioned earlier, has been linked to shifts in broad economic and political currents impacting folk high school education through time, and these changes have continued since folk high schools' major reorientation as "schools for all" in the late 1960s through to the present. While the Social Democratic Party continuously strengthened welfare state infrastructure through the 1960's and 70's (Schall 2016), it has been shrinking significantly both in material and ideological terms since the 1980s through now. There have been repeated shifts rightward in the seat of political power, with the Social Democratic Party losing hold of the majority to the center-right parties in the 1990s and again after 2006 (Schall 2016). The Social Democratic Party itself, too, began adopting more neoliberal modes of governing in the 1980s and 1990s (Murphy 2015: 22). Key changes have involved increasing privatization of public services such as education and healthcare in the form of tax-funded support of for-profit providers of these services (Laginder *et al* 2013: 6). Swedish policy researcher Paula Blomqvist (2004) argues that a positive feedback loop between state policy, private enterprise, and public

demand for neoliberal privatization has meant that only a powerful semblance of the original state welfare structures remain, and increasing gutting of these structures can be expected, while strong welfare state ideology is essentially dead. In its place, "Neoliberalism has…become a dominant way of thinking, a hegemonic consent, which not only includes the traditional political right (conservatives and liberals), but also the labour movement and the political left" (Nordvall 2013: 125). In the 1990s and 2000s, then, the social democratic egalitarian ethos, a widely-shared value framework resting on the expectation that the welfare state should facilitate equality, has become increasingly dissonant with a reality of growing economic and social inequality resulting from neoliberal policies (Isenhour 2010).

Through this same period, shifts in population demographics and in popular discourses about migrants in Sweden have coincided with and fueled these political, economic, and ideological changes. Up to the 1970s, when the social democratic welfare system was at its height, most migration served Swedish labor needs and came from inside Scandinavia (Graham 2002). As their earnings fed into the public system, migrant labor was framed as a net economic gain for 'native-born' Swedes and migrant laborers were welcomed to stay and settle in Sweden (Schall 2016). In the economic crisis of the 1970s, labor migration declined, and in its place, the increasing arrival of asylum-seekers from South Asia, South America, and Africa, fomented a narrative of Swedish moral exceptionalism in providing refuge and care within a political framework of multiculturalism (Ålund & Schierup 1991). While the multiculturalist stance celebrated antiracism in an attempt to repudiate a racist and colonialist past, its failure to challenge longstanding assumptions of white superiority embedded in social democracy, as discussed above, meant that it also perpetuated implicit, disavowed forms of racism, now transformed into a cultural idiom (Schierup & Ålund 2011, Hübinette & Lundström 2014). In the early 2000s, the neoliberal reforms that had been retrenching the welfare state and making labor increasingly temporary and precarious converged with increasingly popular right-wing rhetoric encouraging a more explicit understanding of migrants as racialized 'others' who were

unable to work due to needing care, thus posing an economic drain on and social threat to the (white) “national welfare community” (Bäärnhielm *et al* 2005). While, for decades, there was no far-right parliamentary presence in Sweden even as nationalist, xenophobic parties in neighboring Denmark and Norway gained increasing strongholds (Hellström 2016), since 2010, the far-right Sweden Democrats Party has undergone massive expansion.

At present, in the aftermath of what was widely dubbed the “refugee crisis” of 2015, when the Social Democratic Party has abandoned many of its basic founding ideologies since the neoliberal turn, especially in terms of its goals for economic equality (Therborn 2017, Tilton 2001), the far-right, anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats Party has been able to significantly grow its parliamentary and popular presence. Giving a more polished public image to explicitly racist positions, rooted in fascist white-nationalist ideology (Teiltelbaum 2017), the Sweden Democrats have used Islamophobic narratives to provide an explanation for – and a channel for expressing frustration about – the deteriorating social and economic conditions that are rooted in neoliberal reforms, by casting migrants and refugees as weakening the capacity of the welfare state to provide for increasing numbers of marginalized white Swedes (Dahlstedt & Neergaard 2019). Meanwhile, the Social Democratic Party has acted on strongly pro-immigrant, pro-integration rhetoric, embodied in its initial support for an open-door asylum policy for Syrians fleeing war, while also enacting modes of exclusion exacerbated by pressures from the right and growing far-right, exemplified by the Party’s later withdrawal of the open-door policy (Greenhill 2016). Today, folk high schools champion the social democratic ethos of moral exceptionalism which reigned in the 1970s, coming out strongly in favor of welcoming migrants and refugees.

While a broad political consensus about the value of folk high school education survived the neoliberal turn and the associated retrenchment of the Swedish welfare state, as Laginder, Nordvall and Crowther explain:

> Beyond dispute, a lot about the ‘Swedish model’ has changed. However, vital parts of the welfare state still remain. Popular education, as a state funded system with broad popular participation, is a clear example of this. A broad political consensus on the importance of

> popular education has meant that the centre-right governments of Sweden…have also continued to support this sector…This can partly be understood on the basis that even among several of the bourgeois parties there is a strong popular movement tradition (Laginder *et al* 2013: 7).

Today, however, the Sweden Democrats Party's rise to power has threatened this consensus by seeking to undermine widespread assumptions about the value of popular education, as National Folk Education Council representatives pointed out in our interview at the opening of this chapter, with Astrid saying, "the folk high school and folk education in Sweden have, of course, an extreme *respect*…from *many* parts of the population. But…There's *one* party [the far-right Sweden Democrat Party] which actually wants to take away all of the [state] funding for folk education. Basically. Or at least convert folk high schools into their [party's] own idealistic spirit."

Backed by a government which is still Social Democratic-led, the National Folk Education Council's intent to use Swedish popular education infrastructures to "reveal the potential of diversity" (Folkbildningsrådet 2013: 8) and "ensure that foreign-born Swedes have access to…education initiatives [that] facilitate integration in Sweden" (Folkbildningsrådet 2013: 9), has been materialized in increasing state investments since 2010 that Sigge described in folk high school courses aimed at migrants and refugees, such as "establishment courses for newly arrived migrants" (*etableringskurser för nyanlända*) as well as general courses (*allmänna kurser),* which provide a route to a GED-equivalent for a diverse student population (regerinen.se 2015). More generally, folk high schools' use of their humanistic philosophy in aiming to build inclusive forms of solidarity through human encounters across lines of social difference in terms of age, mental health status, class position, and race and national background, has taken on heightened stakes in the political present.

This study focuses in particular on general courses (*allmänna kurser),* or the subset of folk high school courses that offer high-school completion credits, because shifting participant demographics in general courses more acutely reflect the larger demographic changes occuring

in Swedish society described above. In theory, anyone can attend a general course regardless of age or high-school completion status, yet as formal high schools have become increasingly demanding, unemployment has increased, and as more migrants and refugees have entered the country, participants in general courses have likewise become disproportionately structurally vulnerable as compared to the general population, being more likely to have incomplete education, to have functional disabilities, and to be foreign-born (Folkbildningsrådet 2017: 13-14), as well as, in my observation, to be attracted to far-right rhetoric as an explanation for their own feelings of alienation or precarity in the contemporary social landscape. Studying state-level and school-level strategies for working with general course participants, then, also offers insight into a set of local responses to the larger shifting social dynamics that brought them there. In an increasingly socio-economically unequal and politically polarizing landscape, many folk high schools have positioned themselves as strongly against the Sweden Democrat Party's far-right perspective and as at least somewhat against neoliberal reforms[9], seeing these as tides which must be fought against for the sake of their participants' well-being as well as for their mission to strengthen broader democratic cohesion.

When we first began talking about Swedish folk high schools, Erik, who taught the high-school completion course I later studied for my dissertation research, commented that, "if you compare it to folk high schools in Norway and Denmark we [Swedish folk high schools] are probably much more political, because there are other traditions – it's more into art and specialized courses and so on in Denmark and Norway. So it's less political there I think. And it has to do with the idea that – or the fact that – all Swedish folk high school courses have to include the "general track" (*allmänna linjen)* [which provides a high-school GED equivalent for

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[9] Laginder *et al (*2013) note Swedish folk high schools' complex relationship to neoliberal projects, which I discuss some aspects of further later in the dissertation. They write that "popular education as a contemporary sector in Sweden is found to be attractive from various political perspectives. For example, it contains both spaces for social movements to challenge neoliberal politics, as well as opening up the kind of voluntary, civil society based welfare actors that neoliberals see as attractive alternatives to general and publicly organised institutions" (Laginder *et al* 2013: 7).

people who did not finish formal high school]. Which will be more social work or political work in itself. You can't get away with having a folk high school without the general track. And that's – that *is* social and political work."

Through close ethnographic examination of everyday interactions among teachers and participants in a folk high school general track course, this dissertation research examines the nexus of these locally textured "social" and "political" dimensions in general track courses, and how they necessarily play out through individual experiences and intimate relationships. Exploring how social democratic legacies of care shape Swedish folk high schools' roles as "bearers of the 'national project'" (Dahlstedt 2009: 385) in the contemporary social context, I argue that folk high schools use local practices of care and well-being as tools to participate in ongoing debates about who should be included in the "imagined national welfare community" and what this inclusion entails. In using "pedagogies of care," based on practices of mutual recognition, in hopes of (re)animating diverse young adults' affective investments in a social democratic ideal of collective solidarity, staff seek to provide young people with a left-leaning optic to understand and cope with the damaging social effects of neoliberal policies and thus to push back against the the rise of the far-right. Ethnographic methods, of course, also reveal that students respond to this historically complex project in various ways, sometimes at odds with one another.

Research setting

I came to develop this perspective based on 11 months of field research that I carried out in the summer of 2016 and during the 2017-18 school year, which included interviews at the National Folk Education Council and the Popular Movement Folk High Schools' Interest Organization (*Rörelsefolkhögskolornas Intresseorganisation*)[10], visits and interviews at six diverse folk high schools around Sweden, and long-term, immersive participant observation and

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[10] This state-level organization represents the interests of the 113 folk high schools in Sweden that, like Oak Bay, are run by non-profit organizations and popular movements. The remaining 42 folk high schools are run by regional governments (landsting) (sverigesfolkhogskolor.se 2020).

interviews in one of these folk high schools, on the Swedish east coast, which I call Oak Bay Folk High School (*Ekvik Folkhögskola*).[11]

Oak Bay Folk High School is located in a tranquil rural setting on the outskirts of Oak Harbor (*Ekhamn*), a town of 1,000 people one and a half hours north of Stockholm by rail. The school, surrounded by thick forests of oak, birch and pine, sits perched high up on a hill overlooking several small islands. This school has about 200 participants enrolled in long-term (1-2 academic year) courses, which are a mix of "special" (*särskilda*) (aesthetic and vocational) and "general" (*allmänna*) (high-school completion) courses. About half of Oak Bay's students commute from a nearby mid-size city, and the other half live on campus, in three buildings with traditional Swedish red wooden siding and white trim. They occupy a mix of single and double rooms, with shared kitchens and living rooms in every hall where students prepare dinner and socialize in the evenings (see figures 1, 2, 3, and 4).[12]

Figure 1 A dorm kitchen

Figure 2 Dorm fika - An evening when students collectively prepared "fika" (coffee and buns)

[11] Other than the names of state-level organizations, the names of all institutions and interlocutors, including interlocutors employed at state-level organizations, are pseudonyms. Key facts about geographical locations, personal appearance, and other identifying markers have also been changed throughout the dissertation to protect participants' anonymity, when doing so would not distort the connection between the data and the analysis.

[12] All photographs in the dissertation are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

Figure 3 A dorm living room

Figure 4 Responsible waste - Six of the nine bins where students sorted waste and recycling

There is also a large, central cafeteria where boarding students eat breakfast and lunch and where both residential and commuting students meet for a daily mid-morning coffee break (*fika)*. The next building over houses the library, which often displayed art that students created independently in the school's art studio or together in elective art classes (see figures 5 and 6), as well as several classrooms.

Figure 5 The library - The well-lit library provides many cozy spots for studying, reading, and group work

Figure 6 Student art - Individual student works are taken down to make room for displaying a collective project

The natural setting of the school, including the historical and cultural heritage of the coastal region, the topographical features including hills, forest, lakes, waterfalls, ocean, and islands, and the beautiful views of these features that the school's elevated location provides, are made integral to the fabric of the school's identity in myriad ways. School buildings and rooms are named after natural features in the area, social activities are carried out in natural areas around the school, especially at the beginning of the year, to familiarize participants with and hopefully inspire them to connect to these spaces. Monday morning staff meetings are held in the "Harbor View Room," where it was common for the principals to start or close the meeting with a comment on how beautiful the water or clouds looked on a given day, and how fortunate they were to be able to gather precisely there and look at them together. In the summer, the bay that Oak Harbor overlooks is full of swimmers and picnickers from the town, and families go out in search of the blueberries that coat the forest floor in the woods behind the school. Come autumn and the start of the school year, when the leaves turn yellow and orange, hundreds of chanterelle mushrooms pop up, sending small groups of resident school participants on the hunt to spice up their evening meals at the dorms (see figures 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11).

Fig 7 Winter view – Looking out from the Harbor View Room

Fig 8 Oak tree - One of Oak Harbor's oaks at the forest's edge

Fig 9 A forest path - Into thick pine stands

*Fig 10 "Pinnebröd" - Students wrap dough around sticks to make "*pinnebröd*" at a welcome event in the woods behind school*

Fig 11 Chanterelles – Rinsed, on the counter in the dorm kitchen

Oak Bay Folk High School is close to celebrating its centennial anniversary, having been founded in the early 1920s. Its board of directors is made up of representatives from two civil society organizations with connections to the free church movement, giving it an umbrella orientation toward ecumenical Christianity that guides its thematic focus on global issues and existential questions. The school's website describes its founding vision as providing a place where people of different faiths can come together to create an example of tolerant humanity and international solidarity and democracy. It has long aimed to be a meeting place for discussions, debates, and cultural experiences that fuel a strong sense of social responsibility. During the Second World War, the folk high school suspended its courses to serve as a military hospital, and the school's director and teachers were involved in the resistance to Nazism, hiding refugees. After reopening, the school maintained its commitment to its founding vision, while growing and evolving its course selection through the decades, for example, offering housekeeping courses for women in the 1940s (which are of course now long retired!).

Today, prospective participants browsing Oak Bay's web page read that it is a place where room for growth and the power to change are found in the encounter between human differences. They learn that the folk high school is a very special type of school, where the teaching is based on each student's active participation, on the basis that everyone has

something to contribute. Courses are based on themes and projects, so that knowledge is the focus, though in an alternative way. Democracy, culture and international issues are high on the agenda, which is reflected in the curricula and in everything that happens in the school.

In line with Astrid's explanation that "Folk high schools[']…democratic mission" is fulfilled in part by the National Folk Education Council "giv[ing money] out to folk high schools…in order [that participants] feel well (*må bra*)," Oak Bay's focus on democracy works in tandem with a major emphasis on relational forms of well-being. As such, the institution as a whole is pervaded by messages encouraging mutual care (See figure 12).

*Figure 12 The "Hug Heart"- this campus feature exemplifies how care and well-being pervade the folk high school setting. A sign next to this heart on the pavement in the center of Oak Bay's campus informs students that hugs support health, and encourages students to use this marker as a reminder to stop and hug one another: "the Hug Heart is for when we feel that a warm hug would make us feel well (*vi skulle må bra av en varm kram*)." In this photo, students used the hug heart as a meeting point during the first week of school to gather before heading down to the beach together.*

Research methods

Living in one of Oak Bay's dormitories for the 2017-18 school year, I carried out daily participant-observation as a student. I lived in Oak Bay housing alongside participants from general (high-school completion) courses (*allmänna kurser*) and special courses (*särskilda kurser*). I also mixed with students from across all courses at school during *fika* (the mid-morning coffee break) and lunch every day in the school cafeteria, as well as at student-organized social events and school-organized activities such as music, art, fitness, and leisure events. In my capacity as a researcher, I stepped out of the student role to gain insight into

teachers' perspectives through attending weekly school-wide teachers' meetings, monthly "general track" (*allmänna linjen*) teachers' meetings, and weekly class-specific teachers' meetings, as well as several board meetings. I complemented participant-observation at staff meetings with a great deal of informal conversation as well as interviews with seventeen staff members at Oak Bay, including school administrators, current and retired high-school completion course teachers, and the school psychological counselor.

Though Oak Bay offers a range of different types of courses, I focused mostly on the "general track" (*allmänna linjen*), which offers four high-school completion courses emphasizing different themes. While periodically visiting different courses on this track, I studied one high-school completion course in particular depth as a full participant-observer, which I call "Being Human" (*Att Vara Människa*), attending all class meetings, four days per week. "Being Human" focuses on social sciences and humanities, covering foundational high school subjects such as basic Swedish, religion, and history in interwoven 'theme' units. For example, concepts and material from multiple basic subjects were incorporated into a unit on globalization. The class met for two full days and two half days per week, leaving the participants time for high school subjects at differentiated levels, such as Swedish, English, and math, as well as creative electives such as art and music. Based on creative, collective participation through discussions and activities, including frequent group projects, "Being Human" has commonalities with many high-school completion courses in folk high schools throughout Sweden, including at all six of the other diverse schools I visited. Its roughly twenty participants were led by three white Swedish teachers in their 50s and 60s, who I call Erik, Hans, and Elsa, who alternated their presence in class, meeting once a week as a group outside of class to coordinate preparation of course content. As in other courses and schools I visited, Erik, Hans, and Elsa saw self-transformation, inclusive relationship-building, and democratic participation as interlinked processes and the aim of their work with students.

Student demographics in the 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18 cohorts in "Being Human" were typical in their size as well as in the age, socio-economic, and national and ethnic demographics, as compared to other general courses (*allmänna kurser*) at Oak Bay and at other folk high schools in residential, rural settings. A majority of the participants were between the ages of 20-25, white and Swedish-born, and from working class backgrounds, while several members of the class were Swedish-born students of color, and several had moved to Sweden from other countries, mostly in the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe. Most students in the class had negative previous experiences in school, often having been bullied by peers and overlooked by teachers, and a large proportion of the class had and/or continued to struggle with mental health challenges including depression, anxiety, ADHD, and PTSD, as well as long periods of being out of school and/or work.

While I spent the most time with my classmates in "Being Human" and the twenty hallmates on my dorm floor, throughout each week at school, I consistently came into contact with 60-75 participants across all classes, and spent intensive time "hanging out" and talking informally with 30-40 participants in high-school completion courses, interviewing twenty of them. Among this latter group, I drew on person-centered interview methods (Levy & Hollan 2014) to follow ten "focal participants" throughout the year, conducting initial interviews, mid-year "snapshots," and end-of-year interviews to track these participants' expectations for, experiences of, and reflections on the school environment's impacts on them in depth through time (Huffman 2014). While I could not plan for a representative sample among focal participants, as participation depended on participants' degree of openness to research participation as well as the early establishment of trust and rapport, which was influenced by the initial configurations of dorm life and classroom activity groups, participants in this group did roughly reflect the makeup of the classes on the general track (*allmänna linjen*), though with a relative overrepresentation of migrant students and students of color when compared to the high-school completion course population as a whole. Seven of these focal participants were my

classmates in the "Being Human," course, and three were from another high-school completion course. Six lived in the dormitory and four lived off-campus. Four were women and six were men. Seven had grown up in Sweden and three had migrated there within the last three years. Four were students of color and six were white. Two came from middle class backgrounds and eight from working-class backgrounds. Eight told me they had struggled and/or were struggling with significant challenges to their mental health, including anxiety, depression, ADHD, and PTSD, and two said they had not. All were between the ages of 19-29.

In initial, audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with focal participants, in August and September, I asked about students' reasons for coming to the folk high school and their expectations and goals for their time there, as well as their past and present experiences of mental health, friendships and other close relationships, and their thoughts on Swedish society and politics. These interviews provided a baseline for tracking whether, how, and why participants experienced transformations in their understandings and experiences of wellness and relational inclusion, as well as in their stances toward society, social belonging, and civic engagement, throughout the school year. In the middle of the school year, in November and December, I a second round of audio-recorded interviews with focal participants, this time using very few broad, open-ended questions to capture a qualitative "snapshot" (Huffman 2014) from participants' perspectives of their feelings about the course, the school, and its impacts on them. These largely unstructured conversations foregrounded the complex meanings and "stakes" that course participation had in each participant's life experience (Kleinman 2006) and highlighted participants' "compelling concerns" (Wikan 2013), helping to refine participant-observation by increasing my attunement to personal meanings that influenced their behavior in social interaction (Hollan 2001). At the year's end, in May and June, audio-recorded "exit" interviews which had both open-ended and semi-structured elements extended the mid-year "snapshot" interviews and mirrored the initial interviews to illuminate the impacts of folk school participation in students' experiences. Questions in these final interviews, while allowing much

open space for participants to digress and reflect on what had been important for them, also loosely followed up from the initial interview on how students' expectations had been met or disappointed, how their goals had been fulfilled, fallen short, or changed, and how their understandings and experiences of mental health and wellness, as well as their sense of social inclusion and their political attitudes, had been affected by their time at Oak Bay. All together, showing how participants engaged with the folk school's local frameworks for care and well-being through time, interview data from the initial, snapshot, and exit interviews helped shed light on the "effort after meaning" involved in incorporating – or rejecting – larger political, social, and cultural projects into personally salient understandings of wellness and social inclusion (Garro 2007). Additionally, interviews in the middle and at the end of the school year with ten other students across Oak Bay's high-school completion courses and with five past "Being Human" students who had completed the course within the preceding two years, while not part of the person-centered interview "cycle" carried out with focal participants, added a wider array of perspectives that gave further context to situate focal students' reflections.

Finally, I reviewed official literature and policy that outlines formal goals for folk high school education and visited Stockholm to carry out interviews with seven state-level folk education administrators, including on the National Folk Education Council. I sought to probe whether and how officials at the state level, like folk high school teachers, conceived of folk high schools as sites of care, and how this might relate to – as described in these organizations' literature – broader ideas about democracy and a vision for societal well-being in contemporary Sweden.

As my research progressed, I came to see that certain insights generated from studying Oak Bay folk high school would also broadly apply across Swedish folk high schools, even as other aspects bounded Oak Bay to a specific subset of folk high schools, and of course some dimensions were idiosyncratic. While visiting different folk high schools throughout Sweden, in major cities, mid-size cities, and rural areas, I observed and was told about similarities and

differences between Oak Bay and other Swedish folk high schools. For example, Oak Bay is one of Sweden's oldest and largest folk high schools, and like many other early folk high schools, has a rural, residential campus; in contrast, many newer folk high schools are often situated in non-residential, urban settings and have smaller student bodies. As compared to students in rural schools, the student body in urban folk high schools tends to be much more diverse in age and in national and racial/ethnic background, as well as more likely to have less previous education and be lower on the socioeconomic ladder (Folkbildningsrådet 2017: 16-17). Students in urban schools are also more likely to have families, making it more difficult to move into a dormitory or commute a long distance between home and school. Students in rural schools, however, are more likely to have a functional disability (Folkbildningsrådet 2017: 17).

Regardless of these differences, older and newer, rural and urban, residential and non-residential, and larger and smaller folk high schools alike tend to share a similar overarching humanistic, holistic philosophy – referred to by some school staff and administrators as the "folk high school spirit" (*folkhögskoleanda*) – based in idealized conceptions of a social democratic past defined by collective mutual care. This "spirit" is kept alive by staff, who occupy similar demographics across schools – that is, largely middle-aged, white, Swedish-born, and politically left-leaning. As mentioned earlier, high-school completion courses across folk high schools also share that a greater proportion of their student population as compared to the general population were born outside of Sweden, lack formal education, and/or have functional disabilities (Folkbildningsrådet 2017: 52). Folk high school staff are positioned, then, both at Oak Bay and elsewhere, to aim to contribute toward broader forms of social democratic cohesion as they seek more immediately to cultivate forms of well-being based on ideals of social inclusion and solidarity among these students at the social margins.

Anthropology of care and well-being

Anthropologists have paid increasing attention to care and well-being in recent years as part of a larger disciplinary turn toward an "anthropology of the good" (Robbins 2013). In

examining folk high schools' social democratic projects of care and wellness as political interventions, I join other anthropologists who examine where local models of care and well-being come from and what enactments of care in pursuit of well-being can do. For example, this scholarship has illustrated how well-being is fundamentally relational across cultural settings, so that ideas of what it means to be "well" in any given place reflects local ideas about how and why to best foster social belonging and connection (White 2016). Researchers have also shown how local understandings of well-being draw on cultural imaginaries of the "good life" (Walker and Kavedzija 2015), which often harken to idealized narratives of the past (Garro 1990, Izquierdo 2009, Throop 2015). In turn, pursuits of well-being defined on this basis can be used toward various political ends, potentially serving to advocate for the rights of subordinated groups (Adelson 1998) or conversely to justify the privileges of dominant groups (Chua 2014). While well-being is often taken for granted as "good," much of this research has followed the critical work of Sara Ahmed (2010) to draw attention to how local understandings of well-being can insidiously reproduce social hierarchy.

Similarly, numerous anthropologists highlight how local models of care can naturalize and perpetuate social inequality (e.g. Han 2012; Holmes 2013). Yet, anthropological research on care has refused to "reduce care to power" (Buch 2015: 279). Rather, anthropologists have repeatedly stressed care's ambivalence, showing that it can have simultaneously 'positive' and 'negative' valences, and warning that it is not mutually exclusive with neglect and violence (e.g. Gammeltoft 2014; Garcia 2010). Further, many studies underscore that understandings of what constitutes 'good' care are contested, and that doctors, patients, families, and other actors may draw on a variety of culturally available frameworks to understand, enact, and assess care (Buchbinder 2015; Nakamura 2013). In turn, different approaches to care matter insofar as they have different effects in the social world. Being simultaneously "a form of moral, intersubjective practice and a circulating and potentially scarce social resource" (Buch 2015: 279), care connects intimate interpersonal interactions with larger socio-political structures. Lisa Stevenson's

(2014) study of Canadian care for Inuit with tuberculosis and Cristiana Giordano's (2014) study of Italian care for migrant women show how bureaucratic state care projects can perpetuate colonial dynamics, harming those at the margins through flattening processes of "othering"; Both of these authors also examine how alternative possibilities for enacting care can challenge these power dynamics.

Extending anthropological work that casts care as a linchpin between intimate relations and larger socio-political structures, I attend to how cultural and historical frameworks shape local constructions of care and well-being, while still leaving definitions of what it means to care and to be "well" open to contestation. I draw on literature demonstrating how caregiving serves "as a practical response to ethical issues inherent in a dynamically shifting social world" (Yahalom 2019: 21). In other words, how practices of care and pursuits of well-being provide a means for people to engage in "social regeneration" in contexts of social change (Yahalom 2019: 19), drawing on shared values and images of the past in order to forge new ways of collective being in the present (Adelson 1998). In a context where both people arriving in Sweden seeking asylum and those who are mobilizing against them face contemporary forms of vulnerability and marginalization in the face of larger political economic changes, the notion of care as a response to social vulnerability raises further questions: Who is most responsible for providing care? Who most deserves to receive care? (How) can a single approach to care and well-being address multiple different forms and experiences of social marginalization? Must providing for the well-being of some necessarily impinge on the well-being of others? These questions are not only theoretical, but rather are constantly being contested through interaction among teachers and students. Through detailed ethnography of everyday classroom scenes, I explore multiple perspectives on these questions. Then, situating these perspectives in relation to scholarly writing in anthropology and on broader Swedish societal dynamics and debates, I illuminate the stakes of different answers for differently positioned participants.

Overview of dissertation chapters

Chapter two examines folk school discourses of wellness and how these are constructed and deployed in everyday practice through "pedagogies of care." While the dissertation ultimately explores how these local practices of care and well-being are used to address a wide array of perceived social problems in the present, including waning civic engagement, the need for refugee integration, and political polarization, this chapter begins by focusing on their application in intervening on growing mental ill-health among young adults at the social margins. In contrast to the individualized, medicalized approach of the mental health care system, folk high school staff reframe mental health as an issue of relational well-being (White 2016) and "social emplacement" (Vigh 2015) in a social democratic idiom. Building on anthropology scholarship that shows how understandings of well-being reflect and contest local cultural and political currents in times of social change (Adelson 1998; 2009), the chapter illuminates how ideas of social emplacement at the folk high school are positioned as tools in local attempts to revive an idealized social democratic past amid ongoing neoliberal reforms and the rise of the far-right.

Chapter three uses case material from eight students – Sofia, Eleonora, Alice, Jakob, Elias, Zahra, Kaspar, and Abdul – to depict several different ways in which school "pedagogies of care" actually impact participants' experiences and understandings of mental health and social (democratic) emplacement over time at school. These diverse students' divergent responses to the folk high school's framework of care and wellness, in which personal transformation is linked with interpersonal recognition and participatory community-building, reveals the double-edged effects of using social immersion as a mental health intervention and the tension inherent in attempts to attend to individual and collective forms of well-being at once.

Chapter four continues to explore connections between (un)wellness, care, and social democratic engagement. It examines folk high school staff's efforts to "get people to care," or in other words, to address growing personal suffering and mitigate civic apathy and antagonism among young adult participants who grew up in an era of atomization and now increasing

political polarization. It traces how, by employing "pedagogies of care," middle-aged school staff aim to pass on their generational "structure of feeling" (Williams 1977), defined by investment in a social democratic ethos of collectivity and solidarity, hoping that when their students become well through developing relationships at school, they will be inspired to care for one another and about social issues in a social democratic idiom (Freire 1970). Following Sofia, Fahim, and Olle, the chapter illustrates mixed success in teachers' efforts to spur civic and democratic engagement in the face of severely destabilized social democratic hegemony. Changed social, economic, and political conditions of this historical moment make it unlikely that care will replicate a straightforward investment in social democracy among young people today.

Chapter five examines how staff seek to use folk school care and well-being projects as integration projects. Teachers invite students to "enact the ethos" (Garro 2011) of social democratic care and relational well-being at school in hopes of helping migrant and refugee students feel included, pitching this as an explicit alternative to far-right xenophobia. Focusing on Yussef, Aisha, and Fahim, readers see how using school projects of care and well-being to foster social integration (dis)articulates with refugee participants' experiences through time. In pursuing an ideal of universal inclusion through the social democratic concept of security/comfort (*trygghet*), yet lacking attention to how hegemonic understandings of race result in unequal possibilities for experiencing belonging (Ahmed 2010), the school unintentionally reinscribes subtle forms of exclusion, thus both facilitating and truncating migrant and refugee students' aspirations toward social emplacement. Examining these students' experiences reveals how antiracist wellness projects in Sweden are shaped by and can unintentionally reinforce enduring forms of racialized differentiation and inequality within Scandinavian social democratic frameworks (Hübinette & Lundström 2014).

Chapter six follows Silvia and Leilah to examine how, in the folk school, expressions of hate and xenophobia are read as symptoms of suffering, and caring for persons who express these views is framed as a solution for the current surge in far-right sentiment. Weaving anthropology

scholarship on care and (mis)recognition (Giordano 2014, Stevenson 2014) together with the concept of the “phenomenology of whiteness” (Ahmed 2007) to analyze a class discussion about hate speech, this chapter shows that focusing care on far-right aligned participants indeed leads them to feel more well and be more open to solidarity across lines of social difference, yet that this may come at the cost of deprioritizing care – and exacerbating unwellness – for students in racialized minority positions. At the same time, students who drew on different forms of recognition to attempt to enact mutual care in this conversation reveal how the folk high school’s unique social environment and philosophy could be used to catalyze more broadly inclusive forms of care and well-being in the face of Islamophobia and xenophobia (Fraser 2000, Throop 2010).

Chapter seven concludes the dissertation by synthesizing arguments from all the chapters, highlighting the importance of using ethnographic methods to combine a focus on state-level welfare projects with their effects in recipients’ experiences amid proliferating research on well-being in psychology, economics, and international development. Emphasizing the inevitable tensions between attending to individual and collective dimensions of well-being, and reiterating whose wellness is most likely to prioritized by default in this calculus, it also underscores the need to attend to how power and inequality subtly imbue imaginaries and pursuits of “the good” so that ostensibly universal projects of care and well-being are unevenly applied in practice. Finally, showing how folk school administrators, teachers, and participants interact as dynamic actors in debates about Sweden’s future, it crystallizes the promise, peril, and complex cultural politics of care and well-being projects at a moment of widely perceived social precarity and polarization in Sweden and Europe and considers relevant implications for the United States.

Chapter 2: "1+1=3": Pursuing social (democratic) emplacement through a "pedagogy of care"

Chapter overview

This chapter examines how folk high school staff use a local model of care and well-being, rooted in a cultural history of social democracy, to respond to increasing mental ill-health among structurally vulnerable young adult students, which they see as exacerbated by contemporary socioeconomic conditions under neoliberalism. Through mobilizing "pedagogies of care" that link interpersonal recognition with personal transformation and participatory community-building in a social democratic framework, teachers reframe mental health from an individual issue to one of relational well-being and "social (democratic) emplacement." Building on scholarship in psychological and medical anthropology that shows how understandings of well-being reflect, regenerate, and contest social values and identities, I show how notions about individual wellness at the folk high school are politicized by being entwined with imaginings of a healthy Swedish society, as pedagogies of care are positioned as tools to revive an idealized social democratic past amid ongoing neoliberal reforms and the rise of the far-right.

Mental health in a neoliberal world of "winners and losers"

Over the last several decades, liberalizing economic policies have led both to increasing economic and social inequality and to the rise of neoliberal hegemony in Sweden (Nordvall 2013). Political and economic shifts that began within the Social Democratic Party in the 1970s and 80s and were accelerated by Sweden's joining the European Union in the 1990s progressively undermined Sweden's longstanding "social democratic ethos," which had supported social and material equality by driving strong welfare and employment policy and bolstering union legitimacy (Berman 2006, Isenhour 2010). As welfare services became increasingly privatized and manufacturing jobs left the country with increasing freedom for companies to engage global capital circuits abroad, social and economic divides in Sweden increased, leading to new forms of social marginalization for those rendered vulnerable by these

structural changes (Blomqvist 2004). Many of my conversations with participants and staff at Oak Bay showed how these shifting socio-economic conditions touch down in experience, revealing implicitly or explicitly how increasing pressures on people to compete and achieve as study and professional work have become shaped in a more neoliberal image (Brown 2015) pose serious challenges to mental health for young adults coming of age in this context.

I heard over and over from folk high school administrators, staff and teachers that more troubled young people have been coming to folk high schools in recent years. Many theorized that disinvestment in public social provisions, paired with shifts in the labor market, underpinned increasing mental unwellness among the folk high school student body. Vidar, a state-level administrator for folk high school education, told me that "in the 2000s, the proportion [of folk high school students] with diagnoses, with ADHD and so on, has grown. And that's of course grown throughout society, but the relative proportion in the folk high school is much larger than in the rest of society (*mycket större än i samhället övrigt).*" When I asked Ulla, Oak Bay's school counselor, if she had any idea why unwellness seemed to have increased among folk high school students, she said she thought it had something to do with the fact that the qualification requirements were becoming so high to find even menial work. This drove people who had dropped out of formal high school (*gymnasiet*), preferring work over study, to come to the folk high school (*folkhögskolan*) to complete their high school requirements in order to continue to be able to work. 'People used to be able to work as a bank teller, for example, straight out of high school,' Ulla explained, 'and now you need a bachelor's degree for that!'[13] Per, an older Oak Bay teacher whose unhurried manner put students at ease, told me that as professional jobs have become hyper-valued, young people have started to see society as being divided into "winners" and "losers," where "losers" are those who lack formal education and thus the potential to achieve professional status. Seeing themselves as "losers," he

[13] Throughout the dissertation, I use single quotation marks to denote dialogue reconstructed from detailed fieldnotes taken in real time in Swedish, while double quotation marks capture audio-recorded, transcribed direct quotes.

explained, leads to depression and other forms of unwellness among young adults who haven't completed formal high school (*gymnasiet*). Karin, who had taught in Oak Bay's high-school completion courses for many years, also thought that larger shifts in formal education and work had resulted in the folk high school becoming a sort of refuge for increasing numbers of young people who were made mentally unwell by this system. She said, "The [formal] school system is much wider, deeper, now - it devours everybody…and the school system doesn't know how to take care of all the difficulties that young people have. So, many fall off the train, sort of. So that is the newest thing, I think, the last ten years, that young people that have, quotation mark, 'failed,' and feel very low in their self-esteem, and also all the um, mental problems, you know, that people have, where should they go? You know? Where should you be if you can't get a job, and the society pushes you, you have to have somewhere to be…" Karin, of course, implies that the folk high school has become a key "somewhere to be" for young adults who feel displaced in the contemporary dominant education and work system.

In interviews, many students who had come to Oak Bay to complete their high school requirements in courses on the folk high school's "general track" (*allmänna linjen*) after dropping out of formal high school (*gymnasiet*), spoke to the negative impacts that increasingly high-pressure environments in formal high schools had had in their own mental, emotional, and social experience.

In an interview at the beginning of the year, Kaspar, a softspoken, gentle participant in the "Being Human" course, who was very attentive to those around him, told me how his own struggles with depression and anxiety were rooted at least in part in the pressure he had felt since entering formal high school (*gymnasiet*) to choose and succeed in a path of study that would open desirable study and work opportunities for him later. Kaspar told me that he had left formal high school twice, once after enrolling in an industrial technology track and the next time after starting over in a humanistic and social studies track, facing increasing struggles with his mental health each time. I asked him, "Can you say a bit more, if you want – so when you

started high school, the first time you left, was it because the subject wasn't a good fit for you? Or was it also something with how you felt (*mådde*)?"

Kaspar explained, "So the first time, I didn't feel so bad (*mådde jag inte så dåligt*), but I wasn't so interested in the subject, it was industry, with tons of machines and welding…I had thought it was just technology at first, so later I regretted my decision (*jag ångrade mig*). I couldn't imagine working in a company just making machinery, it wasn't for me. There wasn't anything in particular that happened, but rather everyone just sat at their computers, talked as little as possible, basically, and there was nowhere you could go during the day to meet people, it was just that people would, like robots, sit there and work, finish, and then go home. I was very young then, I dropped out (*hoppade av*) the first year. Then I thought I'd switch tracks and try again in the second year. But I was sick then (*jag var sjuk då*), had been sick for a while, actually, and when I changed tracks, I felt bad again (*mådde jag dåligt igen*), so I couldn't really continue to go to school and dropped out again…The humanistic orientation suited me better, but it was being at school that wasn't so good, maybe."

I asked, "Can you say what didn't feel good (*kändes inte bra*) at school?"

Kaspar answered, "I don't know – the social environment (*omgivningen*), the teachers, and those that I interacted with during the week, they were surely good people but I don't know, it felt just so odd and strange then (*det kändes då, så udda och konstigt*) to be there in that situation, I couldn't imagine being there for three more years."

I asked, "And when you started to feel bad (*att må dåligt*), what was that like, what did you feel then?"

Kaspar responded, "I don't know. Depressed (*deprimerad*). Anxiety (*ångest*) too. I didn't have it especially tough or anything like that, no. It just felt odd, strange, not right."

Kaspar's story illustrates how for many young adults who eventually make their way to the folk high school, the structure of formal high school education (*gymnasiet*) is detrimental to their well-being. This is partly because in Sweden, students are required to choose a major field

of focus already at the high school level, which delimits future study and work possibilities (akin to the requirement to choose a major in US higher education). These emphases, which include industrial technology, pre-nursing, media, and social sciences, give Swedish high school students the required prerequisites to specialize in one or more vocational or higher-education tracks after graduation. Many of the students in my study recounted feeling undue pressure to choose their high school – and thus, in some way, future career – emphasis at the end of middle school. This led a number of students to switch high school (*gymnasiet*) tracks one or more times, which posed mental health challenges because it often required switching schools, being thrown into a completely new social environment, and adding an extra year of schoolwork to their time to graduation. These combined structural pressures pushed many of the students to drop out of formal high school, and in a developmental period which is already often socially stressful, likely exacerbated preexisting vulnerabilities to mental unwellness.

Julia, another student in the "Being Human" course, a lithe and energetic student with pink-streaked hair who wore her feelings on her sleeve and always had a story to tell, also described how formal school had affected her negatively in an interview at the beginning of the year. She told me she had dropped out of high school after struggling to fit into the social and learning environment while living with ADHD, which impacted not only her ability to focus but also led to mood fluctuations and difficulty filtering what she expressed to others. As a result, she faced bullying with her classmates "call[ing] me mean things. They said I was a whore, and things like that. They said very evil things to me." Describing the intense social pressures to conform she had felt in high school, and which she extrapolated that many of her classmates must also have felt, she said, "today in Sweden, young people today, we're very, like, there are many who want to have a lot of money, get rich. You want to work out, exercise a whole lot, and it's really common for young women to get botox and want to have plastic surgery. You dream so much about wanting to become something. And you have unattainable dreams, and illusions basically. And I've thought about this a lot with makeup- especially when it's become so much

that you should do botox and stuff like that. It's gone too far. It's not okay. It's destructive. That you don't like *yourself*, if you'd change your body. You injure yourself, you don't like yourself for what you are, you feel that you have to change yourself because you don't think you're good enough. But at some point - at some point you have to think, hello, what am I doing? Do I really need to work out 5 or 10 times every week? Is it for my own sake? Or for others' sake?"

I responded, "That sounds really hard! With all of those pressures, what do you think about the situation with mental health in society?"

Julia answered, "I think it's totally- it's *bad* in Sweden today. You don't get the help you need. You don't get it. And I've been in the psychiatric system a whole lot, and gotten a lot of help, so I have a lot of experience with that. And what they do today, if it goes on so long that you feel bad enough (*mår så dåligt*) that you need to be committed (*läggas in*), then you end up in a department where you just *go* there, basically, and you don't get any help, you don't get anyone to talk with, nothing. You get medicines. Like – 'Take pills, and everything will be fine.' And then you end up with an addiction. So they never find any strategies or ways to help people feel better (*må bättre*), but rather instead stuff them full with medicines, and I don't like that. Medicines don't help. Antidepressive medicines should help with depression, but I don't think so. They don't do that, they just make it worse, because they dampen your feelings. I think you need to *talk* with someone. You need to be *seen*. (*Man behöver bli* sedd). You need to *talk* with someone. You need to *do* things (*Man behöver* göra *saker*). You have to get *help* in understanding what it is that isn't good. But now it's that you should take a bunch of medicines and then expect that to solve everything. So I think it's wrong, that it shouldn't be- I think it shouldn't be okay to just give out medicines willy nilly (*hur som helst*). And then if you have ADHD, or whatever it may be, what should you do when it can take two to three years before you get a diagnosis? So imagine, if you're schizophrenic, you have to go around hearing voices for three or four years before you get medicine. So, it's a very bad style (*stil*). Very, very bad." Julia points out how, in recognizing mental health as only an individual and medical problem, rather

than a social and interpersonal problem, dominant social discourses – which are mirrored in the formal mental health care system – do not recognize the underlying sources of nor provide adequate resources for dealing with mental unwellness.

Sofia, another participant in the "Being Human" course, who had bright red hair and was at once intuitive, serious and reflective as well as spontaneous and playful, had also dropped out of high school after feeling that the social environment had negatively impacted her mental health. In an interview at the beginning of the school year at Oak Bay, she agreed with Julia's indictment that social formations such as schooling in Sweden give rise to mental unwellness, as well as Julia's assessment that the formal mental health care system may even do further harm in attempting to treat mental ill-health. She told me that in formal high school (*gymnasiet*) and since then, "I've felt very bad (*jag har mått väldigt dåligt*). I got very tired of school (*skoltrött*), and it wasn't so often that I *went* to school. In high school I was there the first year and then I gave everything and I gave all my energy and then the second and third year I was gone more and more and the third year I almost wasn't there at all. School hasn't really been my thing - I've never felt that I knew who I should be in school, because it's been very cliqueish."

When I asked her if she could draw on her own experiences of having "felt very bad" (*har mått väldigt dåligt)* to reflect on the issue of mental health in Swedish society more broadly, she described a deep dissatisfaction with the medicalization of mental illness in Sweden and what she perceived as a systemic public failure to provide people with non-medical resources that would support their feeling well. She said, "It feels like people talk about [mental unwellness] more now than they did five years ago, and more now than ten years ago, fifteen years ago - so every year it becomes a less taboo-laden subject if you feel mentally unwell (*psykiskt dåligt*). And that's of course very positive, I think. Because you have to talk about it - if you yourself feel bad (*om man själv mår dåligt*) and everyone else around you is doing well psychologically (*har det bra psykiskt*) and feels good (*mår bra*) all the time, then you feel even worse (*mår man ännu sämre*). So I think it's really nice that you can relate to others - but if you think about how

society deals with people who feel mentally unwell (*människor som mår psykiskt dåligt*), I think it's a catastrophe. I think it's really bad that you're supposed to just get, like, 'happy pills' and they should save you - because they don't *do* that. Because I myself have researched a little bit about these opiates that are supposed to raise your serotonin level and some do it, but there are also tablets that block your brain when it sends out signals between different receptors - so that instead of it going up and down like this, when you measure it, it goes like this, in a flat line, and when you stop taking those pills, it goes even lower. So I think that's just a way for us to postpone the problem.

"And then you know I have that experience of my sisters - those two who have been in open psychiatry. And one of them had to wait for four years before getting a diagnosis, and the other one's in the third year now, and they say that, 'Yeah, we're sad, but the wait is so long,' and they don't have resources, and I think that we must have more resources for mental illness (*psykisk ohälsa*) because it has to do with how we're seeing that people start using drugs (*droger*), for example - either they do it because they feel mentally unwell (*mår psykiskt dåligt*) or they feel mentally unwell because they get stuck in those kinds of addictions. And that's also one of those kinds of things that I don't think we talk about, or not in the right way - you always hear that you shouldn't use drugs - but not why not, and what it does in here [points at her head]. But it's hard, because the way society frames it (*när vi ser det från samhället*) it often becomes as if - it's a bit like it's a certain category of people, that they end up there [addicted and struggling with feeling mentally unwell], and they get bounced back and forth between different places, and there's no one who can really do anything. I think it's a bit scary, because who knows - anyone can end up in that kind of situation, and I've seen what kind of help exists there [in the psychiatric system], which can be a bit, 'Oh, shit, scary! – I have to help myself because I can't trust that society can help me.' A bit like that, I feel."

As many staff quoted above explicitly do, and Kaspar, Julia, and Sofia implicitly do, state-level discourse via the Swedish National Folk Education Council also links widespread

individual distress to neoliberal forces – including a mental health care system that tends to reinforce rather than challenge advanced capitalism's individualizing effects – in understanding increases in unwellness among young adult folk high school participants. Literature from the National Folk Education Council describes how folk high school student demographics have shifted as in the present, "Society is becoming a marketplace on even more levels [and] citizens…are increasingly reduced to the role of consumer or customer"; in turn, "the downside of [this increasing] individualization is often loneliness, isolation and low self-esteem" (Folkbildningsrådet 2013: 31-32).

The folk high school as mental health promoting

As a result, the National Folk Education Council casts responding to contemporary social forces that exacerbate mental unwellness as a key contemporary task for folk high schools. Vidar, who works on folk high school policy in a state-level organization, illustrated how even as the welfare state shrinks, increasing public spending is being directed toward folk high schools as one arena – alongside formal mental health care – in which the negative mental health effects of decreasing social support can be addressed. Vidar said, "Swedish folk high school education has never been so big as it is now. And it's growing. Because the state thinks that [what we're doing] is good (*staten tycker att det här är bra*), and wants the folk high school to grow, so we're going to develop 5,000 new student places in 2018." Lars, a friendly Oak Bay administrator who wore earth tones, emphasized the intent behind this spending in providing care specifically for young adults who have become increasingly structurally vulnerable in Sweden's contemporary social and economic landscape. He explained that folk high schools can't use increased funding to expand in whatever areas they choose, but rather the state has earmarked budget and placement increases specifically for the "general track" (*allmänna linjen*) which offer high school completion courses targeted at the most structurally vulnerable students. Lars said, "society is putting pressure on the folk high school. The leadership is saying all the time that the general track (*allmänna linjen*) should get bigger. 'Take care of (*ta hand*

om) those who haven't finished high school.'" In folk high schools, such discourses of care foregrounded attending to student wellness as a priority.

Folk high schools and the formal mental health system, then, are tasked with responding to some of the same problems. Yet the care that folk high schools provide in an attempt to address mental and emotional suffering is quite different from the clinical models of care in psychiatry and allied mental health care fields. In stark contrast to the individualized, medicalized mental health interventions that Julia and Sofia describe as characteristic of the Swedish mental health care system, the Swedish National Council on Folk Education, as well as administrators and teachers at Oak Bay and other folk high schools I visited, locate folk high schools' possibilities for addressing mental unwellness in their potential for catalyzing social connection, casting them as "route[s] out of alienation to inclusion" (Folkbildningsrådet 2013: 8).

The colloquial concept of *mående*[14], which might be loosely translated into English as "feeling" and has physical, mental, and emotional components, provided a non-psychiatric idiom for the school to approach the project of supporting and improving students' mental health through practices of care. Many Oak Bay students and staff cast the folk high school as counter-cultural in its emphasis on placing mental health in reflective social context, as the everyday use of concepts of "feeling bad" (*att må dåligt*) and "feeling good"[15] (*att må bra*) at school worked to emphasize the intertwined social and existential dimensions of (un)wellness. By the accounts of many of my interlocutors, the folk high school had unique potential for promoting and improving mental health precisely because it was a *non*-medical space, where a focus on interpersonal encounters facilitates personal reflection and growth in the context of

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[14] While in the United States, "How are you?" is among the most common greetings, in Sweden, one of the most typical greetings, is, "Hur mår du?" (How do you feel?).

[15] While the closest literal translation of *att må bra* is "to feel good," in everyday speech this would also correspond to "to feel well," where the latter translation allows more of the actual complexity bundled into this term in the way it is used in Swedish to be reflected in English. I use both translations in the chapter. Likewise, *att må dåligt* translates literally as "to feel badly," but the way it is used in Swedish also lends itself to be translated as "to feel bad" or "to feel unwell" in English.

deepening social connections.

A number of students explicitly described the folk high school, from the beginning, as a place for becoming "well" in holistic social and existential terms, remedying ills caused or exacerbated by normative formal education, work, and health structures. For example, when I asked Sofia, "I'm curious about the connection between how you feel and school. So both before now and also now…does it feel different here [at Oak Bay]?" She responded, "Well, I think it feels really positive here. I actually talked with someone in our class about this - about how it feels like we all have a big *meaning* (*en stor* mening) in terms of being here together - and it feels like you have to help out and lift each other up (*hjälpa till och lyfta varandra*), and if someone feels bad (*mår dåligt*), we can help if we see it and perhaps just ask, do you want to hang out with us, or - stand up in some way. So it feels like we're a little - people come here who need to be healed, and we are people here who are going to heal [each other], and we're going to be helped out (*det kommer människor hit som behöver bli healade och vi är människor här som ska heala och vi komma hjälpas åt*)."

In another beginning-of-the-year interview, Matteo, who had experienced familial trauma in his childhood that had deep and lasting impacts on his mental health and his ability to build trusting relationships, as well as making it very difficult for him to succeed in formal education, told me, "So I think my plan as far as studies is, I'll do the easy subjects first, so I have more time for the difficult ones. And besides that, I'm generally not focused on the studies at all. My focus is on the after school activities, like, doing something with classmates, or trying to connect people, in that way, that's my focus. Because I think focusing on that in the first year will help me become much more myself than I've been before. So it'll help me kind of reclaim my human side, my emotional side, my personal side. Because I've always had to be like, logical, and grown-up, you know? So I've always had that mindset, but I've never had the freedom of being me, or finding out who I am, in a way." Similar to Sofia's description of the school, Matteo

saw Oak Bay as a social setting where he might experience personal healing forged through actively inhabiting the school's unique infrastructure for interpersonal relating.

In separate interviews, Per, a long-time and well-loved teacher at Oak Bay, Vidar, working at the state level, and Lars, a down-to-earth administrator at Oak Bay, described how the folk high school's foundational philosophical framework lent itself to fostering mental health, making it an appropriate place to address the current rising tide of unwellness in the student body, even without this needing to be an explicit goal. One afternoon as we chatted in the teachers' office, Per told me that 'One of the folk high school's main tasks is to save people who feel unwell (*rädda människor som mår dåligt*)!' He explained that 'The folk high school is the "third leg" (*tredje ben*) in mental health care. Medicine is the "first leg" for addressing mental health, therapy is the "second leg," and social context (*social sammanhang*) is the "third leg." It makes no difference,' Per told me, 'to get therapy and medicine if then you sit in your room all day and don't do anything or meet anyone. Being at the folk high school gives people a social environment and something *to do*.' The folk high school's basic social infrastructure, in Per's understanding, was itself conducive to fostering mental health by bringing people together in a supportive social environment. In his view, a major thing that helped young people feel better (*må bättre*) at Oak Bay was making friends with others in their classes and building a support network. A main part of the teachers' job, according to Per, was to facilitate this building up of community among the students, although the teachers could only do so much toward supporting this, and the rest the students had to do – and often did – themselves. Per underscored that it didn't work to think that young people who dropped out of high school due to struggles with mental ill-health must first get better and then resume studying. Rather, he explained, young people had to get well *through* studying in the folk high school's social environment.

In an interview in his Stockholm office, Vidar added more context to Per's theory, telling me that Swedish folk high schools were founded on the basic ideas and values of holistic

education,[16] and have long had a strong emphasis on "humans' possibilities to develop and grow, to build on what is collective and shared, where the dormitories have been very important – it's a different type of environment for learning and development, and human growth and maturation (*mänsklig växt och mognad*)." He told me, "I believe folk high school education has [since its inception in the late 1800s] been very much characterized by people who are interested in people (*människor som är intresserade utav människor*), a humanistic interest in relating in the form of the personal encounter (*det personliga mötet*), an interest in two subjects meeting one another (*två subjekt som möter varandra*). You don't objectify the student, but rather there is a subject-subject encounter (*ett subjekt-subjekt möte*). And there's a focus on people being *allowed* to fail (*människor* får *misslyckas*), and to succeed, in a secure/comfortable (*trygg*)[17] environment." Vidar explained that the fact that the folk high school has always had "these sorts of foundational values (*grundvärden*), built on this relational focus (*relationsfokuseringen*)," means that even though the student body has changed through time, "Swedish folk high schools have always fulfilled a function for groups with a need to become established and to be integrated in society in some way (*har alltid fullt en funktion för grupper med behov av etablering och att integreras i samhället på något sätt*)."

Like Per and Vidar, Lars framed mental health care as an issue of social integration, understanding folk high schools to be healing because they provide spaces to establish relationships and wider social connections. Lars told me, "Integration isn't only – if someone had sat in Eskilstuna [a Swedish city] and played computer games for five years, supported by social services (*socialförsäkring*), that person might need just as much [as someone who has migrated from outside Sweden] to come into the warmth in human community (*komma in i*

[16] This notion of holistic education is denoted by the word *bildning* in Swedish, and *bildung* in German, as might be more familiar for many readers.
[17] *Trygghet* (security/comfort), or *trygg* in its adjective form (secure/comfortable), is a difficult-to-translate concept that connotes ideal material, social, and existential conditions in a Swedish social democratic value framework. I discuss its relevance to local practices of care and understandings of well-being briefly later in this chapter and in more depth in chapter five.

värmen i människors gemenskap) and in language, talking – one might know Swedish but not communicate with people, not hang out with anyone or really interact with anyone. Or, in any case, one might feel that they're outside of society (*man känner sig utanför samhället kanske*). So in some ways I think that there's a big difference with integration when one has a language barrier, but we work with integration of *everyone* here (*jobbar vi med integration av* alla *här*). To get people together to start talking." He reflected further on how students struggling with mental ill-health respond to the school's social environment, saying, "I've thought that for the young people who there's been in some way the most work around (*mest jobb kring*), who have a lot of baggage with them that they're dealing with – and it can't be too much so that it becomes the only focus at the school, but this is also a place people can come with a lot of baggage – it's often those people for whom this year or years at the school has *meant* most…not [necessarily] those who have *learned* the most, but rather those for whom it's meant self-confidence (*självkänsla*). And there is something in that *mix* of people, which is very meaningful (*betydelsefull*) for that target group [who need more support]… [We want to keep] it a mix of people (*en människor blandning*) up here, [because] I think that can contribute to that feeling of a kind of human melting pot (*mänsklig smältdegel*) which forms this environment."

Vidar, sharing Per's and Lars' opinion that the folk high school's best resource to help people struggling with mental health issues lay in bringing them into contact with diverse peers in a larger group, expressed worry during our interview that, as folk high schools welcome an increasing number of students who need mental health support, specialized programs and resources focused specifically on this target group have begun to proliferate. He cautioned, "We must ensure that (*värna om att*) folk high schools' foundational pedagogical idea (*grundläggande pedagogiska idén*) will be able to cope with (*hantera*) this…I hope that we can, with our fundamental folk high school pedagogy (*grundläggande folkhögskolepedagogik*) integrate these people in the environment (*integrera dessa människor i miljön*), that they can be just one part in the group (*en del i gruppen*), and we don't make any big deal out of, 'Oh, you

have ADHD,' or 'You've been on sick leave (*sjukskriven*) for several years,' or 'You've been out of the labor market for a long time.'"

Many other staff's and students' accounts align with those shared here, painting a picture of the folk high school itself as a "caring institution" (Noddings 2013), meaning that the institution as a whole is set up in a way that affords person-centered caring relations. Indeed, Oak Bay's overarching material, social and existential infrastructure does this in multiple ways, by offering: 1) financial support which most students in high-school completion courses receive from the state to attend school, 2) dormitory housing for roughly half of the student body that lives on campus, which allows many students to gain independence from living with family for the first time and offers shared spaces for socializing and developing routines of self- and mutual care through cooking and hanging out, 3) collective daily coffee breaks (*fika)* and conversations over meals in the cafeteria, 4) the natural environment of sea and forest, where students take walks to engage in independent and collective reflection, 5) evening and weekend social activities that bring students from across the school together to build relationships outside of class, and of course, being a school, 6) pedagogies that prioritize human encounters and relationships as well as respond positively to a wide range of learning and emotional styles which may have hindered students in their earlier experiences at formal schools.

Pedagogies of care: "It has to do with the* encounter*"

In this chapter, I focus mainly on the last dimension listed above that characterizes the folk high school as a caring institution – pedagogies that prioritize human encounters and relationships – which I conceptualize as "pedagogies of care." These pedagogies are not always explicit objects of focus or even concrete strategies, but rather shape teachers' everyday interactional repertoires, permeating teachers' and students' interactions inside and outside of the classroom in ways meant to enhance students' feeling of wellness on the terrain of their social relationships. In using the term "pedagogies of care," I draw on Sam Paldanius' (2014), term "pedagogy of recognition," which he argues characterizes the teaching and learning

environment in Swedish folk high schools. In examining recognition as central to folk high school institutional life, Paldanius refers to the same foundational folk high school values that Vidar describes above, based on, in Vidar's words, "a humanistic interest in relating in the form of the personal encounter, an interest in two subjects meeting one another." The practices of recognition that Paldanius studied are also central to many of my interlocutors' understandings of the folk high school; however, I choose to foreground "care" as the defining feature of this pedagogical mode, given my observation that practices of recognition are key to enacting local understandings of care in this setting, and are used intentionally in service of cultivating local ideas of well-being.

As I have suggested so far and will discuss extensively in the remainder of the chapter, folk high school pedagogies of care, premised on catalyzing students' capacity and desire to care for one another through practices of mutual encounter and recognition, locate well-being in intersubjective relationships, social inclusion, and existential reflection. Ulrika, a warm and reflective language teacher with piercing blue eyes and a collection of beautiful hand-knit scarves, who had also worked in the school administration, explained this using the notion of "being seen." When I asked her, "Could you say, when it goes better and better, what is it that exists that influences people to feel better here [at Oak Bay]?", she responded, "when it gets better, and it succeeds, then it's – I think it has to do with the *encounter* (*jag tror att det handlar om* mötet). When you get them to find their own strength in themselves, one part is that they become seen (*de blir sedda*). When one becomes seen, and is also present/included (*finns med*) in a context where one understands that, 'I am important, I'm *needed* in order for this to work.' I'm thinking, in group work, it's not everyone who understands that they're important. But in group work, everyone is important in order for it to work. And I think that when the teachers, in lessons, get the possibility to work with group work in that way, and that the individual feels that they are important [for others], then it can be that they get rid of their heavy baggage." Ulrika was also careful to emphasize that the school's vision of feeling well (*att*

må bra), in contrast to commonplace ideas of individual happiness, rested centrally on the feeling of belonging to a context. In turn, this feeling of belonging allowed people to draw strength from the collective to navigate life's challenges together. She said, "I believe that we have a 'happiness ideal' (*ett lyckoideal*) in society – that we should always be so happy (*lyckliga*) – and everything should be so 'WOW!' And it should be so, 'Oh! I should feel so good all the time (*jag ska må så bra jämt*),' like that. And of course one doesn't get that. Rather for a typical human it's up and down, up and down throughout life. And I think that the earlier our students learn that it's what one does when one is down – that one gets some tools (*att man får lite verktyg*) – 'How will I think when I'm down (*när jag är där nere*)? Yes, well I'll go to school in any case, because then I'm part of a context (*då är jag med i ett sammanhang*).'"

In another interview, Birgit, a former folk high school teacher who had transitioned to working with folk education at the national level, elaborated on this notion that the folk high school infrastructure afforded "feeling good" (*att må bra*) in ways that catalyzed personal development in relational context, linking individuals and their social surroundings in positive feedback loops. Reflecting on her time as a teacher, Birgit said that, "Well-being in the context of the folk high school (*välmående*[18] *i folkhögskolesammanhanget*) had to do with not only that [students] felt good (*mådde bra*) but that they felt good in such a way that they were equipped to always go one step further (*mådde bra på ett sätt så att de rustades alltid gå ett steg längre*) – but never further than the participant had energy to bear – that was very individual for each participant."

Like Ulrika, Birgit was not primarily concerned with well-being as an experience in itself but with what feeling well allowed people to do with one another and create together. She posed, "What is the *effect* of [a person's] well-being?" (*Vad är* effekten *av ett välmående?)* Answering her own question, she said, "The effect of feeling well for one participant is that they have

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[18] *Välmående,* the closest literal translation for which would be "well-feeling," is a more formal, less colloquial way to refer to well-being.

enough energy (*de orkar*) to get themselves to school; the effect of feeling well for another participant is that they finish reading their first book; another can be that one finally solves a math problem that they've been struggling with for a very long time… And then it becomes a well-being epidemic (*en välmående epidemi)* – that's good – that was very much my mission as a teacher to create those sorts of well-being epidemics (*det var mycket mitt uppdrag som lärare att skapa sådana välmående epidemier*), like that, 'Now we're going to focus on what's good because that makes it easier to cope with what feels challenging for me right now as a person,' – and that applied to everything – and one person's gain was always for the good of the whole collective (*en persons vinst var alltid till goda för hela kollektivet*) because then that person felt good – they became helpful and smiling and so on – but to not put any stock in (*lägga någon värde i*) the idea that one should have everything right on a test or so forth, but rather it's where I am right now (*det är där jag befinner mig precis nu*)[19] – and then the completely fantastic thing happens that one as a teacher backs off (*man som lärare backar*) and then it's trust-based (*tillitsbaserade*), everything flows (allting flyter på) and people pump each other up and help each other (*man taggar varann och hjälper varann*) and it's energy and the processes are driven forward and people show care and consideration (*man visar omsorg och hänsyn*) – of course you meet challenges all the time but it quickly turns to something good instead of getting stuck." According to Birgit, as individual students began to feel better, new possibilities were opened for what they could do together as a class; at the same time, people beginning to operate more collectively had positive impacts on individuals. In this model, well-being inspires well-being by prompting students to take up practices of mutual care, becoming more responsive to one another's perspectives and needs.

Birgit's and Ulrika's narratives both capture clearly how "feeling well" (*att må bra*) in the context of the folk high school is social as well as existential, located in reflective and relational

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[19] Saying "where I am" with the words *där jag* ***befinner mig*** summons an existential location, akin to saying "where I am in life." This is opposed to a more literal/descriptive expression of "where I am," which would use the everyday phrase *där jag* ***är***.

feedback loops in the space between persons. Like Vidar and Lars, Ulrika and Birgit were invested in the idea that the school's *general framework* of universal integration and inclusion contained healing potential, and that amidst rising unwellness, folk high schools' foundational pedagogies of care, routed through local relational infrastructures, were key tools for enhancing student mental health. In light of this stance, some staff shared Vidar's concern, described above, that as specialized mental health resources proliferated, there was a risk of losing sight of the possibilities for enhancing student wellness that were built into the broader, overarching organization of the folk high school. Lars told me with mixed feelings that Oak Bay had recently formed a "student support team," which had a specialized focus on student health. He said, "Now it feels natural with the support team (*stödteamtet*), though we didn't think that 10 years ago. We thought then that what was beautiful was that teachers and our holistic support teacher (*socialpedagog)* took care of (*tog hand om*) individuals and the studies. And then something happened that made it so teachers didn't have energy to deal with that (*orkade inte det*) and needed support in that, and we're very happy to have that [support], but in a way it's an unfortunate (*tråkig)* development, too."

While Vidar and Lars worried that specialized student support programs might take away from the ability of the folk high school's foundational "pedagogy of care" to enhance student well-being in more holistic ways, however, Ulrika and others felt that at Oak Bay, the work of the student support team did not necessarily take away from from but rather drew on the school's preexisting pedagogy of care. Rather than signaling a break from the school's earlier approach, they explained, the creation of the support team – all teachers and staff who had already worked at Oak Bay, but now gave a dedicated percentage of their time toward their roles on the team – simply took much of the caring and wellness-supporting activity which had already implicitly characterized the school environment, and thematized it more formally.

Ulrika introduced the work of the newly-created student support team (*stödteamet)* to the rest of the teachers and staff at a pre-semester school-wide staff meeting in August 2017,

telling us that the team aimed to be "health promoting" (*hälsobefrämjande)* in a broad sense. On the blackboard, she drew a stick figure, explaining, 'This is a participant (*deltagare*[20]), and participants are the center of everything we do and work toward at Oak Bay. So that's what we're focusing on – how to best attend to participants, especially those who fall through the cracks.' She added a list of words around her drawing of the participant, which represented areas of focus for supporting struggling participants: "attendance" (*närvaron)*, "activities" (*aktiviteter)*, "studies" (*studier)*, and "dorms" (*internatet)*. Finally, she added another ring of words, representing the support team staff's roles, including, "health inspirer" (*hälsoinspiratör)*, "study workshop," (*studieverkstad)*, "dormitory manager" (*internatföreståndare),* "psychological counselor" (*kurator)*, "special education" (*specialpedagog)*, and "guidance counselor" (*studie- och yrkesvägledare)*.

After the meeting, Ulrika told me that they had decided to create the team because of "growing mental illness in the student body (*den växande psykiska ohälsan bland de studerande*)…[which has meant that] the teachers have had a very heavy situation, where they've had to have a whole lot of student conversations, and it hasn't been enough. And it's made it so that the other students have been impacted also. Because inside the classroom then, the teachers need to focus on those who don't feel well (*de som inte mår bra*)." Ulrika and Lars both point out that growing unwellness among students had taken a toll on teachers' well-being as well, as teachers increasingly "didn't have energy to deal with" (in Lars' words) what had become for them, too, a "very heavy situation" (in Ulrika's words). In this sense, the support team extended the school's pedagogy of care by aiming to support both teachers' and students' mental health in holistic, mutually imbricated ways.

Anthropology of well-being: Placing emic understandings of what it means to be and become "well" in social, cultural, and political-economic context

[20] Folk high school staff prefer the term *deltagare* (in English, participant) to recognize that their students are adults, avoiding the term *elev* (in English, student) because it connotes elementary, middle, and high school age students.

Above, I have illustrated some local theories shared by students, teachers, and administrators, of the social context for growing unwellness among young adults who become marginalized in the contemporary education and work system. I have also begun to illuminate, and will continue to do so throughout the remainder of the chapter, how understandings of and possibilities for what it means to be and become "well" – like the folk high school is attempting to facilitate – are shaped just as much within and by social contexts. To do so, I draw on scholarship in psychological and medical anthropology showing how understandings of well-being reflect, regenerate, and contest sociocultural values and political-economic structures.

As part of a series of broader trends within the discipline, including the "moral turn" and the "anthropology of the good" (Robbins 2013), well-being has recently emerged as a significant theme of study in anthropology (e.g. Jimenez 2008, Mathews & Izquierdo 2009). While emic definitions of what it means to be "well" vary widely, it seems clear from research across the globe that this concept relates to assessments of the 'good,' in terms of what is locally constructed as 'right' or morally valued. Scholars working in this vein highlight how aspirations toward an imagined "good" play a role in shaping life as lived, driving "people [to] orientate and act in a world that outstrips the one most concretely present to them" (Robbins 2013: 457). With this in mind, I join scholars of well-being including Edward Fischer in "tak[ing] seriously…people's desires, aspirations, and imaginations—the hopes, fears, and other subjective factors that drive their engagement with the world," whether or not they always materialize (2014: 5). At the same time, in this and other chapters, I heed Sherry Ortner's reminder that focusing on themes associated with "the good" such as care and well-being need not be reductively positive, if we also leave room to explore more and less obvious and often inadvertent ways in which "power and inequality…delimit and deform…projects of care and love, happiness and the good life" (2016: 65).

In addition to showing that well-being is tied to local ideas of 'the good,' ethnographic studies in a wide range of places have also illustrated that well-being is fundamentally

intersubjective and social. In summarizing this body of anthropological research, sociologist Sarah White adopts the term "relational wellbeing," concluding that "Wellbeing is not…the property of individuals but…something that belongs to and emerges through relationships with others" (2016: 29) "and the context in which wellbeing is experienced" (2016: xii). Ideas of well-being, deeply enmeshed with ideas of what it means to "relate well," vary across time and space because they are shaped by local cultural histories and social contexts. Further, studying well-being as a relational phenomenon provides a lens onto dynamic processes that connect individuals and the various concrete and imagined communities in which they participate.

A number of anthropological studies have linked well-being with forms of familial, cultural, political, and national forms of identity. For example, Linda Garro's (2010, 2011) processual approach to studying well-being tracks the continuous efforts required by family members in a California family of Mexican descent to sustain "a socially embedded and relational view of health as 'family well-being'" (Garro 2011: 300); Claire Snell-Rood's (2015) study of women in a Delhi slum examines how women navigate oppressive family relationships by embodying "a relational strategy that promotes inner well-being" (Snell-Rood 2015: 178-9); and by examining how middle-class Germans draw on discourses of social solidarity to explain their preference for socially and environmentally sustainable products, Edward Fischer (2014) shows how aspirations toward well-being and closely associated "moral projects play into the construction of particular sorts of political subjectivities" (73) and work to "create imagined moral communities" (217). These and other studies show that emic definitions of well-being tend to link understandings of the "well person" with visions of the "well family" or "healthy society" through shared enactments of locally valued forms of sociality.

Yet agreements over what comprises a "well family" or "healthy society" cannot be assumed. As these questions are contested, various local ideas of well-being, corresponding to different visions of family, group, or national identity, can be crafted and positioned as tools in the debate. Indeed, shifting understandings of well-being during periods of social change

provide a particularly salient lens onto new landscapes of debate that often emerge at these times over what constitutes "the good life" and who is worthy of this, often closely entangled with questions of who constitutes the community or national body (Calestani 2009; Chua 2014). Global processes of advanced capitalism have had major impacts in disrupting and shifting understandings of social belonging at multiple scales, impacting existing understandings of well-being and giving rise to new understandings of wellness in response (Lambek 2008: 125).

Although anthropological scholarship casts well-being as relational more or less everywhere it has been studied, what "relational well-being" looks like in practice may vary significantly within and across communities, because different forms of relating may appear "good" or wellness-enhancing from different social perspectives, and because once-dominant understandings of what it means to "relate well" may face challenges in the currents of social change. The specific forms of relating that become associated with relational well-being in a given community reflect local norms concerning culturally valued modes of sociality. In focusing on how local understandings of wellness take shape in Swedish folk high schools in particular, with their unique philosophy of relating and their infrastructure for building relationships among diverse participants, I examine the "cultural formulation, social negotiation, and institutional channeling" of well-being (Mathews 2009: 181) in a state-sponsored educational system. In the following section, I illustrate local understandings of well-being at the folk high school in more depth. I elaborate further on how the relational and existential content in this model of wellness is shaped by a cultural history of social democracy in Sweden, which folk high school practices have long helped to construct and idealize. I also show how social democratically-inflected well-being projects take on heightened stakes for folk high school actors in the face of contemporary social, political, and economic forces that increasingly threaten the viability of social democratic modes of relating. Ultimately, pursuing mental health interventions through popular education provide both an alternative approach to mental health and a very different vision of a "healthy society" than the biomedical psychiatric system in this

historical moment.

In this project, I build on the work of a number of anthropologists in this field who have drawn on Sara Ahmed's (2010) writing to explore "how happiness 'works' [and] what it 'does,'" (Walker and Kavedzija 2015: 7) or in other words, to examine how well-being is constructed in practice as well as the social effects it gives rise to. I investigate how Swedish welfare structures meant to influence wellness do so not only quantitatively (impacting how 'well' people are) but also qualitatively (impacting people's notions of what it means to 'be well'), shaping both material possibilities for and ideologically-inflected understandings of well-being. Only asking "how much" well-being folk high school participants have over the course of a year displaces the crucial questions of how well-being is defined and enacted in the folk school through a variety of discourses and practices and what effects this has for participants' understandings and experiences of wellness.

Working toward "feeling good" together: Local understandings of care and well-being in practice

When I told Alice, who was in her third year in the high-school completion track at Oak Bay (though in a different course than I was), and who brought an artistic flair to everything she did, that I was interested in researching ideas and experiences of feeling (*mående)* at Oak Bay, she told me enthusiastically, 'That's such a huge thing here, *everything* is about mental health (*psykisk hälsa*), and how we feel (*mående*) – they're always talking about that.' She continued, 'I also talk a lot about feeling (*mående)* and mental health (*psykisk hälsa),* because mental illness (*psykisk ohälsa)* is such a big thing for many of us here at school.'

Indeed, the "pedagogies of care" that permeated the school environment made talk of "feeling" (*mående*) omnipresent at school, encouraging students to open themselves to existential reflection through social encounter, seeing wellness and unwellness as socially-shaped states that students could act to gain increasing control over together. Assemblies from early on in the year capture especially clearly how staff mobilized this local discourse in practice,

intending to prompt students to reflect on how they might mitigate "feeling bad" (*att må dåligt*) and cultivate "feeling well" (*att må bra*) through everyday acts of self- and mutual care in the school environment.

In the first whole-school assembly of the year, in late August 2017, administrators and teachers welcomed the students to Oak Bay from the stage of the auditorium, providing an overarching framework for the school as a space conducive to "feeling good" (*att må bra*). First, Ulrika, a warm and welcoming language teacher, and Rikard, a friendly and lanky administrator, described a longstanding ethos of mutual care at Oak Bay that they hoped we would carry on in our interactions with one another throughout the year. Ulrika talked about how Oak Bay had been long defined by a solidaristic spirit, including serving as a place of resistance to Nazism during World War II. She said,[21] 'I hope this school is a place where you will all find your own way to feel good (*må bra*), in ways that fit how everyone is different. You might be the person who feels good when you get out and hike up the hill through the woods,' she said, gesturing out the window to the forest behind the school. 'Or,' she said, gesturing toward the dorms, 'you might be the person who feels good when you lie down on the couch in the dorm common room and watch your favorite TV shows. Or you might be the person who feels good when you engage in discussion about democracy and solidarity and what you can do to make the world a better place. I hope you seek out here whatever it is that makes you feel well.' Then Ulrika passed the microphone to Rikard, who said, following on Ulrika's comments, 'I hope you'll help each other throughout the year. It can feel bad (*tråkigt*) to ask others for help, but it feels good to help other people, and if no one asks, then no one gets to give help, which makes life harder for everyone. I hope everyone really feels supported and cared for this year at the school and by the teachers and by each other – that's the main thing here at Oak Bay.'

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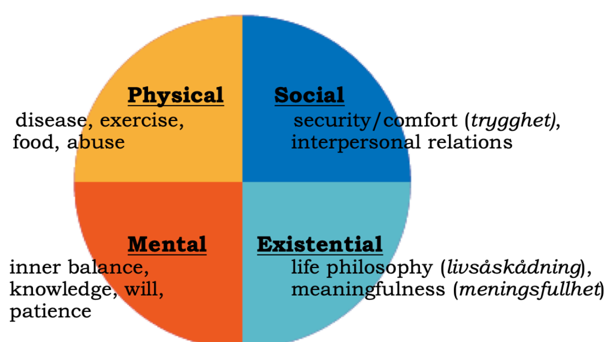
[21] In this scene and throughout the dissertation, I use single quotation marks to denote paraphrased dialogue reconstructed from real-time handwritten fieldnotes, and double quotation marks to denote audio-recorded and transcribed direct quotations. Field notes handwritten in class and later typed up, as well as daily typed fieldnotes capturing social interactions outside of class, capture an expansive, detailed record of events throughout the school year that complemented audio-recorded interviews.

A couple of weeks later, in September, there was an assembly for all of the students taking high-school completion courses on the "general track" (*allmänna linjen*) to hear from Marta, whose role on the student support team (*stödteamet)* was the "health inspirer" (*hälsoinspiratör*). Marta gave a lecture on the school's holistic conception of health, introducing the folk high school as a special kind of environment which was conducive to thinking about and practicing "health" in a particular sort of way. She started her talk by telling us that health promotion (*hälsofrämjandet*) had long been important at Oak Bay, but that it had become more explicitly thematized this year with the introduction of the student support team (*stödteamet*). She began by introducing a way to visualize health in the school's holistic model of wellness, using a pie chart[22] to portray four major dimensions of health:



Marta said, 'We can work on having something in all of these areas, although how we fill out these quadrants might look different for each of us. We must have a balance between the quadrants.'

Then we discussed what influences our health. Marta introduced the concept of "salutogenesis" (*salutogenes*), explaining that this meant the origins of health (*hälsans ursprung*). She told us that in contrast to the medical fields' focus on pathogenesis (*patogenes)*, or the origins of illness, Oak Bay embraced a salutogenic way of thinking, which regarded health

[22] This is not the actual image used in Marta's lecture, but rather was reconstructed from detailed field notes.

as an ongoing process for each individual and emphasized possibilities for health promotion and improvement. ‘So,’ she said, ‘what are the factors that influence health?’ The next slide listed several factors:

- genes
- ways of thinking (*sätt att tänka*)
- life habits/lifestyle (*levnadsvanor/livsstil)*
- relationships/social life (*relationer/det sociala*)
- larger conditions/environment/society (*villkor/miljö/samhället*)

Pointing to the last bullet point, Marta emphasized that ‘these larger structures influence how we feel (*påverkar hur vi mår*). And while we maybe can’t influence society as a whole so directly, we can influence the environment at school (*skolans miljö*) so that it helps us feel well (*må bra*). All of us here *are* our work environment and study environment (*vår arbetsmiljö och studiemiljö*), and we need to be conscious of the environment we are creating for ourselves.’ She implored us here, as well, to be conscious of the fact that we were all collectively in control of creating this environment for ourselves and others.

Marta ended her lecture with a quote from Plato, the gist of which was that focusing on health could be the biggest hindrance to a good life. She asked us if we had any interpretations of what he meant by that. A student raised her hand and offered the idea that, ‘to not need to *focus* on health, but rather to have health simply be integrated in everyday life, can offer the best possibility for a good life (*kan ge den största möjligheten till ett bra liv*).’ ‘Yes!’ Marta said. ‘And we hope that the way you all use this space and build a community here at the folk high school will make this a place where the four dimensions of health – physical, social, mental, and existential – are built naturally into your everyday life rather than being something you worry about.’

Ulrika and Rikard’s as well as Marta’s moves to frame the folk high school for students as a wellness-promoting environment illustrate how local understandings of well-being rest on a common understanding at Oak Bay that people move toward greater “wellness” by actively participating in – and collectively constructing – a social context that feels mutually caring and

meaningful. So, too, in the classroom, folk high school "pedagogies of care," premised on practices of mutual encounter and recognition, located well-being in intersubjective relationships, social inclusion, and collective solidarity.

A final brief ethnographic scene illustrates how folk high school "pedagogies of care," built on an idealized social democratic model of inclusion, saturated the everyday classroom environment in the main course in this study, "Being Human." One October morning, as I took my usual seat in the classroom's large ring of tables, our teachers Hans and Erik,[23] who both had white hair, bright blue eyes, and abundant energy, started by leading a creative exercise to introduce our psychology theme unit. Erik passed around construction paper, followed by a big coffee can full of multicolored pastels and crayons from the classroom cupboard. On one side of the paper we wrote or drew three words or pictures showing how we thought others typically saw us; on the other side of the paper we wrote or drew three words or pictures showing how we wanted others to see us.

Then Hans took a big red marker and drew a chart on the board illustrating the "Johari Window" (*Johari Fönster*) model for understanding how we, as selves, were situated in the social world. The two axes in the chart depicted "I" (*Jag*) – what I do and don't know about myself, and "Others" – what others do and don't know about me. The four boxes that resulted showed different combinations of these possibilities, including what both others and me know about myself, what others know about me that I don't, what I know about myself that others don't, and what neither others nor I know about myself (see Figure 13 caption for more detail).

[23] Every high-school completion course at Oak Bay was team-taught by two main teachers – in our case, Erik and Hans – and a third teacher, who joined once or twice a week – in our case, Elsa.

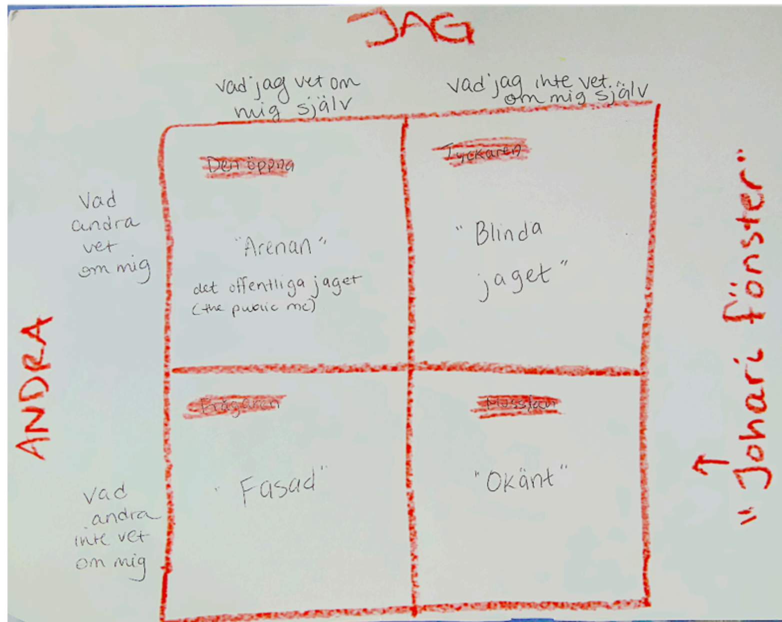


Figure 13 The drawing I made in class as Hans drew on the board. *"Johari Fönster"* (Johari Window): X axis shows Jag (I) – from left to right, *Vag jag vet om mig själv* (What I know about me) and *Vad jag inte vet om mig själv* (What I don't know about myself); Y axis shows *Andra* (Others) – from top to bottom, *Vad andra vet om mig* (What others know about me) and *Vad andra inte vet om mig* (What others don't know about me). Starting from top left and moving clockwise, the boxes depict *"Arenan"/det offentliga jaget* (the public me), or in other words, those parts of me that I know about myself and others know also about me, *"Blinda jaget"* (the blind me), or in other words, the parts of me that others know about but that I don't. know about myself, *"Fasad"* (facade), or the parts of me that I know about but that others don't know about, and *"Okänt"* (the unknown), or the parts of me that neither I nor others know about

When Hans finished drawing, he talked through each of the four boxes on the chart. He said that the "public me" is multiple, because we exist in different contexts (*vi finns i olika sammanhang*) in which *we ourselves* are different, based on the activity we're doing and people we're doing it with. Moving to the next box in the chart, Hans said, 'There's a lot others notice about us but that we aren't conscious of ourselves that we do. We often *don't* tell others this, but it can actually be good to tell each other so that these things can enter our awareness. Then we become able to change them.' Moving to the third box, Hans explained that we each have a "*fasad*," or a protective banner we put up in contexts where we feel unsafe (*otrygg*) being vulnerable. 'Finally, he said, 'there is "okänt" - what I don't know about myself and others don't know about me. This is not only bad – it can also include hidden talents! So try out new things and you might discover one of these.'

Erik said, 'If you ask me, I think this is really exciting! But we want to know more about what you think. Take ten minutes in small groups to think and talk about your take on all this. How do *you* think different aspects of yourselves come into contact with others around you?'

Such prompts into wide-ranging, open discussions were a common feature of folk high school class sessions, intended to motivate student participation through a focus on how our

own experiences intersected with the curriculum and might drive it forward. I talked with Ebba, a confident and outspoken student from northern Sweden, and Kiki, one of the youngest students in the class who seemed less sure of herself. Ebba explained to me, 'It's a Swedish cultural thing not to dare to say to other people when they're doing something they don't realize. But like Hans said, doing that can be good – it's brought me and Kiki closer together. I took a risk to point out something negative Kiki was doing but didn't realize, and I didn't feel comfortable saying it – I don't feel we know each other very well, but I felt it was important.' Kiki nodded, saying, 'I agree – I'm grateful Ebba spoke up. It deepened our friendship.'

After we shared some of the thoughts that came up in our small group discussions with the class, Hans turned back to the board, saying, 'Think about when we feel safe (*trygg*) – how this affects the proportions of our different boxes on our chart, and how much each of us allows others to see us and how much we allow ourselves to be with others. These aspects of ourselves will affect our possibilities for building a genuine group. If we don't allow people in, we end up with a collection of individuals that is not really a group.'

On the board, he wrote: **1+1 = 3**

1+1 = 2

1+1 = 1+1

Facing the class again, Hans posed, 'When does 1+1=3?'

Matteo volunteered, 'When people come together and get to know each other and build a relationship, they do something more together than they could have done themselves.'

'Yes!' Hans said. He explained that 1+1=2 is the result when two people each bring their own thing to the table, but don't fuse it together to create something *new* and creative. 1+1=1+1 is similar to this, but even less connected – existing in parallel as individuals, creating *no sum* at all. Hans underscored, 'It is super important to try to engage in 1+1=3 *all the time*.'

Returning to an earlier moment in the lesson, when the teachers had asked us to think about how others (*andra*) see us, and Silvia had asked, 'Which others?', Erik posed his own

question: ‘Who are “others”?’ Pacing animatedly around the room in the space in between the tables, pausing occasionally to make eye contact with one student or another, Erik told us that George Herbert Mead was a social scientist who had theorized different kinds of “others” – “the specific other (*den specifike andre*)” – a specific other person, and “den generalizerade andre (*the generalized other*).”’ He continued, ‘This can seem pedantic, but it’s very important to many philosophers. And it has to do with everyday forms of power (*vardagsmakt*).[24] When two people encounter each other and one blinks first, it’s about who becomes the *object* and who becomes the *subject* in the interaction. The philosopher Martin Buber,’ he explained, ‘thought it was very difficult to have a genuine encounter (*ett äkta möte*). Buber said it was really hard to get a sense of “I and thou [subject] (*du*)”’ – here Erik paused to look exaggeratedly into Hans’ eyes – ‘instead of “I and you [object] (*dig*).” You [object] (*dig*),’ Erik said, now turning away from Hans and pointing at him with his arm extended, ‘is just a picture of the other we have because we don’t have the energy (*orkar inte*) to really *take in* the other. Too often in the interhuman (*den mellanmänskliga*) realm, we encounter each other’s pictures of each other rather than genuinely meeting one another. Buber says we need to *learn* how to encounter each other without wanting power over one another or to hide ourselves, as often happens.’

Hans and Erik’s lesson in this scene, both in terms of the content, focused on self- and mutual awareness and recognition, and the ways students are encouraged to collaboratively enact this content, through eye contact with the teachers, creative reflection, and discussion with one another, exemplifies the “pedagogy of care” characteristic of the folk high school environment. Erik implicitly presents the folk high school as a space where students can “*learn* how to encounter each other,” building up the personal energy and fortitude required to genuinely meet others in ways that promote collective participation and solidarity, “without wanting power over one another or to hide ourselves.” Hans points to the emotional nexus of

[24] *Vardagsmakt* – in English, everyday power – was also the name of a book we read in the first unit of the class, which Erik is referencing here.

people's feelings about themselves and their feelings about others as a linchpin in democratic social life, explaining that when a space is created where people feel safe (*trygg*) enough to "allow people in" – or in Ulrika's words, to "be seen" as well as to "see" others in one's social context – it becomes possible to "build a genuine group" or social collective, whose sum is greater than its parts (1+1=3). Aiming to mold the way students relate to themselves and one another in a social democratic spirit, the pedagogy of care exemplified here provides a means to reflect and intervene on broader societal power dynamics through the small-scale, intimate building blocks of participants' everyday relationships.

"Feeling good" through social democratic emplacement

Folk school staff's explanations of well-being for students in these scenes resonates closely with what Henrik Vigh (2015, citing Bjarnesen 2013) calls "social emplacement." A metaphor for understanding relational well-being based on physical emplacement in a geographic landscape, social emplacement refers to "being positively situated in a relational landscape" (Vigh 2015: 99). Vigh, like his theoretical interlocutor Michael Jackson (2011), sees this form of well-being not as a static state or even as necessarily attainable at all but rather as an ongoing, dynamic process of struggling toward an ideal of being embedded and respected within a locally-organized set of relations that one values. The content of the "relational landscape" in question, which gives local texture to "social emplacement" in any given place, is, of course, different in Vigh's (2015) study of militiamen in Guinea-Bissau than in Swedish folk high schools, where it is informed by Swedish and more broadly Scandinavian cultural histories.

To understand the local contours of valued forms of relationality in the folk high school, I draw on Sally Anderson's (2008) work on Danish children's sport associations as sites of "democratic enculturation" (6), which aim to "bring children 'into society'" by socializing them into the culturally valued, democratic relational style of "civil sociality"[25] (xiv). Similarly, I see

[25] Anderson explains that, "Joining together as *civil* peers entails acquiring a set of…stances connected with…*civil* social arenas, forms of relatedness, and modes of behavior…The concept of *civil sociality* was…coined to help grasp what children might be learning through taking part in the 'civilizing' process of

loosely shared cultural tropes, including social democratic values, as giving local texture to what "social emplacement" means in Swedish folk high schools, organizing relational well-being in social democratic terms. That local models of wellness in the folk high school are both shaped by as well as fuel social democratic modes of relating fits with Swedish folk high schools' long history as central sites for constructing social democratic identity, including bolstering collective political participation through popular movements and contributing to the popular self-image of Swedes as "essentially democratic" (Dahlstedt 2009). While social democracy is no longer the unquestioned ruling political ideology it once was in Sweden,[26] the Swedish idiom of social democratic values, which knit together material, social and existential dimensions including participatory democracy, solidarity, equality, security/comfort (*trygghet*),[27] and care (Murphy 2015, 45; Tilton 2001, 421), as well as "reflective…self[hood]" as a feature of "modern Swedishness" (Frykman 1993: 268)[28], remain broadly pervasive in folk high schools, being widely embraced by their largely white, middle-aged, left-leaning staff demographic. In this context, a main goal for teachers in cultivating students' wellness through mutual encounters aimed at "social emplacement" is to prompt students to reflect on themselves and their relational capacities, and increasingly orient to one another with recognition as equals, building

extra-domestic sociation, which is of import to both nationalizing and democratizing movements…The concept of civil sociality allows us to explore the more or less institutionalized practices of sociation, commonality, trust, solidarity, mutuality, and reciprocity that tend to be overlooked in macropolitical studies of civil society" (2011: 322; emphasis in original).

[26] The destabilization of this hegemony has accelerated in recent years, as popular discontent with the neoliberal evacuation of the Social Democratic Party (Schall 2016) has been expressed in terms of increasing popular investment in far-right positions (Hellström 2016).

[27] As mentioned in an earlier footnote in this chapter, *trygghet* translates loosely as security/comfort, which in the Swedish context has material, social, and existential dimensions. From the earliest construction of the Swedish welfare state, *trygghet* was a key social democratic value and goal of public infrastructure (Tilton 2001, Murphy 2015). Further ethnographic data in chapter five further illuminates in more detail how this concept was understood and negotiated by differently positioned actors at Oak Bay in relation to local practices of care and well-being.

[28] In his study of specifically "Swedish" emphases, such as the reflective self, Frykman is careful to clarify that, "When talking about national identity I mean culturally transmitted personal characteristics—often tacit knowledge, or what Pierre Bourdieu would refer to as habitus or disposition (cf. Bourdieu 1984). It is formed by the discourse about the national as well as the cultural patterns of everyday life…[It] has to be seen in a context of constant change, as heavily structured by time and by the cultural scene" (Frykman 1993: 260).

a shared sense of security/comfort (*trygghet*) and shared investments in collective participation and solidarity.

As we heard earlier in the chapter from Birgit, a former folk high school teacher turned folk education administrator at the national level, folk high school staff see inherent value in promoting each participant's well-being, as explored in the cases above, but also look beyond that to, in her words, larger "*effect[s]* of well-being" in social context. Birgit described how ultimately, folk high school staff hoped to cultivate "well-being epidemics" that would fuel cohesive social life, in which "one person's gain was always for the good of the whole collective."

In an interview with Ulrika, I asked whether this perspective resonated with her work at Oak Bay, posing, "It's hard to say, maybe, but what do you think it is to feel well (*må bra*), what does that mean? And what is it that one can do when one feels well - what is the bigger idea in terms of working with participants to feel well here [at Oak Bay]?" Ulrika told me, "So I think if you start from the top, it's a socioeconomic question. Social economy is a giant budget item within a society. All illness (*ohälsa*) costs a whole lot of money. And if one can give persons a foundation, if a person gets tools to handle their own life (*verktyg till att klara av sitt eget liv*) – that's what I think the foundation of health (*hälsa*) is. If you manage to pay your bills, if you manage to have a residence, if you manage your basic needs, then education comes in and enables you to make money (*få ekonomi)*[29], and makes it so that you also can feel good (*mår bra*), such that you encounter other people and can be functional together with other people. And society is built on interaction. And if you manage that interaction, more or less, then it becomes health in that way, also...Take care of yourself, then you can take care of other people

[29] While I translated Ulrika's Swedish phrase "*få ekonomi"* to the more intuitive phrasing in English, "to make money," the literal translation is "to get economy." In using the phrase "to get economy," she draws an implicit contrast with her preceding statement, "Social economy is a giant budget item within a society. All illness (*ohälsa*) costs a whole lot of money." In setting up this contrast, she juxtaposes a complex of individual and social health – in which one earns money through working from a basis of health and in a way that furthers one's health and societal health – with a complex of individual and social unwellness, in which individual unwellness drives one to receive money through the "social economy" of the state welfare budget, draining rather than contributing to societal resources.

(*Ta hand om sig själv, då kan man ta hand om andra*)." Further, she reflected, "Folk education's mission is, of course, that people should be able to deal with/manage (*handskas med*) their own lives. But also, not just their own lives. But also, actually, in a democracy, be present (*finnas med*) and influence broader society in a positive spirit. And then [to do that] it's important to have been included in a context that's felt good (*att ha funnits i ett sammanhang som har känts bra*)." Ulrika conveyed a sense of hope that sparking what Birgit called "well-being epidemics" at the folk high school would have even further ripple effects, extending beyond its walls into broader society.

Many folk high school staff, like Birgit and Ulrika, framed individual experiences of mental health – which were seen to emerge from social emplacement in locally meaningful relationships – as springboards for larger forms of societal health. In this regard, Oak Bay staff pursued a politically-inflected form of relational well-being that, building on the notion of social emplacement (Vigh 2015), we might think of as "social democratic emplacement." Drawing on Sally Anderson's (2008) research in Denmark, I suggest that Swedish folk high schools' culturally and politically informed projects of social emplacement "establish connections between social forms and society as a whole," constructing "emic notions of society [that] stem…from forms of small-scale sociality" (cited in Bruun *et al* 2011: 14). Just as Danish children's associations "form democratically oriented individuals and, hence, a democratic society 'of the people'" (Anderson 2008: 6), the local framework of relational well-being in Swedish folk high schools aims at fostering a larger imaginary of national cohesion, through everyday modes of relating in an idiom of social democratic care.

To illuminate the stakes of this project at the contemporary moment, I turn again to anthropological research showing that emic understandings of well-being serve as vehicles for reflecting, contesting, and regenerating local values within larger social contexts. As such, "To understand the cultural meanings of well-being is to understand a society's social, cultural, and political values…Much as culture is understood as being dynamic, so too are notions of well-

being, and those meanings will change over time and with changes to our wider society" (Adelson 2009: 109). Building on Naomi Adelson's (1998) work examining how understandings of relational well-being among the Cree in Canada in the 1990s were tied up with idealized narratives of the pre-colonial Cree past, I argue that folk high school staff's vision of well-being for their young adult students is rooted in an idealized pre-neoliberal, social democratic past. Adelson's (1998) interlocutors identified changing relationships to land, traditional lifeways, and forms of sociality wrought by colonialism as detrimental to their well-being; and in turn, their advocacy for the right to "live well" in indigenous-defined ways doubled as a demand for political autonomy. Thus, Cree definitions of cultural, social, and political well-being, or *miyupimaatisiiun*, provided a conduit for "articulating Cree national identity in response to a continued challenge to that identity" (Adelson 1998: 5); meaning that, "*Miyupimaatisiiun*…[wa]s shaped by—and shape[d]—the contours of dissent" (Adelson 1998: 16).

In much the same way, during my field work at Oak Bay in the 2017-18 school year, folk high school teachers and staff located the source of growing unwellness among young adult students in larger political-economic and cultural shifts, and many Oak Bay administrators and teachers saw the ways people once related to themselves, each other, and society at large in an idealized social democratic past as well-being promoting. According to this narrative, the cultural and material infrastructures undergirding everyday life at the height of the social democratic welfare state, including popular movement and union participation, supported universally inclusive forms of collective sociality that bolstered relational well-being; In turn, cultivating young adults' well-being through attempting to bring back these imagined former ways of relating provides a way to protest larger structural changes and to attempt to revive a bygone social, cultural and political national imaginary through the terrain of students' psychic lives and everyday relationships.

Conclusion

The framework for understanding and cultivating well-being among structurally vulnerable students at the folk high school, described above, reflects and enacts a specifically social democratic set of fears, values, and projects meant to respond to the contemporary Swedish social context, which is defined by a rapidly growing far-right, ongoing refugee resettlement, and continuing neoliberal reforms to education and work that channel people into increasingly demanding paths of training and qualification. While this chapter has introduced the folk high school's "pedagogy of care" through examining how it is used to mitigate mental unwellness and foster mental health, coming chapters in the dissertation will explore how these local practices of care, aimed at "social democratic emplacement," are also applied much more broadly to address various different societal dilemmas perceived by folk high school staff in the present. Where, as discussed in the opening of the chapter, many of the contemporary causes of unwellness among young adults in Sweden today are perceived to be tied to atomizing neoliberal economic and social forces – and further, as a far-right, xenophobic vocabulary has become an increasingly popular channel for voicing these discontents[30] – in addition to responding to growing mental illness, the school's social democratic practices of care and pursuits of wellness are also aimed at addressing civic disengagement, refugee integration, and political polarization. As such, pedagogies of care are meant, at least in some ways, to be anti-xenophobic and anti-neoliberal, intending to equip people to combat these forces through facilitating lived experiences of well-being and wider forms of collective participation and solidarity. These "psychopolitical" projects of care and well-being at school are meant to push back on both far-right and neoliberal right-left consensus[31] understandings of what it means to be "well,"

[30] I have not discussed the presence of far-right rhetoric at the folk high school extensively in this chapter, but examine it in greater depth in the following chapters.
[31] I do not, however, suggest that Swedish folk high schools positions themselves holistically or completely against neoliberal trends, especially in light of the fact that they receive funding from an increasingly neoliberal state apparatus. In the National Folk Education Council's vision and goals for folk education (Folkbildningsrådet 2013), an expressed need to shelter members of society from the harmful social and psychological effects of neoliberal reforms, and even to counteract some of these processes and their effects, sits alongside portrayals of folk high schools' role being to facilitate the workings of the neoliberalizing economic system by preparing and even shaping citizens to contribute to its demands. Yet

rejecting the far-right's ideas of racial and cultural "purity" as foundational to societal well-being as well as the neoliberal emphasis on competitive achievement and productivity (which fits neatly with the mental health care system's individualizing clinical focus) as markers of individual and social health.

Using eight student cases, the next chapter begins to examine how students throughout the school's diverse student body are actually impacted by school projects of care and wellness. It explores how a range of students who entered the folk high school struggling with mental ill-health took up and responded to the folk high school's pedagogy of care over time, illuminating some of the impacts of these projects in their personal experiences of mental well-being and social emplacement. The fact that the students in this next chapter had such divergent experiences shows the double-edged nature of using social immersion as a mental health intervention, raising the question of whether, how, and why (not), in practice, as Birgit attested, "one person's gain was always for the good of the whole collective." In highlighting this point, the next chapter's cases introduce a theme that remains central throughout the rest of the dissertation, namely, the tension inherent in attempting to attend simultaneously to individual and collective forms of well-being.

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while some researchers (e.g. Fejes 2006) see folk education in Sweden as having been more or less completely coopted by neoliberal governance projects, I see this relationship as more complex and ambivalent.

Chapter 3: Was "one person's gain…always for the good of the whole collective"?: Social immersion as a rocky road to realizing mental health

Chapter overview

Where the last chapter examined folk high school students' and teachers' hopes that the folk high school would provide a salutogenic or mental-health promoting environment through pedagogies of care, as well as their well-laid plans for how to achieve this goal, this chapter turns to exploring how extended everyday immersion in the folk school environment actually impacted young adults' understandings and experiences of mental health wellness in practice. First, brief ethnographic scenes of class activities in the high-school completion course "Being Human," which focus more on students' than teachers' perspectives, start to show more about how participants took up and responded to staff's "pedagogies of care" and visions of relational well-being defined in terms of "social emplacement," not always in the ways or with the results that staff hoped. Then, in-depth interview data from eight students further fleshes out the variation in students' perspectives on and experiences of care, (un)wellness, and senses of relational belonging in the folk high school environment over time. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the inherent difficulty of using social immersion and mutual encounter as tools to intervene on mental health, and how this reflects inevitable tensions more generally found in simultaneously attending to individual and collective forms of well-being.

Mixed reactions to pedagogies of care: 'I don't do that with people I barely know!'

The folk high school's pedagogy of care, aimed at fostering the relational and existential idiom of wellness described in the previous chapter, provoked varied responses from students. Many participants were initially reluctant to engage with these unfamiliar forms of care, centered on encounter, while others were immediately curious. Two illustrative examples of this point come out of the first week of the "Being Human" course, when teachers introduced the students to one another with exercises in mutual encounter. The first was a meeting and

drawing exercise. After the second day of class, I described this exercise in my fieldnotes as follows:

> *08/22/17: The second day of "Being Human" started today with a "getting to know each other better" activity. We all went around the room and took about 1 minute in pairs to look at each other's faces and draw them without looking down at the paper. This had several interesting effects. One was getting contact with everyone. Another was getting everyone's name again and how to spell it. Another was looking into people's eyes for a much longer time and in more silence than one usually would. This gave me a definite VIBE of everyone – a really interesting different way to get a window into knowing people – it felt nonverbally clear to me who felt more nervous, who felt more comfortable in themselves/with other new people, who radiated centeredness and chilledness... After meeting and drawing everyone, we each retrieved the piles of drawings our classmates had made of us and chose two pictures that we felt represented us in some way – not necessarily because of resemblance – and had to explain to the group why. In preface to going around and sharing our thoughts about our pictures, Erik emphasized that it's important that there's space for everyone to say something and for everyone to be heard, which has been an important theme so far at the folk high school.*

Figure 2 The drawings students made of each other during the first week of class, hung up on the classroom bulletin board

The second example came up the next week, in a walking and talking exercise, when we took a field trip as a class up the coast to a beautiful viewpoint. On our way there, the teachers assigned us partners to walk with and discuss existential questions. We each received a handout titled "Meaning for me! (*Meningen för mig!*)" which listed prompts to loosely guide our

conversations. It began, “Talk with each other about what is most meaningful, essential, and important for you right now.” It included questions such as, “Why have you chosen to take the ‘Being Human’ course? What do you hope it will lead to?”, “How would you choose to live your life if you could choose freely? Why?”, “What is your outlook on life?” and “Who are you?”

Reactions to these exercises, especially the second one, were mixed. Notably, the day of our walk to the viewpoint was a day when many participants – seven out of twenty-four – were absent. In my fieldnotes, I wrote that it seemed that many people in the class felt vulnerable and self-protective, and embodied and expressed that in various different ways. One participant came to the meeting point, and when she realized that we would be walking and talking about existential questions with partners, said, ‘I actually can’t do this,’ and left. Among the participants who embarked on the walk, while some pairs talked earnestly, following the prompts on the handout, others mostly chatted and joked about surface-level topics, or split apart and joined up with other groups after only a few minutes. After class that afternoon, I ran into my classmate, Lukas from Stockholm, who was quick-witted and often joking but also guarded, in one of the dorm kitchens. I asked if he’d had an interesting existential conversation with someone that morning, and he said ‘No, I don’t do that with people I barely know!’

While many staff members cast the folk high school as a place where it is possible to begin to “feel better” (*må bättre),* most also anticipated such mixed reactions to the school’s approach to scaffolding this. A number of staff commented that the potential for feeling socially emplaced at school was tied to participants’ own efforts and abilities – in some cases shaped by the state of their mental health – toward being fully present social participants within the school’s infrastructure. Many also did not give much weight to the reluctance some students showed to engage at the beginning of the year, knowing from past experience that it was not unusual for them to eventually find it safer to do so over time. Participants, of course, had their own perspectives on whether, why, and how they engaged with and experienced the school as a holistically wellness-facilitating environment through the year. In the next section, I examine a

range of students' reflections on their own personal and social transformations at school through the year to illustrate how school attempts to foster existential and relational well-being through personal reflection and mutual recognition had differing effects for different participants in terms of their mental health and senses of social emplacement.

Pursuing mental health through social emplacement: Students' experiences

Below, brief case study snapshots of eight students show variation in the impacts of folk high school social practices – shaped by local philosophies of care and relational well-being – on students' understandings and experiences of mental health over time. Grouping these snapshots into four loose categories illustrates how (1) for some students, the school's philosophy of well-being translated more or less seamlessly into a reality of improved mental health, (2) for some the process of becoming well at school was slower and more complicated, (3) for others the folk high school environment produced ambivalent positive and negative effects on mental health, and (4) for yet others, the school's scaffolding for improving relational well-being resulted in unimproved or even exacerbated mental ill-health.

Sofia and Eleonora: Contagious well-being

Students in the first group, as we can see through Sofia's and Eleonora's stories, found themselves in positive feedback loops of reflective connection with others in the school social environment, illustrating national-level folk education administrator Birgit's notion, described in the previous chapter, of folk high schools' capacity to foster "epidemics of well-being." Sofia and Eleonora described relatively quick, straightforward experiences of mental health improvement through an accelerating process of social emplacement over the school year, increasingly coming to embody the school's model of relational well-being through experiencing mutual recognition, existential reflection, and collective solidarity.

In line with Oak Bay teacher Per's understanding, described in the preceding chapter, that teachers must support community-building among the students, yet that ultimately students were responsible for actively pursuing this themselves in order for a community – and

with it, enhanced feelings of mental wellness – to materialize, Sofia talked throughout the year about how students must care for each other by creating a shared context of social belonging. Having invested in and actively enacted the school's philosophy of care and well-being in practice, Sofia reflected at the end of the year that her mental health improved over her time at Oak Bay in large part because it was an environment in which she felt seen and which encouraged her to make others feel seen.

In an interview at the beginning of the school year, in September 2017, Sofia explained that she was approaching her time at Oak Bay as a way to experiment with new ways of being social, which she hoped would lead to feeling more well. Reflecting on how she had navigated social life in the past – and how this had impacted how she felt – she told me, "I've always been kind of the class clown before, and that's been a way for me to deal with the fact that I didn't know how I should be…now that I'm older, and have seen that it's been a way for me to handle the social, it's become that it's not *fun* anymore - then you don't want to be that clown person any longer. So now it feels like it's easier to start over on a new foot…But it's also been a very *long* journey, and I've felt very bad (*jag har mått väldigt dåligt*) - well, during certain periods I've felt very good (*mått väldigt bra*) but then I've also felt very bad - so I've been very uneven (*ojämn*)."

I asked her, "And when did that start? Has it always been like that?"

Sofia answered, "Since my teen years. And it's several times that I've thought - I want to get a handle on that (*ta tag i det*), and maybe go talk to someone, but there's a little fear in me there as well (*det finns en lite rädsla i mig där med*), because we have, in my family we have a little mental - tendencies to feel worse mentally (*psykiskt*)…two of my siblings have felt really mentally unwell (*har mått väldigt psykiskt dåligt*) and they've gotten medicine for that, and I've seen that they have changed a lot, and I didn't recognize them after they started taking these pharmaceutical medicines, and so it became that I thought, I'm never going to do that. And I haven't done that - but the problem is that I've felt really bad (*jag har mått väldigt dåligt*)

because I haven't - I've tried to solve everything by myself - and I think that's connected with me wanting to find alternative forms [of mental health care], also."

Throughout the interview, Sofia elaborated on how she saw the folk high school as a place where she could address her mental health needs in an alternative way. When I asked her if she could say which conditions helped her feel good (*må bra*), she said, "I feel good (*mår bra*) when I feel I can be myself, basically. I grew up in a family that is social democratic at base (*en familj som är socialdemokratisk i grunden*) (smiling), so with this idea that you should struggle (*det här med att man ska kämpa*), and also with an emphasis on this humane/humanistic dimension (*den här humana aspekten*)...What makes me feel *good* - that's when I feel that I can relax in an environment where where I don't need to think and don't need to be insecure but rather it feels good *naturally* - and that you laugh, you joke - or, for example, if you have a deep conversation and you get to develop a thought more."

I asked if she could talk a bit more about her first impression of the folk high school, how it was going and what felt good or not so good. She told me that from the outset, the folk high school provided an antidote to feelings of loneliness and isolation that had weighed on her before coming to Oak Bay, saying, "what feels good is that I've gotten new friends - I wasn't so social before. I wanted to be, but I didn't feel that I knew how I should be, so it was nice for me to come here where no one knew me and get to meet new people...it feels good, it feels like I'm a part of a whole (*en del av en helhet*). [Even] people who aren't in our class have friended me on facebook and for me, that's an affirmation (*en bekräftelse*) of that, aha, they *see* me (*de* ser *mig*)! And that's really wonderful. Because myself, I'm not the person who reaches out to people in that way, so I appreciate it when it comes to me. Because I'm a little more cautious, like, 'but does that person *actually* like me, or-?' and that kind of thing."

In an interview at the end of the school year in June 2018, after spending nine months in the school social environment with its emphasis on care through mutual recognition and well-being as social emplacement, Sofia reflected that her initial feelings of 'being seen,' which she

mentioned in the first interview, as well as the healing power these feelings had for her, had deepened through sustained relationships she developed at the folk high school. Looking back over the school year, she said, "so much comes with the folk high school, it's not *just* studies - it's friends, and relationships, and you get new perspectives and new impressions, and you reprioritize your way of thinking…[because of] friends that I've gotten and have gotten close to…I've been able to be a person…and Simone has been my best friend here. She has been like a sister, almost. It's been at *that* deep level of friendship, that it feels like…she picks me up (*fångar upp mig*) when I feel like I'm falling down (*ramlar ner*)…and that's not such a given (*inte så självklart*) that you find that in people, even in your friends, that they see you in that way. And…that's meant *so much* for me."

Probing for more detail in how her interaction with the school's social environment had intersected with her mental health and sense of well-being, I asked, "When you think about the social [dimension] through the year- it's so interesting because everyone, I think, thinks that the [relational] constellations have changed. Do you have any reflections on how that was for you?"

Sofia explained that the dynamic, changing patterns of sociality at school allowed her to experiment with different modes of relating, in ways that helped her learn more about her own relational needs, saying, "Yeah. Those I hung out with from the beginning and was really tight with, that's changed. And that's been because I've hung out with other people, and then it no longer worked [with my first friends here] like it did earlier. But then I've gotten to choose and think about, what's important for *me,* and what relationships do I feel like *I get* something *out* of, and what's morally and ethically right, too- it's a lot of questions like that that I've had to consider, maybe not always actively, sometimes, yes, but also a bit unconsciously. But I don't know, I feel like sometimes I've given a lot and gotten little back, and then I've felt like, it's okay if I let it go, because there are other people there who can understand me on a different level, and can give back on that level. And that's been a bit strange because sometimes it's felt like- it's

a strange mood when you're in certain groups that you've left behind you. But I haven't let it affect me so much (*beröra mig så mycket*). Or, it did that for a while. But not in the end."

I affirmed, "So it feels like you found relationships and put a lot more time into relationships that gave a lot."

Sofia responded, "Yeah- it feels like one got to try oneself out (*man fick testa sig fram*) a bit…because when I only hung out with [my initial friends], it was a lot- we only joked all the time and laughed away all that was serious. Then I felt like I could be a bit more serious with Simone. And we could talk about things that are human (*mänskliga*) and focus on other things and not only joke about everything. And I need that also. So I don't know. It felt like- this is what makes me feel good right now (*det är det här jag mår bra av just nu*)."

A bit later in the interview, I asked, "I'm curious also, if it feels like you've gotten to develop as a person or grow in yourself?"

Sofia affirmed, "Yeah…before I moved [here] and started at school, I was very filled with anxiety. I was worried inside constantly. And then when I started here, and found my place in the group, and felt comfortable, it was like just opening a door and going into another room, mentally. Because then all these qualities came forward that I've neglected for many years, and I think that's why it was became so much, so intensive, and I got really- I took a lot of space (*tog mycket plats*) and also took a kind of leader role as well in many contexts…"

"Does it feel like you've maybe waited a long time to express these things?" I asked.

Sofia answered, "Yeah, truly. I've had a whole lot of this inside of me. But it hasn't only been about performing, but also existential questions and this searching (*det här sökandet*) that's always been there but always has been in a way that I've had a hard time understanding or knowing, what works for me, and such. I've thought a lot about belief, and God, and critically questioned why people should be a specific way to practice a faith (*utöva en tro*). I'm trying to understand other people through thinking about these things…I feel like I have a more relaxed, humble picture of, that you can believe in something beautiful (*fint*) and try to be a good person-

and there I've a lot from Simone, too, because I've said to her that I feel like a really bad person right now, I'm just going around and getting disturbed by these things, and I've behaved like this, and I've hurt someone like this, and I don't know what I'm doing. And then she's really picked me up (*plockat upp mig*) there and talked to me, and that's fascinating because she's quite young, but she's learned that early, and I've learned things through mistakes in life many times. So just to get to be *seen* in that way (*bara att få bli* sedd *på det sättet*), and get to re-learn that idea, because that's the kind of thing you hear, but then maybe forget, because you end up in the wrong environment, or don't set clear boundaries for yourself, or have self-respect, or whatever it may be. But there it feels like I've become a bit more grown up in myself, a little more mature."

I followed up, "So for you, to become more mature, does that have to do for you with where your boundaries lie?"

Explaining how the sense of existential growth and increased well-being she experienced at school both emerged through relationships, especially with Simone, as well as impacted how she wanted to relate to sociality and inhabit relationships going forward, Sofia responded, "Yeah, exactly. It's very easy to get caught up (*att ryckas med*) with other people and group pressure and so on, but for me it's just been like, no, now I'm starting to get tired, and now I don't think this is fun anymore, if for example we've partied, then I'm like, now I'm going to go home and sleep, thanks for today, bye bye. If that was me a couple of years ago, I might have just kept going, because I didn't want to *miss* anything...But in the end, I didn't see it with the same fresh eyes but rather it was like, just seeing that, we're going to fill up an empty space with alcohol, and then it wasn't fun anymore. It was almost sad (*sorgligt*). There's something I want to associate myself with, like we did at the final party (*avslutningen*), where we all in the meadow and danced and it was fun, and everyone was happy (*lyckliga*), and there were so many feelings, and there was laughter, and there were tears, and- *that's* living for me (*det* där *är att leva för mig*), that's how I want life to be (*så vill jag att livet ska vara*)."

At the end of the interview, I asked Sofia, “What is it that you think you’ll take with you from here?”

She said, “I feel a bit braver (*modigare*). I dare to dream more now. I dare to think that it isn’t so dangerous to move somewhere. As long as you have something to do, you’ll meet other people and you’ll meet new friends. I’m not as scared anymore. I’ve gotten more of a taste for getting new impressions…I really want to develop that and dare to break my habits and build new, healthier habits. I hope I’ll find my way there.”

“Thinking back to the beginning of the year,” I said, “I remember that you said you were more often alone, and you became more social here–”

Sofia jumped in, “Yeah, and that’s what I said to [our teacher] Erik, when he asked, ‘How’s it going with you,’ one day when I was totally tired, and I was like, ‘No, I don’t want [our course] to end, and I feel a bit bad (*mår lite dåligt*) just at the thought that we’re ending soon.’ And I said that at Christmas! We’re going to end soon! Because I didn’t want it to come as a shock when it happened but rather to prepare myself, because for me it’s been so valuable to get this social context and be included in it (*det har varit så mycket värt att få det här sociala sammanhanget och ingå i det*). Because before, I was *very* alone, and in a way it was self-chosen aloneness, but it was also because the people I sought out weren’t people who *could* pick me up in that way, either, so it wasn’t meant (*det var inte meningen*) for me to remain there, either. But now I feel like I have a new identity around people, and that I get *seen* in a different way (*att jag blir* sedd *på ett annat sätt*), and I understand how important that is in order to feel good (*jag förstår hur viktigt det är för att må bra*), and I really want to continue encounter (*möta*) new people, and dare to invite to new encounters, too (*våga att bjuda in till nya möten*), because I think it’s incredibly important…I think it was that I needed a change in environment, number one, and then I think it was also that I needed to feel- that my self-esteem (*självkänsla*) got stronger.”

I responded, “Yeah, now I remember that you had said it was really hard for you with

self-esteem in the beginning of the year, and now I've almost forgotten that, because you look so much more secure (*trygg*), or confident."

Sofia reflected, "I think if I'd moved somewhere else and started working, I don't think it would have been the same thing. Then I think the anxiety would have been with me longer. I don't even know if I would have gotten past in (*kommit över den*) in that way. Here [at Oak Bay] it's been more that everyone has been a bit in the same boat, in some way, because people come from different places and everything is new, so we all have needed to find each other (*hitta varandra*) and test ourselves out there (*testa oss fram där*) too."

Sofia's reflections in interviews show how, in line with the folk high school's hopes for scaffolding relational well-being, experiencing interpersonal encounters at school as meaningful deeply affected her orientations both toward herself and toward others. She drew from and fed into feedback loops of relational well-being that the school potentiated throughout the year via an emphasis on mutual responsivity, experiencing continually strengthening acceptance of herself that fueled her desire to make others feel similarly accepted and included. Sofia's changing feelings about herself and others being linked in a meaningful social context were not only drawn out in narrative reflections in the interview setting but also imbued how she showed up at school in everyday life. One morning in late May, near the end of the school year, students were greeted by a message from Sofia as they entered the classroom (see Figure 3). Her greeting, meant to bolster her classmates' sense of feeling well, reflected the school's understanding that a positive relationship between self and others underpins well-being. She included multiple words that affirmed individuals' worth precisely through the capacities they had for relating positively with others in a shared context, writing, "You are important: Meaningful, Smart, Brave, Beautiful, Strong, Fantastic, Helpful, Best, Grateful, Loved."

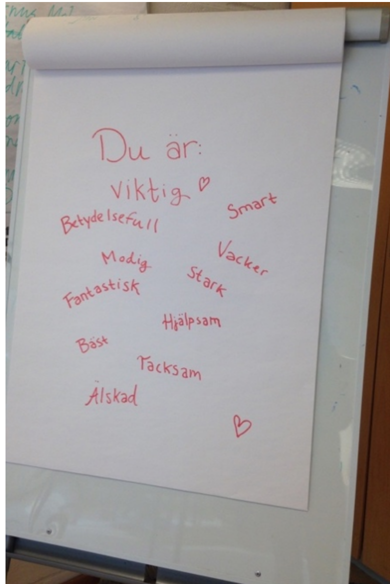

Figure 3 Sofia's message to the class in May 2018: "You are important: Meaningful, Smart, Brave, Beautiful, Strong, Fantastic, Helpful, Best, Grateful, Loved."

Eleonora, a tall and graceful student with a warm smile who participated in another high-school completion course at Oak Bay that ran parallel to the "Being Human" course in which I intensively participated, experienced a similar trajectory toward greater well-being through social emplacement at Oak Bay. In February 2018, when I visited Oak Bay's English elective, the class discussed how their time at the folk high school was impacting them. Eleonora followed on a point that Yussef, a student in the "Being Human" course from Syria, had made about the school feeling like a family. She agreed, emphasizing that meeting people from different cultures and backgrounds at Oak Bay had been incredibly valuable for her. She explained that her parents were from Bosnia and she came to Sweden when she was three and still struggled a bit with the Swedish language, but that she didn't feel so different at Oak Bay. She said that her previous experiences in school had been really different than at the folk high school, that she was left behind because she didn't go at the same pace as other students, and teachers didn't have time or space to attend to her needs as an individual. At the folk school, in contrast, she explained that it felt like each person could get the attention they needed. Further, she said that in her opinion, school was about much more than just reading books, and she appreciated that the folk high school approach resonated with her own view that oftentimes you could learn much more from meeting new people and just talking to them than from lessons.

A few months later, in May, I had a chance to talk more in depth with Eleonora about her reflections on the year ending, in a one-on-one conversation during the daily mid-morning coffee break (*fika*). She told me that she had come into the school year with the goal of completing her high school requirements (*behörigheter),* and thinking that the year at Oak Bay would just be about studying (*plugga*), but that, like Sofia, what she had actually gotten out of the year was much more about the social aspects than about studying. She told me that when she first came to Oak Bay, she had been so surprised by how quickly she found good friends – that it had taken only three or four days to "come in" to the social context. When I asked how she felt about leaving, she said that she really didn't want to say goodbye to all her friends from the year, and that while she was glad to be coming back next year, she also felt mixed about it, because a lot of the people who had made this year what it was for her wouldn't be coming back, and it was hard to imagine the folk high school context without them there. She really hoped that they could prioritize keeping in contact, she said, since these friendships formed at Oak Bay had been *such* an important network for her. 'People here feel like family,' she said, 'and they're who you turn to when you have problems or are dealing with whatever. It feels really sad when you lose contact with people who have been important in your life.' She explained, 'I think people get *so* close in this context because of living together, and seeing each other every day outside of school as well as in school.'

Also like Sofia, engaging with the folk high school's social context had given Eleonora a new perspective on how friendships could be, she said, elaborating that 'The kinds of friendships I've had here are so different from friendships I've had earlier in life. Now, when I go home, I'm not really interested in hanging out with the people I used to hang out with. The people I hung out with before just wanted to party and didn't care at all about school, or talking about feelings or anything. Frankly, it was a really selfish (*självisk*) way of being. In contrast, here,' she said, 'I've been surrounded by people, who, while still also wanting to have fun, know a lot and are interested in learning and in understanding issues in the world, and really want to *talk* about

things, and also have a different sense of inner calm, and strategies to get in touch with inner calm, like meditation.' Describing many of the people she'd met at the folk school as opposites of her, she told me that 'Through friendships I've built here, and the chance to just meet people from so many different backgrounds with different personalities and life experiences than me, who I never would have met otherwise and might not even have talked to if we'd met on the street, I've experienced a lot of personal growth and positive changes in myself, discovering new ways of being, new sides of myself, and the freedom to live more fully and freely and openly. I myself was never good with feelings before,' she explained. 'I didn't know how to talk about feelings or show them to others, and I was afraid of being rejected if I didn't perform a certain kind of toughness and independence. At Oak Bay, though, through time and through many shared experiences with new friends, I've realized that I can show different sides of myself – I can be childish, cranky, or sad – and people will still be there and accept me. So I've learned how to feel safe expressing more and ultimately accepting more of myself and my feelings, in this context where others have met that warmly.' Eleonora underscored that in coming to feel more accepted *by* specific others at Oak Bay, she had become much more warm and accepting *of* others in general as well.

A couple of weeks later, I learned even more about Eleonora's experience of the social context of the folk high school and the deep effects that feeling included in this context had had on her sense of self and mental well-being. The school year would end in just a couple of weeks, and when I came into the dorm kitchen to make tea one evening, I found myself joining one of many spontaneous conversations that had started springing up around that time among students sharing their reflections on the year. That particular night, I sat with Eleonora, Alice, William and Lidia[32] for hours, talking through many cups of tea. Eleonora expanded about her

[32] William and Lidia had already completed their high school requirements – William at a formal high school (*gymnasiet*) and Lidia in a high-school completion course (*allmän kurs*) at Oak Bay the previous year – and both were studying visual art in an aesthetic course (*särskild kurs*) at Oak Bay during the 2017-18 year. While they didn't have classes together with Alice, Eleonora, or me, we had a lot of shared everyday time living in the same dorm.

earlier life in ways that gave more context to our *fika* conversation, relayed above.

Eleonora said that feeling included in unanticipated ways at Oak Bay had been so important for her throughout the year. At first, she said, she had been afraid of the people on the science track,[33] because she thought they might think she was dumb, but hanging out more with them, mostly thanks to Alice leading the way, she had realized that they totally accepted her and she actually felt intelligent around them and stimulated by their conversations. Alice had been the first person she got close to at Oak Bay, she told us, and Alice being there and listening and also offering a different perspective on her own way of thinking (*tänkesätt*) had been really helpful in her self growth throughout the school year and having some deep realizations about herself. Alice, who had been at Oak Bay for three years, interjected that she wouldn't have been able to offer this kind of relational presence if it had been earlier in her own life, but that she herself had come a long way because of her time at the folk high school, which had allowed her to do that for someone else.

Eleonora continued, elaborating on what her friendship with Alice, and with others at Oak Bay, had helped her realize. She told us that she had grown up without knowing her dad, and that her mom had a lot of boyfriends who circulated in and out of the house. 'My mom,' she said, 'depended a lot on their male affirmation of her worth, and I learned that behavior from her. It's been so deeply embedded, and it was unconscious for a long time. I've just been realizing that much more this year.' As this pattern came increasingly into her consciousness, she said that the folk school social context had also allowed her to practice enacting different ways to think and act with regard to herself and men, serving as a kind of social laboratory. 'I never realized men were a problem for me,' she explained. 'I've always been outgoing and I can talk to people, including men – but here at school, and in my friendship with Alice, I've begun to

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[33] As opposed to those in high-school completion courses on the "general track" (allmänna linjen), students on the science-focused track had already completed formal high school (*gymnasiet*) and planned to pursue higher education in a science-oriented field such as nursing, medicine, psychology, or veterinary studies.

understand that the whole emotional complex I experience when it comes to men is my main problem!' Growing up in a depressed urban periphery, she said, she'd had very little money, and as a young teen a few years before, she had been really sad (*väldigt ledsen*) and dealt with that by turning to alcohol and drugs. Older teen guys had controlled the access to these forms of self-medication, and she said that she would flirt with them and used to enjoy the affirmation they gave her. The worst, she said, was when 'I was taken away from my mom and sent around through different foster homes and care centers that were very damaging. I felt like I was punished for my parents' mistakes. I lived in a home where boys and girls weren't allowed to hang out with each other, and of course you're not going to learn healthy ways to interact with the opposite sex in that kind of environment, so now I see that it ended up reinforcing some unhealthy ways of relating.'

Lidia, who had been listening intently, affirmed that people who had it good in Sweden thought that the Swedish system was so great, because they didn't see the holes, but that people who didn't have it good or who were vulnerable and on the margins saw the ways that the system could be damaging. 'You are so amazing for reflecting on all of this,' she said, 'and making connections here that have helped you grow.'

Eleonora responded, 'I've come so far in my personal development during the school year and become so much more conscious about many things that if I passed my old self on the street, who was so shallow, I wouldn't want to talk to her at all!'

The seeming "fit" between the folk high school's philosophy and set of practices for enhancing mental health through pursuing relational well-being, on one hand, and Sofia's and Eleonora's lived experiences, on the other, might be traced to several factors. While they both experienced shifts toward taking on the folk high school's definition of well-being, they may also have come in already sharing a similar philosophy of well-being as the school, as we heard, for example, in Sofia's initial interview that she came in with an idea of the folk high school as a place where participants could help heal one another. They both seemed to actively and

consistently pursue engagement with the school's infrastructure for sociality. Further, Sofia and Eleonora both described the lowest points of their lives in terms of mental health as being several years in their pasts, and Sofia explicitly mentioned that before coming to Oak Bay, she had already engaged in a great deal of personal reflection that gave her insight into what made her feel unwell and well. These facts of their stories might indicate that students who ended the year on this note were also more likely to have entered the folk school environment at a point on their own personal trajectories that made them better emotionally equipped to engage its social resources. Beyond whatever else they might have brought with them, however, it was crucial that from early on in the year, both Sofia and Eleonora were seen as likable by their peers and received positive feedback from others in the environment that helped them feel seen, feeding into the creation of a positive feedback loop of relating, recognition, and feeling well that ultimately buoyed feelings of social emplacement, collective belonging, and mutual care.

Alice and Jakob: Slowly but surely

In the second group, students experienced similar overall trajectories as those in the preceding group toward improved mental health in the folk high school environment, but less smoothly and more gradually, bumpy yet nevertheless upward journeys which were facilitated by structural possibilities for "taking it slow" at the folk school. Ulla, the school counselor, explained to me in an interview that, "I've seen a tendency toward…participants who have a hard time motivating themselves, have a hard time getting out of bed, [and who] isolate themselves. And you can see that they'll need to be here several years to complete their high school requirements (*behörighet)*…But several of them, you can see a very positive development, especially if you know that someone has been home, more or less, for many years, and then something starts to happen when they come here." Alice, who was in her fourth year at Oak Bay, and Jakob, who was in his first year and planning to return for a second year, fit this pattern.

Alice, Eleonora's classmate in one of Oak Bay's high-school completion courses, and who

we learned had been such an important relational partner for Eleonora, related similar positive effects of the folk high school social environment on her mental health, but over the course of a number of years there as opposed to the changes Eleonora described experiencing over mere months. One morning in early March 2018, over coffee in the dorm kitchen, Alice told me why she hadn't finished formal high school (*gymnasiet*) before coming to Oak Bay. She had had a friend who felt very unwell (*mådde jätte dåligt*), she said, who engaged in self-harming behavior, who she had taken care of (*tog hand om*) for years. That had really drained her of time and energy, and in the role of tireless caregiver, she herself began to feel very unwell (*mår väldigt dåligt*), falling far behind in school and becoming depressed and anorexic. When it became very clear that she wouldn't be able to graduate, she was told that she could either go into a treatment program for anorexia or come to a folk high school. 'I chose Oak Bay,' she said, 'because the former principal had written something on the website about human rights that struck a chord with me, and it seemed like a good place to be. It was also helpful that it was far from Jönköping [her hometown], where I still don't want to go back! Part of that,' she explained, 'is that my mom has a lot of struggles and a hard time with boundaries. I can never talk to her for just a short time – it always becomes a long thing and can feel stressful, so I don't talk to her much anymore. Really,' she reflected, 'the folk high school has saved my life (*har räddat mitt liv*), in a way. When I first got here, I had been really depressed and I was really used to being alone, so I would cook in the kitchen and then run into my room rather than sitting with people. Others would have to draw me out. Slowly, I realized that there is space to be *yourself* here, and that felt so different than before. The community (*samhället*) here is really important – knowing that things are going on, even if you don't go, just knowing there is a larger context and community you are part of and places you *could* be. This context gives you a sense of security and comfort (*trygghet*), which has really helped me in terms of mental health (*psykisk hälsa*). I feel much better (*mår mycket bättre*) now than I did before, and I've done a lot of big things here.' She elaborated, 'I started to feel more accepted, I learned to become more aware of my

own patterns, and I practiced working through things that feel hard. And last year, I got my first boyfriend here, and we moved into an apartment together. Those were big milestones for me.'

Thinking about her friends' experiences, she said that many people experienced a lot at the folk high school in terms of working through things that were hard for them. 'Someone can come a long way during their time here, and it might not be visible from outside (*det kanske syns inte från någon annans perspektiv*), but in terms of their life, they've taken a really big and meaningful step forward here at Oak Bay. On the other hand,' she continued, 'so many people here have been through really tough things, and that that can be hard, too – I really struggle with drawing boundaries when people close to me are suffering, because my tendency is to give all of my time, energy, and attention to them, which makes me feel unwell (*mår dåligt*). People are going through so much here that I've been through this cycle several times – even just a month ago, when I had a serious panic attack and kind of a breakdown!' We talked about a dilemma that came up frequently at the folk high school, where on one hand, people felt the folk school was a very understanding and supportive social environment that boosted mental well-being because so many people could relate to each other on having been through hard things. On the other hand, though, the very fact that so many people were dealing with difficult struggles at Oak Bay could exacerbate a sense of unwellness, making life feel heavier and harder for everyone. Such features of the school arrangement could simultaneously both encourage yet also slow – or in some cases even stymie – healing, a point I return to in discussing the next group of students.

Alice related, 'One of the biggest things on my mind right now is that you get so used to (*van vid*) being here, especially after being here for years, like I have, and it feels scary to think about leaving at the end of this year. I'm not worried about my mental health (*psykisk hälsa*), because I know that even if I still do feel bad (*mår dåligt*) sometimes, I've gained more confidence now that I can cope with that (*hantera det*). What I'm scared of is going into the job market and working life (*arbetsmarknaden och arbetsliv*).' When I asked why, Alice told me,

‘It’s been four years now since I’ve worked, and most of my friends graduated from high school (*gymnasiet*) two years ago. I feel behind on the “normal” track of what’s expected. The thing about the folk high school is, as great as it is, we live in a little bubble (*en liten bubbla*). Some people can even start to kind of live in their own reality (*egen verklighet*) here.’

From my perspective, Alice was thriving in the community she had built in the “bubble” of Oak Bay. While I hadn’t known her during her first years at the folk high school, her description made the difference sound like night and day. I knew her only as a gregarious character adding life to our hallway and the school at large. She shared her gift for self-expression with others by regularly contributing original paintings to student art shows, she had worked hard to help organize parties for everyone in the dorms, and I often found her hanging out in the dorm kitchen and living room with friends, cooking, watching movies, laughing, and having deep conversations. I could understand the trepidation she described feeling in leaving this atmosphere, which had become such a secure and comfortable (*trygg*) space for her, and in which she had started to feel so much more secure (*trygg*) in herself and her sense of community, to re-enter the “real world,” where she might be seen as lacking, unprepared, or out of touch. After the long journey to improved mental health, through a series of small relational shifts over time which culminated in a sense of meaningful social emplacement at Oak Bay, Alice was reluctant to reenter the very differently configured social sphere of the outside world, with its pressures for economic success and normative competition.

Jakob, one of my classmates in the “Being Human” high-school completion course, seemed primed to have a similar experience as Alice, having taken what might have appeared to many from the outside as small steps during his first year at Oak Bay, but which felt to him like large changes that laid a foundation for greater mental health and relational well-being. With his tousled hair and quick, mischievous smile, Jakob often projected an air of relaxed calm despite inner feelings of anxiety. In late May, we sat in the dorm living room and talked about how he had felt throughout the last several months in the social context of the folk high school, and he

told me he was looking forward to continuing at the folk high school the following year, when he would be able to unfinished complete coursework from long periods of missing the "Being Human" class in the middle of the year when he had felt unwell (*mådde dåligt*).

Jakob told me that before coming to Oak Bay, his experience in formal high school (*gymnasiet*) had been negatively impacted by his struggles with social phobia (*social fobi*) and social anxiety (*social ångest*). He enjoyed studying, but he didn't really thrive in school because it was hard socially in class, and it was hard to fit in given that he didn't even want to leave the house. Then, halfway through high school, his brother had died. 'I've talked about it a lot now,' he told me, 'and I don't have a problem talking about it. But at that time, I became deeply depressed. I couldn't deal with school anymore. It was a very dark time.'

When I asked him what his goals had been when he first came to Oak Bay at the beginning of the year, he said, 'I needed something new (*behövde något nytt*), a big change (*en stor förändring*), to start over from the beginning (*att börja om från början*). I needed a new environment with completely new people (*en ny omgivning med helt nya människor*), and in a new place far from home. Until this year, I've always lived in the same small town, and I've known many of the same people for my whole life. I was worried that if I stayed there I would end up staying on the same track, in the same situation. Living at the folk high school was important for me because I wanted to try living alone. When I first came here, I wanted to get back to studying in earnest, after trying formal high school (*gymnasiet*) twice and dropping out. Another reason I wanted to be in the dorm is that it helps that it's only one minute to the classroom, because I often have a hard time getting myself out of bed in the morning, and the short commute makes it easier to do that, even when I feel bad (*mår dåligt*).'

Through the school year at Oak Bay, he said, 'It's been really fun (*kul*) to meet different kinds of people who I haven't – and wouldn't have – met before. In terms of the people who have become my friends here at school, we have the same goals and outlook on life – it comes down to what we value and care about. Some people care most about just having a big social

network, but what I value most is people who take others' well-being (*välmående)* very seriously and have empathy (*empati*) – always giving others a chance. People who take life itself seriously and don't get caught up in small stuff but can see the whole picture (*helheten*).'

The previous day, Jakob and I had talked at *fika* (our daily coffee break) about his feeling that he had gotten over the worst of his social anxiety throughout the school year, but was still struggling with it. I asked if he could talk a bit more about what that meant for him and what it had been like for him to work through that at Oak Bay. He said, 'I still experience social anxiety here, which for me is that when I'm in groups, especially with people I don't identify or resonate with, I can really get into my head, and I lose my sense of dynamism and creativity trying to just hold onto my sense of who I am. So despite the changes I've felt in terms of social anxiety throughout this year, I actually still feel like I have the same underlying problem even now. And my anxiety has really affected my experience of studying here this year, being absent from class so much. I've tried all sorts of ways to work on this to get rid of it – exercises, medicines, and so on – but I haven't found a way to actually make it go away. However,' he went on, 'in the specific context of the folk high school, I have met people, for example Ali, who share the values I described as being important to me, and that's allowed me to feel much more socially comfortable here. Feeling good (*att må bra*) has a lot to do with context for me.'

We had talked recently about how much better Jakob had been feeling just over the last couple of months, where he had been attending class most days and eating lunch in the cafeteria rather than spending most of his time in his dorm room. I asked, 'Overall, would you say that you've felt better (*har mått bättre)* here at school this year than you were feeling before you came here? And how do you think things have changed throughout this year in terms of your feeling (*mående*)?

'Yes,' Jakob said, 'definitely – I *have* felt better (*har mått bättre*) here, because I've gotten time to philosophize and think about things (*filosofera och tänka på saker*), and to grow as a person (*växa som människa*) here. At the beginning of the year, I was really lacking people

that I could trust (*lita på*) – and the people in our class, while not bad people, I just didn't have much in common with. So at first I felt like I couldn't relax and build relationships (*skapa relationer*). But since then, a huge part of what's been good here has been living at the dorm, and the very welcoming friends (*väldigt välkomnande vänner*) I've met in the dorm, such as Lidia. In fact, I think feeling better here has been in large part thanks to Lidia specifically.' He explained that this was because 'when I have social anxiety I can be very quiet – for example, keeping to myself and not responding to invitations to join into things – and Lidia didn't give up on me or on asking me to be included! Now, I'm starting to feel a lot better (*må mycket bättre*), and when it's going well in school, and I'm getting stuff done in my own life, and also building relationships with the people in the dorm – these things kind of set off a positive feedback cycle. In sum I would say it's the *people* here (*det är* människorna *här*) that have made the biggest difference.'

When I asked if he worried about his social anxiety becoming stronger again when he left this context and entered another, he said yes, he did worry about that – but that he thought if it did, it wouldn't be as bad as before. He explained, 'I've spent so long struggling with the main goal in my mind of "solving" or totally getting rid of this anxiety. But over the time I've been here, I've come to a point where I've kind of switched gears to realizing that this isn't going to go away. In light of that, I've taken on a new goal. Which is, rather than struggling so hard against this, how can I figure out how to accept this as part of myself and live *with* this as best as I can? When I feel good (*mår bra)*, I don't care too much about stuff and I'm able to relax and not get into my head. But now I don't expect to feel good (*må bra)* all the time, and that's totally natural. It's not human (*inte mänskligt*) to feel good all the time, and *no one* does – life simply is up and down (*upp och ner*).'

Returning to what Jakob had said about having grown as a person over the school year, I asked if he could talk more about what that meant for him. He said, 'For me, the growth (*växande*) I've experienced here has to do with getting a better understanding of the world I live

in (*en bättre förståelse av världen jag lever i*) and of my own tendencies and personality – what I myself like and am good at and need to improve (*vad jag själv tycker om och är bra på och vad jag behöver förbättra*). It feels really good to know what I need to improve, in order to be able to do something about it.' I asked if he would want to say more about anything he had discovered that he would like to improve, and if it felt like he could work on that in the context of the folk high school the following year. He said, 'It has to do with principles and things to live by (*principer och saker att leva efter*), which I've been inspired by in others here. In the past, I've been very nihilistic, thinking everything's just made up (*påhittad*), everything is arbitrary. Now, with the new insight I've gotten here in terms of others' ways of seeing the world that have offered an alternative to that, I've realized that life becomes so much richer (*livet blir så mycket rikare*), and you get so much more out of life, and live longer (*lever längre*) – not literally, but in terms of how you *experience* your life – if you take everything fully seriously (*om man tar allting på full allvar*), even if it's only 5 minutes, but for that time you're really fully *present*. No matter how abstract it feels, we actually do exist in this world, and we can make the best of it and see the fun in things (*se det roligt i saker*). We can try to find things interesting, even very small things.'

Finally, I asked him if he felt as though he had reached his own goals that he had had for the year. He said he mostly had, but that his goals had also changed a bit as the year went on. He told me, 'I feel better now than I thought I would (*jag mår bättre nu än jag trodde att jag skulle*). But on the other hand, I haven't done as much in school as I wanted to – I can feel very, very tired at times and not succeed in getting things done, especially when I'm feeling bad (*när jag mår dåligt*).' Jakob explained that while he had come in with mostly study-focused goals, and to a lesser extent social- and self-related goals, as he underwent social and personal growth through the year, he realized that relational well-being was a more foundational goal that had to be prioritized before his study goals could be met. He looked forward to the following year as another chance to continue to pursue his study-related goals more intensely.

Both Alice and Jakob's cases illustrate how, in contrast to formal high school (*gymnasiet*), the folk high school facilitates mental health by allowing people to proceed at their own pace, building in time to work on relationships – and deal with setbacks – without pressure to perform academically or graduate quickly. Just as Alice told me that, 'Someone can come a long way during their time here, and it might not be visible from outside (*det kanske syns inte från någon annans perspektiv*), but in terms of their life, they've taken a really big and meaningful step forward here,' Ulrika told me that, "There are a few students who have very high absence rates, but *we* know that this person has taken a *giant* step, in coming here, in just being here (*att ändå vara med*), as opposed to sitting at home, which they did earlier, when they weren't here at the school. So that those students, we *let* them- we can go slower. And then maybe they can study here for two years, or three years, and be done. But it can be hard for classmates to understand sometimes. Because then people think, oh, that person is gone. Why are they allowed to be gone so much? But then we know that this is maybe a person who will be here for two years, or three years. And then it's okay, to fail a little, or not go *fast* forward, the first year."

Allowing students to take time to develop a sense of security and trust in the folk high school social context helped some students, like Jakob and Alice, reject what Ulrika described as a societal "happiness ideal" (*lyckoideal*), and instead take on healthier ways of regulating the inevitable swing between positive and negative emotions in the context of feeling "socially emplaced." Ulrika's emphasis that the most important thing for her was that "our students learn that it's what one does when one is down – that one gets some tools – 'How will I think when I'm down? Yes, well I'll go to school in any case, because then I'm part of a context,'" was echoed in Alice's sense that she no longer 'worried about my mental health (*psykisk hälsa*), because I know that even if I still do feel bad (*mår dåligt*) sometimes, I've gained more confidence now that I can cope with that (*hantera det*),' and in Jakob's newfound commitment to 'figur[ing] out how to accept this as part of myself and live *with* this as best as I can…[because] life simply is up

and down (*upp och ner*).'

Yet while students like Sofia, Eleonora, Alice, and Jakob related to the scaffolding the school provided in ways that largely aligned with staff's hopes, experiencing changes in what they understood well-being to mean as well as experiencing an increased sense of social emplacement that supported their mental health and well-being, defined in relational terms; others' experiences were not dominated by this sense of overall positivity. Students in the third group, illustrated by the cases of Elias and Zahra, experienced precisely what was healing about the school environment for students in the first two groups – opportunities for relational connection – as highly ambivalent, being harmful just as much as they were helpful.

Elias and Zahra: Cut by the double-edged sword

In the third group, students' ambivalent experiences of sociality at school add more illustrations of the kind of social dilemma Alice introduced above, about the downsides of school sociality, bringing into relief the "double-edged" nature for many students of relational immersion as a remedy for mental unwellness. While students in this group saw improvement in their mental health as a result of building close relationships at school, deep yet temporary immersion in this environment also evoked negative personal histories with social attachment that simultaneously exacerbated mental unwellness.

The school counselor, Ulla, and I discussed this "double edged" potential of school sociality. When I asked her, "Does it seem like the social environment can either lead to people feeling better or worse?" Ulla answered, "I think both. I've met many students who say, 'Oh, this is so fun, I have friends!' and maybe they're a bit shy, or had hard teenage years, who blossom (*blommar upp*) here. But the folk high school context also supports a kind of education where people talk a lot about how they feel and share a lot of themselves, and that can bring things to life (*man diskuterar väldigt mycket hur man mår och man delar med sig mycket, och det väcker ju ibland saker till liv*)."

My first genuine talk with Elias, a shy and sweet student who had grown up around the

corner from the school and always wore a hat over his thick light brown hair, was during the first week of the "Being Human" class, when the teachers assigned us as partners to walk and talk about what we found meaningful in life. In my fieldnotes that night, I wrote:

> *8/29/17: Elias and I had a wonderful conversation today and discovered that we had both struggled a lot with self-confidence. He is so kind and such a patient listener, I felt really comfortable talking to him and I also felt invested in our conversation since I felt he was deeply listening in an other-oriented way.*

On our walk, he told me that he thought a lot about the future and had trouble being present in the moment. I asked what he thought about the future and he said that just then, it felt good at least in terms of that school year because the situation felt good at Oak Bay, but that he doesn't really know what to think about in terms of what was to come after the year. 'Right now,' he said, 'I'm excited that I'll finally be done with high school (*gymnasiet*) after six years, but I'm also not totally sure what I want to do after. I like living at home at the moment, but I kind of want to move out since I feel like it's not normal to live at home when you're in your twenties – most of my friends have already moved out from home.' When we talked about school and our studies, he said that in formal high school (*gymnasiet)* he initially chose the technology track because a bunch of his friends had chosen it, but then it was way too hard, so he switched to media – which included photography and film – and he liked that better. 'Now, though,' he said, 'I've found out that that's not really what I want to do, so I'm still searching for what it is I'd want to do. I've always really, *really* hated talking in front of groups of people, and that's something I never liked having to do in school before. One of the biggest challenges for me,' he said, 'is that I really have no self-confidence. I don't have any self-esteem at all. Something happened in my childhood that was really hard, and that influences me a lot to this day.' When I asked, 'are there people in your life who you admire for their self-confidence, or feel you could be inspired by in some way about self-esteem?' He responded, 'No…maybe that's part of the problem. I often feel when I talk to other people that they don't see me seriously or take me seriously. And I feel like I can't talk about what happened to me, because whenever I've

tried I've seen that it doesn't help to talk.'

By the end of the school year, in June, Elias had developed deep and personally meaningful relationships with a number of our classmates. Unlike the students we saw above, however, as the year drew to a close, this movement toward social emplacement, far from resulting in increased well-being, brought on an overwhelming flood of new feelings of unwellness. One evening during the last week of school, Elias and I went on a walk and talked in depth about his experience. He told me it had been extremely stressful (*jobbigt*) for him in the past several weeks, feeling that the end was nearing and knowing that we weren't going to have this whole context anymore. Earlier, he said, it had been so nice to have the routine and structure of having somewhere to *go* every day. 'Even when I've felt unwell (*har mått dåligt*) this year and not come to school, it's felt so grounding and important just to know that people are there (*finns*) – that you still *belong* to a context even if you're not *in* the context at that moment. The whole group context and group feeling in class, plus smaller groups of friends, have been by far the most important thing about this year for me. In the end, I probably won't get the credits I needed to finish high school, but I don't care at all about that, because that doesn't compare *at all* when I think about the social dimension. But now that I'm losing that it's so, so heavy for me. The context is falling apart and that feels devastating. I feel like I'm going to wake up on Monday and feel a huge loss, like losing my family – that's how important people in the class have felt to me. This year has meant *so* much for me, and being here has affected me a lot. I've grown (*växt*) a lot in myself this year and gotten to know some more things about myself.' When I asked what he had learned about himself, he said, 'I've been so impacted by how open other people in the class have been, that they've dared to share things about themselves, and that's made it feel safe (*trygg*) for me to think about doing the same thing.'

Elias continued, 'At times I feel good (*mår bra)* and at times I feel bad (*mår dåligt)*, and I'm often unsure why it changes. I don't exactly know why, but recently I've been feeling unwell (*mått dåligt*) more often. I skipped two weeks of school because I felt unwell (*mådde dåligt*) and

when I was home alone, I spent a lot of time thinking about, “Why do *I* feel so bad? And why *shouldn’t I* feel good (*må bra)* also?” Another thing I know now, that I’ve learned a bit more about in terms of myself this year, is that I prioritize others’ needs and well-being above my own. I care so much about how others feel, and I really want to help and support others and want others to feel well (*må bra*). But this can come at the expense of my *own* well-being. So,’ he said, ‘even if people think it’s kind that I care about others, this pattern of always prioritizing other people creates big problems for myself.’ He reflected that, ‘Over the last weeks, I’ve been seeing and thinking about how others around me – like Sofia and Simone – are feeling good and doing well, and making progress in their lives, while I’m feeling bad. And I really love that things are going well for them. I think it’s great for them, and I don’t resent it. But I’m wondering, why am I not doing as well or making progress in the way I’d like to? I worked hard to find a summer job. I applied for multiple jobs and didn’t get any of them – they all told me, “We’re looking further,” and I don’t understand why. And it feels terrible. Whereas other people I know applied for only one job and got it. Now I don’t know what I’m going to do, and I’m *so* worried about the future – what will I do even on a day to day basis in the summer, what will I do in my life? When I see that others feel better than me, I’m happy in one way – in my head – but I’m realizing more and more that even if it feels “good” or “right” to me in some way that others should feel better than I do, in my heart it feels bad and very heavy. So I’m trying to figure out, what can I do about that? And I don’t know. I don’t have an answer yet. I was wondering about this at the beginning of the year as well, and I don’t feel I’ve gotten much farther on it this year.’

In sum, while Elias describes his experience of relational immersion at the folk high school as improving his mental health in one way, in terms of feeling buoyed by a newfound sense of “belong[ing] to a context” and “grow[ing] a lot in [him]self,” feelings of comparison with others and self-judgment that new close relationships inspired, as well as the looming demise of this social context as a whole, also led to him feeling very “unwell” and “devastat[ed]” at the end of the year.

A glimpse into Zahra's experience, a bubbly and kind 23 year old woman in another high-school completion course who had fled to Sweden three years earlier from Syria with no one but her older brother, shows how beginning to feel "emplaced" in a temporary social context can be especially painful for people with personal histories of social uprooting and loss. One evening in March, Lidia, Zahra and I sat around sharing ice cream in the dorm living room. Lidia, who had grown very close with Zahra, living right next door, had earlier told me that she was worried about her friend, having noticed that Zahra, normally quick to laugh and present whenever something was planned, had seemed more stressed, sad, and withdrawn over the past month. As the three of us talked that night, Lidia opened up about her own history of having felt unwell (*mått dåligt*). The three of us started talking about anxiety, and Lidia asked Zahra if she ever got anxious. Zahra said, 'Yes – I feel anxiety all the time, about so many things!' She described deep and incredibly painful, torturous anxieties that kept her up at night – traumatic dreams and questions about the meaning of life and suffering. 'It might sound weird,' she said, 'but I think a big part of what's been causing me more anxiety recently is actually starting to feel a lot closer to and safer with my friends here [at Oak Bay]. Knowing that this is temporary and that we'll be splitting apart again soon is really scary.' Lidia asked, 'Have you been able to talk to people about what you've been through and these experiences that are so painful for you? I think empathy can be important for healing.' Zahra responded, 'I don't know. I mean, actually, I think empathy can almost be the most injurious thing, because it can make me dependent on people. I've lost people that were very close to me, and that's incredibly painful. I try not to be dependent on anyone. Since I came to Sweden, I've really tried to avoid having close friends and to keep people at a distance, but that's been much harder than I thought at Oak Bay.' Lidia said that in her own experience, while anxiety was incredibly uncomfortable, it could also be a defense against feeling even more difficult emotions. Zahra agreed, saying she felt that if she went under the anxiety to the deeper sadness and loss that she felt, she was terrified that it would have no end and swallow her up completely.

This conversation reminded me of another student from the previous year, who I had met on an initial field visit and who students still talked about not infrequently. Faith, a young woman from Nigeria who had made friends quickly with her empathic nature and lighthearted spirit, had committed suicide in the Oak Bay dorms a couple of months after starting school. Lidia, having been at Oak Bay at that time, told me that many students had felt completely shocked by Faith's death and the realization that she had been struggling so much, and there had been much discussion about how her friends and classmates might have been able to act differently. Now, Lidia told me, it seemed more clear in hindsight that because Faith had suffered serious trauma earlier in her life, starting to feel safe and close to people at Oak Bay had been very difficult, because it brought up a safe space to start feeling more in touch with a lot of pain that had been pressed deep down inside. Similarly, I realized, for Zahra, traumatic past experiences of losing relationships and losing an entire social context when she was forced to flee Syria, fundamentally shaped her experience of community-building in the folk high school as one of looming loss, making that process daunting and threatening even as she found friendships that felt good and supportive.

The unique mental health stresses often faced by refugee and migrant students, which we see in the cases of Zahra as well as Faith, above, and Abdul, below, were not invisible to school staff, although staff struggled with how to best address them. As the school counselor, Ulla and I discussed how unwellness had grown over time among the student body, I asked her, "I wonder if [unwellness] has grown with refugees or people who've come from outside Sweden since 2015, have you noticed that?"

Ulla responded, "I haven't worked here so long that I could see a pattern, but I think that for those in the folk high school's 'establishment courses' (*etableringskurserna)* [for newly arrived migrants], I think that there is a very large need (*ett väldigt stort behov*). I know that their teacher has tried to invite everyone to come here and just try it [free counseling] out, and I've said 'Of course!' but there are very few who come. But it's reasonable to assume that they

really have a large need to talk, as they have been plucked up out of a society (*fångades upp utav samhället liksom*), and there are certainly many who have PTSD for example and who are struggling with feeling rootlessness (*kämpar med att känna rötloshet*) and so on."

Brief glimpses into students' experiences in this grouping show how the very same dimension of folk high school life that seems to best foster mental health – sociality – can also be responsible for eroding mental health. For many, pursuits of social emplacement were experienced as ambivalent, as they brought simultaneous threats of displacement into full view. The folk high school's attempts to use relational immersion as a mode of mental health intervention may present especially significant challenges for participants whose mental health struggles relate to the stress of navigating self-other relationships and participants who have suffered deep relational traumas and loss.

Abdul and Kaspar: Experiences of misfit

For students in the fourth group, the folk high school mostly did not catalyze positive relational experiences, as sociality at school was experienced as largely negative. Students as well as teachers described how a sense of misfit could make the folk high school "not the right place" for addressing certain students' mental health.

Abdul, a gregarious student in another high-school completion course who had arrived in Sweden from Syria the year before and had a gift for music and performance but struggled to communicate as he was still beginning in Swedish, lived in the dorm next to mine. In late September, we had an interesting conversation as we stood in the coffee line at *fika* (our daily mid-morning coffee break). I asked Abdul, "How's life been?" meaning, 'how have you been in the last couple of days?' He interpreted the question, however, on a much grander scale and started talking about his whole life – his past, present, and hopes for the future. Fortunately, there was a very long *fika* line, so we covered a lot of ground. He told me that, on the whole, his life had been very hard. He grew up in Syria and then went to work in UAE, where the working conditions were harsh and where he got married but then divorced. Then, he said, he came back

to Syria, but almost immediately, war broke out. When he left, he had gone first to Turkey, then Germany, and then Sweden. Explaining his current situation in Sweden, he repeated a phrase that he had said to me multiple times in earlier conversations: "I'm starting from the beginning (*Jag börjar från början*)." He meant this, he told me, in the broadest possible terms, in the sense of building a life for himself, getting married, finding a job, learning a language, and so on. 'I want to play in a band here,' he said, 'but it takes a lot of time to find enough people who all play different instruments and want to join the band. In fact, all of the components of the life I hope for take a lot of time…'

One Saturday in late November, I went to explore a nearby town, and I ran into Abdul on the train on the way there. He told me, 'I just want to get out *somewhere*. Weekends are difficult (*tråkigt*), you know? There's nothing to do. I've just been sitting alone in my room all weekend. I don't like to go in my kitchen because the people in the kitchen are all "in" with each other, like a club I'm not invited to.'

I asked, 'Where did you live before coming here? Did it feel different or better in that living arrangement than here at the folk high school dorm?'

'I lived alone in an apartment in the next town over,' he said. 'No, it definitely wasn't better before – I was alone there also. The problem is larger than the school arrangement. It's a problem with Sweden and the people here. I'm not happy at the dorms (*Jag trivs inte på internatet*) and I'm not happy in Sweden (*jag trivs inte i Sverige*).'[34] He explained, 'The culture is so different from what I'm used to. I like it when people are lively, open, and want to be together sharing food and music. Here, people only socialize in their small groups.' When we got off the train, we walked around town for a bit and then got falafel wraps from a street stand. As we walked and ate, he despaired about how everything closed so early in Sweden on the

[34] Interestingly, while people who had grown up in Sweden repeatedly told me that they saw the folk high school as a counter-cultural space within Sweden, where people were much warmer and more social, Abdul and some others who came to Sweden from other sociocultural contexts where much broader social gatherings were the norm saw more commonalities between the folk high school and Sweden at large.

weekends, which we had just experienced while browsing some stores that all began to close by 3 PM as the sun set. Throwing up his hands, he said, 'Where do people go that early?! They just want to be alone in their houses, and on top of that, it's so dark in the winter and people don't get enough vitamin D. I came to Sweden because I knew other people who had come here, and they said it was good relative to other countries, the care is good, you can get what you need and be happy. So when I came it was a big shock, because I really haven't been happy here and I don't see it as a positive place.' Turning to me, he confided, 'I can't say this to other people – I can't say it to Swedes – but I can say it to you: Sweden is like a big hospital! (*Sverige är som en stor sjukhus!*) (see Figure 14). Everyone is weak, tired, alone, indoors…(*Alla är svaga, trötta, ensamma, inomhus…*). When I lived in Turkey for a month, I really liked it there. There's better weather, a big community to celebrate holidays with in Istanbul, and more food, music, energy, and hospitality.' He said that one of his teachers at the folk high school, who was very supportive, wanted him to go to university in Sweden next year, and that he was going to try to apply. His ideal, however, would be to go to Turkey or the US and not stay in Sweden in the future. He stressed, 'Of course, this is *my* personal feeling and not an objective truth that would apply to everyone. But my feeling is that I don't fit (*passar inte*) here in Sweden, and Sweden doesn't fit with me in terms of who I am and how I want to live.'

Figure 14 "Like a hospital" - One of the dorm hallways on a winter night. The metaphor of a hospital is interesting because of its symbolic ambivalence as both a place of healing and a place of unwellness and even death. This metaphor was not unique to Abdul, but seemed like a broader theme from the perspective of those who felt socially "misfit" in Sweden and/or at the folk high school. By early December, both Matteo and Abdul had told me they thought Swedish sociality felt like a hospital. My hallmate Anders said to me that he didn't want to stay at school too much over the Christmas break because when it was empty at the dorm the hall looked and felt just like a hospital. Even those who loved the folk high school felt it stood apart from the "regular world" in ambivalent ways, such as Alice's metaphor of Oak Bay as "a little bubble," or Lidia's joke to me over lunch one day, about how she dreaded leaving when classes ended, that 'the folk high school is like a comfortable prison where people have a syndrome that they like being trapped and don't want to leave their captors!'

Five months later, in late April, as the end of the school year began to loom larger in

students' minds, Abdul and I sat and talked in the dorm kitchen. He was still reeling from having recently found out that he hadn't gotten into the university where one of his teachers at Oak Bay had encouraged him to apply. He told me that he was having a really hard time finding an apartment to move into when he left the dorm, that he couldn't find a job and his unemployment coach (*handläggare*) couldn't seem to help him with either, and he didn't know what he was going to do or where he was going to live. He joked, 'I'll be sleeping in the streets…I'll be sleeping next to the woods behind the school!' Becoming serious again, he said, 'I feel so disappointed about this whole year at the folk school. My teachers told me only recently that I would need to continue here for 1-2 *years* in order to complete the Swedish high school requirements. I thought I was almost done! It feels like it's all been for nothing, and I've just been alone in my room the whole time. And it feels like no one can help me – when I've talked to the school staff, they couldn't help me figure out where to live or how to solve my other problems. I can't sleep, I can't eat, I'm so worried and stressed about my future. I feel unwell (*mår dåligt*), although I'm thankful for my health and that my body is still healthy and strong so that I *can* work. Last year, I rented an apartment on the black market without a contract – someone unemployed who got an apartment from public services turned around and rented it out – so that's an option again, but it costs a lot of money and I'm running out. All I have is the money from selling my apartment in Aleppo, and I spent almost half of that coming to Sweden and almost the same amount again here in rent and for school since I've been here, so I'm about out of money. Remember when I told you I worked in UAE,' he said, 'how I had a wife and a house and a business? Then in one day, I lost everything, we went to court and the judge said, you have to get divorced and you have to leave the country, and my wife got to keep everything because she was a citizen and I had no power as an outsider. My decision to leave Syria was incredibly hard – I sold my apartment and left my family again, and so I've lost everything and started again multiple times in my life.' He described more of his journey to Sweden as well, telling me that one of his friends had died of a heart attack along the way in Greece. He kept

repeating, "Life is hard…but why? (*Livet är svårt…men varför?*)" He asked, 'Why does it cost so much to buy a house? 'Why do people have nowhere to live, when there's so much space in Sweden, in the US, in the whole world? There should be enough space to live. I'm considering going back to Aleppo,' he continued, 'since I was reasonably happy there with my sister and her daughter, and I know the area, the language, and things aren't so expensive there. I'm also considering going to Turkey or to the US, where my friend who's been both in Sweden and in the US says it's easier to find a job. It would be much easier to leave Sweden after getting citizenship, though, and that will take two more years. I spent so much money and it was so hard to leave everything in Syria and come here, that I don't want to make the decision in just one day, I can't. I need time to think and it's a really, really hard decision.' He had been mindlessly shredding a napkin while we talked, and at this conclusion he held it up to the light and said, laughing, 'This is my life!' He said that on his journey to Sweden it had been so, so hard but he couldn't let himself think too much about it or he would go crazy, so he had to just keep going – 'and that's also what I'm reminding myself now, that it's hard, but I have to just keep going.'

Over time, it became clearer to Abdul that the folk high school was not, in fact, the best place for him to engage in the difficult work of, as he had put it, "starting from the beginning (*börjar från början*)," or in other words, to begin rebuilding his life while seeking asylum in Sweden. On the other hand, at the end of the school year he also hadn't found any alternative context in Sweden that he thought would have been better suited to doing so, given that he felt a sense of 'misfit' with Sweden as a whole.

Kaspar, a softspoken student who had grown up an hour's drive from Oak Bay and who we learned at the beginning of this chapter had struggled with depression for years, had a similar experience, but for different reasons, of "misfit" between his hopes for mental health improvement through social emplacement at school and what he actually experienced at the folk high school over time. In our first interview together in August, I asked Kaspar, "Do you think that the environment here [at the folk high school] is one where you can feel better (*må bättre*)

than you did earlier?" He affirmed optimistically, "Mhmm, I think so. For example, if I were to live in an apartment, it would be stressful (*jobbigt*) at the end of the day. If you hadn't planned to meet someone at the end of a particular day, then you'd come home and it'd be completely empty and dark and such. Then it feels very sad to just spend the evening like that – go out and buy groceries, go to bed early – then it becomes easier to think more negatively, and become more tired. Here [in the school dorms] it's more that there are people around you all the time (*det är folk runt omkring en hela tiden*) and when you come back after grocery shopping and start to cook, then people are standing in the kitchen and you can talk to someone all the time. It might not necessarily show so clearly (*det kanske inte märks så tydligt*) when you're talking to someone that you feel better (*att man mår bättre*), but you do feel better in the long term, then, you feel that automatically – there are a whole bunch of chemicals that get going in the body that make it so that you feel better and feel- think more positively. Humans are social creatures (*Människor är sociala varelser*)."

Yet as the weeks went by, Kaspar increasingly withdrew from the social context at school, as being constantly surrounded by people whenever he left his room began to feel alienating to him. In mid September, after a special annual school-wide dinner with music and games, everyone filtered out of the cafeteria and a bunch of students stood around smoking and chatting in the late evening light on the path between the main campus buildings and the dorms. As Kaspar passed me on his way back to the dorm, I asked him how it was going. Seemingly in a hurry to get back, he said that it hadn't been so fun with people lately. A few days later, I ran into Kaspar eating in the dorm kitchen. I wrote in my fieldnotes that it was good to see him out of his room and around, as I hadn't seen him in a while. He told me he had been doing the homework for the "Being Human" course from home, explaining that he had been having a tough time with back pain from general worry and anxiety, but that he felt it was going to get better eventually, so he was hanging in there.

In a teachers' meeting for the "Being Human" course a week later, the teachers Hans and Erik reviewed the attendance rosters and noted that Kaspar had missed 75% of classes so far. Erik said, 'Of course, we know that it's not that Kaspar is just skipping or doesn't care, but that he's really having a hard time.' They remarked that Kaspar, who was very shy, seemed to be outside the group. It was really becoming a problem, they agreed, that Kaspar had been gone so much and had missed a lot of the class, especially in terms of the first group presentation and not being present to help his classmates with the group work. Hans stressed that, 'The whole folk high school concept doesn't work without group work (*grupparbete*), and group work doesn't work unless everyone is there.' For the teachers, Kaspar's absence meant that, regardless of how motivated he might have been in an inner sense, both they and his classmates had a very limited reach in terms of how they could engage Kaspar in the collective process, and thus in terms of the impact the school could have for him and vice versa. They discussed whether it made sense to have him continue in the class, given that he had been absent more often than present, and that they might lean towards saying it was not a good idea.

Just over a month later, in late November, I ran into Kaspar in the kitchen at night, and he didn't look like he was doing very well. He looked kind of stoic and a bit like a shell of himself. When we started talking, he lightened up a bit. He told me he was heating up food that his family had brought to him. 'Sometimes I haven't been eating all day,' he said, 'and I haven't been cleaning either. But I've been reading – I actually just came back from returning a book to the school library.' He continued, 'I'm on sick leave (*sjukskriven*) now for the rest of the year. For now, I'm going home for a week and then I'll see how I feel and maybe keep living here. But maybe next fall I'll try to start school again at the folk high school in my hometown.' I asked if he thought it would be easier to live at home again for a while rather than at the dorm in terms of how he felt (*mådde*). He said, 'I'm not sure. I just know that I want to – from within myself – make an effort to feel better (*må bättre*) – to do things when I don't feel like doing them but that are important for maybe starting to feel better, like holding to routines of getting out of bed,

seeing people, eating, and so on.' He reassured me that the reason he didn't feel good and wasn't coming to class didn't have anything to do with the course or the people in the course – it was just a tough period in his life, and all people have tough periods.

Midway through the 2017-18 school year, after Kaspar had decided to formally leave Oak Bay and move back home, Ulrika described what she saw as the main factors preventing the folk high school from being able to effectively help students in situations like his. In an interview about the school's new student support team (*stödteamet*), after hearing what she thought had been going well in terms of facilitating new ways to support students' – and now less-burdened teachers' – well-being, I asked her, "Is there anything that's been hard with the support team (*stödteamet*)?"

Ulrika told me, "What's hard isn't something new. But rather it has to do with this question of, how do you get young people to find their own strength (*hitta sin egen styrka*)? How do we get them to feel motivated? That's probably *always* going to be a question for a folk high school. Because the people who come here - not everyone, but there are many who have with them rather a lot of baggage. Of hard things. Or that school hasn't worked. So when they come here, they fall into the same behavior. So…until they begin to understand that, well, no, this is voluntary, and I have to do it myself. Because- we can make sure that we're available (*vi finns till hands*), but of course every person has to help themselves. We can't help if the other person doesn't want it. That doesn't work… Some people, of course, have to leave (*sluta*) because they don't feel better here. We have had students who had to leave (*som har fått sluta*). If you've been absent too much, or don't submit assignments, then maybe you're at the wrong place, *right now* in life [and] it's better for you to have the opportunity to be somewhere else. You're welcome back another time, but not right now."

Though for different reasons, both Kaspar's and Abdul's cases, similar to several other students (mostly young men) I knew during my fieldwork, shows that for some, the folk high school social environment is, in Ulrika's words, "the wrong place" because for them, it is not

salutogenic. As we saw in Elias and Zahra's cases, school sociality itself contains downsides that can cause negative mental health repercussions. While for Elias and Zahra, this led to ambivalent experiences, as school sociality was felt to threaten and bolster relational well-being in equal measures, for Kaspar and Abdul, the negatives all but predominated. Instead of experiencing greater social emplacement at the folk high school, their experiences of social *dis*placement became exaggerated in the context of feeling alienated and excluded while surrounded by people. In Kaspar's case, we see how, as a number of teachers pointed out that, a certain baseline level of mental health is needed to facilitate students' capacity to show up and be present with peers at school, in order for the school's social framework to catalyze greater relational well-being. Abdul's case begins to illustrate how a sense of social exclusion based on perceptions of "cultural misfit" was a stressful aspect of school sociality that exacerbated unwellness for many migrant and refugee students in different ways and to varying degrees.[35] Further, Abdul's case also illustrates how persistent mental ill-health in the folk high school environment can stem not only from experiences of "misfit" between individuals and the school's structures of sociality, but from a "misfit" between the causes of and attempted remedies for suffering and distress. Where the folk high school offered a socially-focused approach to mental health by seeking to facilitate students' movement toward social emplacement, its lens onto and ability to act on the material dimensions impacting students' well-being, such as Abdul's dire financial stresses, was more limited.

Conclusion: Sociality as a double-edged sword

All together, the student cases above are instructive about the folk high school social environment – and social immersion more generally – as a tool to intervene on mental health. Collectively, they point to what becomes a recurring theme in the dissertation, of inherent tension in attempting to attend to both individual and collective well-being at the same time. As

[35] I discuss this phenomenon at much greater length in chapter five.

such, these cases show how and attempt to explore some of the reasons why it is not necessarily the case that, as Birgit hoped, "one person's gain was always for the good of the whole collective." Finally, they show how attempts to mitigate mental unwellness and foster well-being are associated with different advantages and disadvantages when carried out in the holistic, community-focused setting of popular education as opposed to the clinical and medical, individual-focused setting of the mental health care system.[36]

Perhaps the clearest lesson to be drawn from the variation in students' experiences highlighted above is that while achieving relational well-being in the form of social emplacement and belonging is a central goal shared by many students who have struggled with mental unwellness, the school's assumption that social immersion will enhance well-being is a risky strategy, since, as other anthropologists of well-being have also shown (e.g. Jackson 2011; Snell-Rood 2014), relationships can just as easily derail lived experiences of wellness as facilitate them. The idea that the double-edged nature of sociality infused residential life at school was captured by boarding and non-boarding students' differing stances toward the dorms. Many of the students who lived in the dorms, like Kaspar and Matteo, expressed to me at the start of the year that they chose to live on campus so they could always be around people and be integrated into a community. On the other hand, many who didn't live in the dorms, including Sofia and Elias, told me they specifically chose not to live at the school because they thought it would be too much, and that they needed to go home at the end of the day to rest and have separation from all the social time and the space of the school (and while many students did experience the dorms positively, for both Kaspar and Matteo, their imaginings of dormitory social life at the outset of the year failed to match up with the reality they experienced). These opposing views of school social life show how it can be both a source of support and positivity and also a source of stress, and that students seek to balance these dimensions in different ways.

[36] Thank you to Keith Murphy for encouraging me to reflect on this point.

A number of Oak Bay teachers and students acknowledged the double-edged nature of sociality by counterposing the image of the positive social feedback loop, which Birgit termed the "well-being epidemic," with the notion of negative social feedback loops in a "vicious circle" (*ond cirkel*). My classmate Silvia introduced me to this concept as a way to understand the relationship between a lack of sociality and increasing feelings of unwellness in late November, when Henrik moved out of our dorm hall and Ulrika told us it was because he had been feeling unwell (*mådde dåligt*). Silvia and I shared our surprise and dismay at learning that Henrik, who was incredibly kind, had felt so bad. Silvia said, 'It seems like so many people here feel bad (*mår dåligt*)! I wish everyone would come in and hang out in the kitchen, because at least for me, I know when I stay in my room I get lonelier and lonelier and it becomes worse, and when I'm here [in the kitchen] more I start to feel better. Here we call that a "vicious circle" (*ond cirkel*). In the beginning here I used to sit in my room a lot and then I thought, I can't just do this, I need to be in the kitchen more and try to be with people.' In a separate conversation, Ulrika explained that another form of "negative social feedback," which we also heard Alice describe above, and which was also not uncommon at Oak Bay. This was not fueled by a lack of socializing but rather by the formation of affective constellations among people who feel unwell, whose feelings of unwellness could become mutually reinforcing. Ulrika said, "If we can get those who feel well (*mår bra*) and are functioning- they contribute help to those who don't feel so good. [But] that's sometimes hard because many of those who feel bad (*mår dåligt*) seek each other out."

In line with the ambivalent potential inherent in human sociality, the majority of students I knew and followed throughout the year would fall into the second and third categories delineated above, in which entering the school social environment is experienced as somewhat salutogenic, though perhaps not enough so to effect a fully satisfying sense of healing in the first year, or perhaps is at the same time threatening to well-being. Those in the first group – who tend to experience relationality at school as more or less straightforwardly healing

– and especially those in the fourth group, who experience school sociality as predominantly negative – were fewer, though not rare. Ulrika summarized this trend by explaining that, “there are surely those who go here at school who feel that they aren’t thriving, and it’s not working. But the larger group is that which feels that after a year, something has happened with them.”

In terms of the larger group – those for whom “something has happened with them” – the cases above also shed light on another ambivalent outcome of using long-term, everyday immersion in a school setting rather than periodic clinical appointments in a medical setting to address mental health. On one hand, when “something happens,” it usually means that students internalize some coping resources they gained through interacting with the school’s infrastructure for building relational well-being. For example, Alice described that she was not worried about her mental health after leaving Oak Bay, because she had incorporated new coping tools into her personal repertoire that she would carry with her beyond graduation. At the same time, in Oak Bay’s relational model of wellness, psychological skills which can be internalized are only one part of experiencing improved mental health, while the school’s external cultural and material scaffolding, providing a specific sort of social context based on daily, ongoing mutual relational encounters, is an equally integral and necessary part of “feeling good” (*att må bra*). As a result, even students who saw the most marked mental health improvement during their time at school, such as Sofia in the first group above, told me they worried about whether this would last in a holistic way outside of school walls, because of the central role of the school environment itself – which many teachers and students described as a countercultural space to the “outside world” – in facilitating feelings of wellness.

Finally, Zahra and Abdul’s cases begin to show some of the unique factors shaping the double-edged nature of sociality as a mental health intervention for migrant and refugee students in particular. Many of these students’ experiences of unwellness, including multiple forms of displacement and loss, as well as unique challenges to their possibilities for moving toward individual wellness at school as part of a larger student collective, given the presence of

subtle modes of discrimination and exclusion that are not often acknowledged in the open. Sarah White (2016: xi) urges us to be mindful of the stakes of ethnographically attending to these realities, writing that, "At a time of unprecedented movements of refugees into and across Europe, what wellbeing means, whose wellbeing counts and how wellbeing may be promoted more inclusively and effectively are issues of pressing importance." When I talked to the school counselor, Ulla, about her perspective on this issue, she explained that many students who had migrated to Sweden from war zones faced mental health challenges related to trauma. However, given that the folk high school's local framework of well-being did not account for mental health needs specific to any student subpopulation, it was clear that Oak Bay staff were still in the process of finding optimal resources to deal with this.

Ulla reflected on some of the challenges and opportunities relevant to folk high school attempts to provide specialized mental health services for migrant and refugee students, many of whom were still learning Swedish. For example, she said, "In the fall I met the students who were here in the 'establishment course' (*etableringskurs),* and there were three or four young men from Syria. I can work in English and Swedish, but in one case it was so very hard, it hardly worked, just to write a little and draw, I had a hard time understanding him and he had a hard time understanding me. And in another case it went swimmingly (*hur bra som helst*). But language is of course important for being able to symbolize things and express how one feels. So it is hard." I asked, "Do you think that it would be good to have a counselor who speaks Arabic, also?"[37] Ulla said, "Yes, for those groups it would be extremely valuable (*oerhort värdefullt*). I think it would make a huge difference." While, as a counselor, Ulla refers here to strategies that could be implemented in the on-site therapy office, at the folk high school, as this and the previous chapter have argued, that space is complemented by much more expansive non-clinical arenas for intervening on mental health. In chapters five and six, I expand in much greater

[37] I asked about Arabic specifically because the largest group of migrant and refugee students at Oak Bay at the time had come to Sweden from Syria.

depth on some of the ideas introduced in this chapter to explore in more depth how everyday sociality in the classroom can both facilitate and hinder migrant and refugee as well as other non-white-marked students' senses of well-being.

Before arriving at those analyses, however, in the next chapter, I continue to explore how responses to mental unwellness in the civic-focused and relational setting of popular education are associated with different possibilities when compared to the clinical, individualized setting of medical mental health care. I analyze the implications of the fact that the school's local framework of care and wellness, in stark contrast to the formal mental health care system, has political and politicizing dimensions, aiming to use socially-embedded individual transformation to (re)shape social and political conditions to fit a societal ideal of social democratic collectivity in the face of pressing threats to Sweden's longstanding social democratic ethos from decades of neoliberal restructuring and the increasing power of the far-right. Where school projects of care aimed at "social democratic emplacement" are meant to lay the groundwork for reanimating social democracy by integrating structurally vulnerable people, many of whom feel unwell (*mår dåligt*), into civic and political life within a social democratic idiom, I turn to exploring how prolonged immersion in the folk high school environment affects various students' approaches to imagining and acting on their civic and political involvement in a social democratic idiom.

Chapter 4: "Getting people to care": Efforts to revive civic participation through mutual recognition

Chapter overview

In this chapter, I trace how teachers use pedagogies of care as a means to "get people to care," in a particularly social democratic way, in response to what they see as a contemporary crisis of civic and political disinvestment fueled by unwellness. For teachers at Oak Bay, "getting people to care" about democracy and society and for one another is a pressing project in the face of eroding social supports for collective well-being, in terms of both the by-now decades-old neoliberal turn and rise of individualistic consumer culture as well as more recent rapid growth in divisive far-right sentiment. Teachers hope to catalyze a specific form of critical conscientization (Freire 1970) by passing on their own generational "structure of feeling," (Williams 1977) defined by investment in social democratic values. In other words, they seek to address perceived problems of apathy and alienation by igniting in their students the same personal investments in social and civic participation, and trust in public and popular democratic institutions, that they internalized in the 60s and 70s at the height of social democracy's ideological hegemony and material success. In the project of "getting people to care," pedagogies of care in the folk high school environment take on a civic and political orientation, serving to intertwine local understandings of well-being and care with democratic participation.

I examine classroom scenes and student interviews to show how students express their social and civic (dis)investments from their own perspectives, and how they indeed experience a range of transformations as a result of spending time in a pedagogical context aimed at "conscientization" into a social democratic structure of feeling, though not always in the direction that teachers hope. Students' varied and partial ways of taking up teachers' efforts to spark their social, civic and political consciousness and participation points to how changed

political, economic, and social conditions of the present limit the viability of reanimating enthusiasm for social democratic participation in its previous idiom.

"Politics is just a drag!": Civic (dis)investments among "our uninterested generation"

On a Monday morning in early December 2017, we gathered in the classroom to begin our unit on globalization, bundled in sweaters and scarves as the radiator warmed up the room. While initially sleepy, class became unexpectedly animated after *fika* (our mid-morning coffee break) when our discussion of global inequality suddenly broke out into a discussion of how and whether democracy functions in Sweden.

One of our three class teachers, Erik, who had grown up near the school, and whose age, manifested in his white hair and beard, had not done anything to diminish his high energy and zest for life, sketched out a framework for the morning's discussion on the board, with bullet points directing us to think about people's different positions in a globalized world. He wrote:

What's the global situation? (*Hur ser det ut i världen?*)[38]

- Rich/poor (*Rika/fattiga*)
- Victims/losers (*Offer/förlorare*) • Winners (*Vinnare*)
- Guilty (*Skyldig*) • Complicit (*tyst samarbetare*)
- Consumers (*Konsument*) • Swedish citizens (*Svenska medborgare*)
- Humans/world citizens (*Människor/världsmedborgare*)

What position/role do you/we/you all have? (*Vilken plats/roll har du/vi/ni?*)

He told us,[39] 'The main question is - why are things as they are? Further, how can we in Sweden influence the world situation?' Pointing to the list on the board, he underscored that this was complicated and that we could be in multiple roles at once. For example, someone who lost their job at a Swedish Volvo factory that was moved abroad might be both a "loser," and at the same time still be a "winner" in the world situation. Turning back to the class, he asked us,

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[38] The literal translation of this phrase, which does not fully convey its meaning in English, is: "How does it look in the world?"

[39] Throughout the dissertation, I use single quotation marks to denote dialogue reconstructed from detailed fieldnotes taken in real time in Swedish, while double quotation marks capture audio-recorded, transcribed direct quotes.

‘Who here feels guilty?’ Max, an easygoing participant from southern Sweden with shaggy blond hair who walked everywhere listening to music in his headphones, raised his hand and said, ‘Me,’ and Erik asked, ‘Why?’ Max responded, ‘Well, I don’t really know…you can get anxiety (*man kan få ångest*) just knowing that you have it good and others have it so bad.’ By December, the students had come to expect Erik’s class days to be characterized by his lively attempts to provoke students to challenge their own assumptions through rigorous engagement with ideas, using creative, humorous, and sometimes shocking prompts.

‘Okay, so another reason I wanted us to think today about our roles as citizens in Sweden and in the world,’ Erik stressed, ‘is that it can get tiresome thinking just about the consumer role and how we are just one among so many consumers and don’t have that much power. But I think we actually have more responsibility than that (*Jag tycker att vi faktiskt har mer ansvar*).’ He explained, ‘We choose politicians by voting, and we can follow politicians’ values. We have choices about how to engage – and it’s also a choice not to engage politically, or to choose not to choose, which means that you can’t really get out of the responsibility of making a choice.’

Sofia, a creative, intuitive, and confident student with bright red hair, asked, ‘But what power do we have, when we vote, and then anyway our politicians are doing the wrong thing?’

Erik responded, ‘Well, we elect politicians, and if they do the wrong thing then it’s because we collectively voted wrong.’

Sofia said, ‘I disagree – politicians just say stuff to get elected and then they don’t do it, so we don’t have a good choice when we vote in the first place. What’s the point if you vote but then the thing you voted for doesn’t happen anyway?’

Erik said, ‘But that’s because of the way the government is structured, with parties building coalitions. It means that they have to compromise, so even if you voted for the Greens and they won, they’ll likely have to build a coalition with the Social Democrats, who have

different positions on some of the same issues. So even when a party wins, all of their policies won't come to pass - that's just the way it is, and you can't expect it to work another way.'

Leilah, a composed and laid-back Swedish Iraqi student whose neatly-pinned headscarves often coordinated with her outfits, and Julia, a kind and spunky student with pink highlights in her hair, were not swayed by Erik's explanation, and chimed in to agree with Sofia, saying, 'Politics is all about money and power.'

Erik looked around the room in disbelief and said jokingly, 'I didn't know we had a bunch of right-wing populists in here! You don't believe in democracy?'

Sofia resumed her earlier tack, saying, 'Well, voting feels hopeless because no one does what they say they will.'

Erik responded, 'Okay - so what should be done if you don't believe in this system?'

Leilah said tentatively, 'Don't vote?'

Ebba, an outspoken student from Northern Sweden who wore her long hair in braids, commented, 'There's really a growing lack of *trygghet* (security/comfort)[40] with the whole system we have.'

Erik said, becoming increasingly surprised, 'So should we scrap democracy?!'

Sofia said, 'Yes! We should scrap this whole system and build up a new one instead (*bygga upp ett nytt*).'

Erik told us, 'Okay, it seems like we all have a lot to say here, so let's get in small groups and go with it for a few minutes.'

I was sitting with Julia, Leilah, and Mira, and we had a very lively, animated discussion. Mira, a talkative and fashionable participant who grew up in Sweden with Christian Lebanese parents, framed the current Swedish political system as completely dysfunctional, saying

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[40] *Trygghet* is a local term which translates loosely to a sense of security/comfort, which can have economic, social, and existential dimensions. From the earliest construction of the Swedish welfare state, *trygghet* was a key social democratic value and goal of public infrastructure (Tilton 2001, Murphy 2015). Further ethnographic data in the next chapter further illuminates in more detail how this concept was understood and negotiated by differently positioned actors at the folk high school.

dismissively, ‘Politicians get so much money and they don’t use it well, they just spend it on expensive parties for themselves.’ Julia agreed, saying she thought that the whole system was just totally corrupt and reiterating that it was all about money and power. Leilah said she thought she was somewhere more in the middle, reflecting, ‘It’s depressing because there are problems, but we don’t talk about them until there’s an election, and the elections don’t always feel like they solve problems.’ Julia followed on Leilah’s comments, saying that in principle, you really can’t complain about things not going well politically if you don’t vote and participate, and Leilah agreed. I asked if there was any political party they liked or had hope in. Julia said, ‘I guess the Social Democrats…’ but without much interest and no description. The others agreed. I asked if they liked politics, and they all said ‘No!’ Mira was quite vehement, Julia repeated that, ‘No, the whole thing is just corrupt,’ and Leilah said, ‘It’s a pain (*jobbigt*).’

Then we shared as a class. Max said, ‘I think you can make change in other ways besides voting.’ Leilah agreed, saying that people do have some power but the system is not perfect. Julia and Mira said that people can’t really do anything.

Erik, who was puzzling in astonishment over many students’ seeming readiness to throw out the baby democracy with the bathwater of perceived corruption, asked, ‘What system do we have that would be better (*Vad har vi för bättre system*)?’

Sofia responded by saying she had voted for a party that wanted to rebuild the whole system, with a universal base income for everyone, so that people wouldn’t be so stressed and we wouldn’t have so many public health issues (*folksjukdomar*). She said it was an ideology geared toward the possibility for everyone to feel well (*må bra*).

Erik said, looking around, ‘It sounds like you *do* still believe in democracy and a way to make change within this system. Otherwise you couldn’t have such a party like the one Sofia said she voted for. We can and should discuss this seriously, and in fact we *need* democracy in order to discuss this!’

Fahim, an intellectually curious student who was relatable and well-liked in the class, interjected, addressing the class in a somewhat exasperated tone, 'All of the rights people in Sweden have are democratic rights – freedom of expression (*yttrandefrihet*), the right to write a book, and so on. So democracy is not at all just about voting.' He continued, 'Coming from a dictatorship in Syria where we felt watched all the time, be thankful here and think about the democratic possibilities and privilege you have – for example, sharing or liking things on facebook here isn't something you have to think about!'

Ebba, who was one of the older students in the class, shared Fahim's exasperation, saying, 'I don't understand, from what you all are saying, it feels like many people don't listen to the news, and are saying politics is just a bore (*tråkigt*)...'

Sofia said, 'I can kind of get why, because politics feels just like arguing – like an old married couple, and who wants to listen to that?'

Erik said, 'So how should it be better? What would make it capture your interest?'

Mira asserted, 'It's just a drag (*bara tråkigt*)! – I vote, but it's a drag *(tråkigt)*.'

Ebba responded, 'But if everyone thinks that way, how will it be in a couple of years? The 30's and 40's generations[41] won't be here forever, and then it'll just be our uninterested generation (*ointresserad generation*)!'

Sofia reflected, 'I think young people's political disengagement has something to do with individualism.'

Mira added, 'I think maybe our generation's political interest will develop – a couple of years ago I thought it was all just super tedious (*tråkigt*) and didn't vote, and now I see that voting is important.'

Leilah got the last word in the conversation before we broke for lunch, saying, 'So there's hope...'

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[41] With the phrase 'the 30's and 40's generations,' Ebba referred to people born in those decades, who she perceived as being more politically active than those in her own generation.

Later, I arrived early to the afternoon teachers' meeting for our course, and Erik and I chatted further about the discussion that had arisen earlier in class while waiting for Hans, who co-taught the class and had been elsewhere that morning, to join us. He said, 'I was so surprised and confused! How did we go from globalization to fundamentally questioning the role of democracy in Sweden??'

I asked if he had noticed shifts in the last couple of years, in terms of students expressing more nihilist and/or populist political attitudes.

He said yes, that the previous year there had been one student in the class who was more on that wavelength, and now it felt like a critical mass. He set this in contrast to earlier years when he hadn't seen those attitudes at all. He said he was so shocked to hear the discourse that all politicians were elite and corrupt and that the whole system was broken. 'This just isn't true at all in Sweden!' he exclaimed. 'Politicians are everyday people, they are us, they are whoever, because anyone can run. There isn't a wholly separate political class, and there certainly is not a majority - or even a large minority - that is corrupt.' Rather, he explained, that was a kind of "us and them" discourse about "everyday people" versus "the elites," which was a Trumpian discourse.

Then Hans came in, and Erik filled him in on the morning's events. Hans, who had grown up in the same town as Erik but a few years ahead of him in school, and shared Erik's high energy but expressed it through his own form of good-natured goofiness, reacted with the same surprise and dismay that Erik had, saying, 'Wow, so we can see that this is clearly something we have to engage with in class more – especially in light of the fact that teaching about, working with, and contributing to democracy is a – if not *the* – main task of the folk high school, the most important task (*folkhögskolans huvuduppgift – den viktigaste uppgiften*) – which has been given to us by law, from the state. In light of our mission, it would not be

acceptable to have participants leave the folk high school thinking "politicians are stupid" (*politiker är dum i huvudet*) - that's simply not workable (*det går inte*)!'[42]

Shifting structures of feeling: From collective participation to apathy and antipathy

The largely negative feelings about democratic participation that many Swedish-born students expressed in class, as well as Erik and Hans' shock and disappointment in response, captures an accelerating generational disjunct in civic and political affect in Sweden. In the contemporary context, broad changes to Swedish welfare structures in the face of ongoing neoliberal reforms, and now the rise of far-right discourse in the era of Trump and other right-wing nationalist leaders, have sparked a shift in the cultural politics of social engagement. In the space of a few decades, popular conceptions of the interconnection between individuals and broader social forces in Sweden has shifted significantly away from a culture of collective social and political participatory engagement channeled through social movements and welfare structures. I consider this fading set of cultural values, or civic sentiments, as comprising a "social democratic ethos"[43] with which most folk high school teachers, who are largely white, Swedish-born, middle aged, and politically left-leaning, identify. Raymond Williams' (1977) concept of a generational "structure of feeling" is helpful in understanding many teachers' identification with this social democratic ethos, as well as many students' uneasy relationship with or even rejection of it, in favor of a different set of investments.

Williams (1977) defines a structure of feeling as "a particular quality of social experience and relationship…which gives the sense of a generation or period" (Williams 1977: 131). Drawing

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[42] As discussed in the introduction to the dissertation, Swedish folk high schools have been sites of political socialization throughout their 150-year history. Their role in civic and political formation is driven in part by the state, which, as a major source of both funding and cultural legitimacy, has leverage in steering folk high schools' work toward certain ends. Here, Hans refers to a personal investment he feels in the National Folk Education Council guidelines which stipulate that in order to receive state money, all Swedish folk high schools must, among other ends, "support activities that contribute to strengthening and developing democracy" (Folkbildningsrådet 2015: 4).

[43] I follow Schall's (2016) move to distinguish between lowercase social democratic values and uppercase Social Democratic Party positions, which have in some ways diverged over the decades since the Social Democratic Party first rose to power.

an analogy between changes in language use and other changes in social experience over time, Williams (1977: 131) explains that,

> In spite of substantial and at some levels decisive continuities in grammar and vocabulary, no generation speaks quite the same language as its predecessors. The difference can be defined in terms of additions, deletions, and modifications, but these do not exhaust it. What really changes is something quite general…and the description that often fits the change best is the literary term 'style.'

Attempting to pinpoint what it is that changes, he writes (1977: 132) that

> 'feeling' is chosen to emphasize a distinction from more formal concepts of 'world-view' or 'ideology'…we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt…We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships…We are then defining these elements as a 'structure': as a set, with specific internal relations.

Structures of feeling "as living processes are…widely experienced" (Williams 1977: 133) and "are from the beginning taken as *social* experience, rather than as 'personal' experience," meaning that, despite being felt by unique individuals, their origins are not idiosyncratic (Williams 1977: 131, emphasis in original). Finally, structures of feeling, Williams explains, are not limited to emotional perceptions but also "exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action" (1977: 132).

Karin, a direct and funny teacher who has taught in Oak Bay's high-school completion courses for many years, gave clear words to the overarching generational "structure of feeling" toward social and political life, characterized by a social democratic ethos, that was shared by most of the teachers I talked with at Oak Bay and at other folk high schools I visited. Over coffee and buns at her apartment, Karin told me: "I believe a lot in the collective society, you know. When people go together and build things together…there is a feeling of well-being in being *trygg* (secure/comfortable) with other people, and also feeling that you have the strength and power to make things happen. You're not a victim to the structure, but you're empowered by that connected feeling, and it can be everything from how you live or how you work, or how you

study, or how you buy groceries – you know, in every aspect of life, the more basically you interact with other people, and not being an isolated individual….I think a healthy society is a collective one, and also a responsibility towards each other to make it work." Karin's narrative reflects an optimistic sense of investment in the possibilities of collective action, underscoring how a sense of security and wellness arises from feeling that together, people have power over social and political structures rather than the other way around.

While for Williams (1977: 131), "The relations between [a structure of feeling] and the other specifying historical marks of changing institutions…[and] social and economic relations," can't be assumed but rather are "an open question: that is to say, a set of historical questions," with hindsight, it is possible to trace how Karin's and other folk high school teachers' sense of investment in social democratic values and relational styles took shape in a larger historical, social, and economic context. The fact that many teachers came of age in the 1960s and 70s means that their social and political formation coincided with the peak of a decades long, unbroken stretch of Social Democratic Party rule (Murphy 2015). In that period, public bolstering and protection of union and popular power offered significant opportunities for white working-class and middle-class Swedes to influence the broader social and economic landscape through collective organization, providing a material context that facilitated experiencing "every aspect of life," as Karin describes above, as part of a shared civic sphere.

Yet changed historical circumstances have supplanted the older generation's social democratic ethos with a new political structure of feeling among a younger generation of Swedes on the economic margins, which is illustrated through students' comments in the class discussion above. This disjunct in the emotional tone of teachers' and students' social and political outlooks is captured in the dissonance between Karin's confident commitment to orienting toward the collective good in support of widespread well-being and a feeling of *trygghet* (security/comfort), and Ebba's worried comment in class that such a system was increasingly difficult to imagine, saying, 'There's really a growing lack of *trygghet* with the whole

system we have,' as well as Sofia's frustrated assertion that the social and political system was actively making people feel unwell and contributing to public health problems. In contrast to teachers' political structure of feeling, premised on an optimistic belief in the power of collective engagement and an assured sense of trust that people can act to steer larger structures, the political structure of feeling prevailing among students who had grown up in Sweden[44] seemed to be dominated by worry, frustration, pessimism, and detachment toward social, civic, and political life. These affects were reflected in multiple students' discussion contributions including Mira, Julia, Leilah, Ebba, and Sofia, who said, in addition to the comments just above about precarity and vulnerability in the contemporary system, that politics was 'all about money and power,' that 'the whole thing [was] just corrupt,' that theirs was an 'uninterested generation' who were 'political[ly] disengage[d]' and influenced by 'individualism,' and that democratic participation was largely 'a drag.' I suggest that these fraught, complex affects toward collective democratic life held by many of Oak Bay's structurally vulnerable young adult Swedish students can similarly be connected to the social and economic landscape in which they are coming of age.

In the present, a new set of historical circumstances introduces a new set of "palpable pressures and set[s new] effective limits on experience and on action" for the generation currently coming into civic and social consciousness (Williams 1977: 132). From the 1980s on, there have been significant historical changes in institutions and social and economic relations in Sweden, including the Social Democratic Party's adoption of neoliberal economic rhetoric and reforms, Sweden's joining the European Union, and the globalization of Swedish capital and outsourcing of manufacturing work, which all made work more competitive and precarious and significantly weakened unions (Blomqvist 2004; Laginder *et al* 2013). In the wake of these changes, neoliberal globalization has displaced social democracy to become the prevailing force

[44] Another significant disjunct in political affect that clearly emerged in the class conversation above, between Swedish-born students and Syrian students, also warrants attention and is discussed further on in this chapter.

in contemporary hegemony in Sweden (Isenhour 2010, Nordvall 2013). This new political economic context, in which the social systems supporting individual welfare have been weakened, has impacted how younger generations of adults inhabit social life. At the same time, students' insistence in the above classroom discussion that the Swedish political system was corrupt show how new idioms have arisen to express social discontent in these circumstances. In an era when Trump and other right-wing nationalist leaders have risen to power around the globe, the influence of far-right rhetoric – popularizing concepts such as "draining the swamp" and "fake news" – has further degraded the sense of trust in public institutions that was central to longstanding left-wing hegemony in Sweden (Schall 2016). In these conditions, the pervasive structure of feeling among many young adults who have grown up in Sweden, especially those on the social margins, is one which demands attending to individualized pressures and guarding privileges perceived to be eroding, rather than contributing to a collective, participatory ideal.

Of course, while the generational aspect of Williams' (1977) concept of structures of feeling is useful in illuminating the generational character of the disjunct in political attitudes that emerged in interviews and in the classroom, highlighted in the group discussion in focus in this chapter, in applying this concept to my analysis, I do not mean to imply that everyone in a given generation shares the same structure of feeling, nor that the structures of feeling I identify as being broadly shared by folk high school teachers and the students in their high-school completion courses, respectively, would be shared by their counterparts outside of the folk high school. The particular people who were drawn to teaching in the folk high school were likely a self-selected group from within their generation who came from similar backgrounds and were committed to a shared set of values that the folk high school manifested. Further, in light of the fact that structures of feeling toward social, economic, and political structures are tied to people's positions within these structures, students within the folk high school who occupied different social positions held, in broad terms, somewhat different structures of feeling. For example, students in Oak Bay's aesthetic courses (*särskilda kurser*), who came largely from

middle or upper-middle class backgrounds and had already completed formal high school (*gymnasiet*), talked much more about being civically active and had overall less apathetic and antagonistic orientations toward political engagement, seeming to align more closely with teachers' social democratic structure of feeling, as compared to students in Oak Bay's high-school completion courses, most of whom had working-class and/or migrant backgrounds as well as histories of unemployment and/or mental ill-health, and who felt relatively more powerless and marginalized in relation to Sweden's dominant social, economic and political structures.[45]

Many folk high school teachers interpreted high-school completion course participants' apparent lack of investment in a social democratic ethos as having much to do with feelings of precarity and exhaustion that changed social and economic conditions have foisted on those at the social margins. In this frame, widespread feelings of unwellness - which are the result of accelerated consumption, increasing social and economic stratification, and a weakened welfare safety net - pose the key obstacle to folk high school participants' civic engagement. Over lunch in the cafeteria one day with Per, a teacher who was popular for his easygoing kindness, he explained his take on the social causes and effects of increasing unwellness among Oak Bay's students in recent years. Sketching a broad picture of "then and now," he told me that the folk high school had always been a countercultural space in some sense, but that the texture and responsibilities of this position were changing along with surrounding social, political, and economic conditions. In the past, the folk school could simply be a positive alternative space for those who, for example, had chosen to work at 16 and then of their own will pursue further education again at 18; their time in the social context of school then functioned as a place for them to gain new ideas for how to engage with others and make contributions to society. Swedish society had become much more status oriented and competitive, he told me, and there

[45] Thanks to Linda Garro for helping me clarify this point.

was such a narrow sense now of what young people "should" do or pursue, what they should look like, and so on. Whereas before, one of the school's main goals was to help people influence society positively, which worked well when the school population was healthier, now, they were working with students experiencing a lot of personal problems as a result of new social and economic pressures. Correspondingly, staff's goals had shifted toward simply helping people survive (*överleva*) and stay afloat as individuals, which had to come before people could begin to think more outwardly and expansively.

In a separate interview, another Oak Bay teacher, Ulrika, who was warm, extroverted and reflective, echoed Per's theory of how contemporary social, economic, and political circumstances have affected students, describing how these conditions had given rise to a new generational structure of feeling among students, which came with new pressures and set new "limits on experience and action" (Williams 1977: 132). In the middle of a conversation where we had been talking about growing far-right influence in society and the danger that right-wing extremist rhetoric presented to collective democratic engagement, Ulrika reflected that, "I also think that it isn't just fear, what's happening in society. And I think this [other issue] is something we can work with at the school, too. It's a whole lot of information, and a whole lot of decisions. [Now,] You should choose a phone plan, you're always changing cell phones, you should choose an internet plan, and- you should choose a whole lot! And I think that makes it so that you get a little tired of choosing. And then, maybe, you don't even have the energy to care (*bryr sig*). And then it spills over into other things. When it's maybe important to make a decision. But you're so tired, of- 'Oy! I don't have the energy to make a decision.'...I think there's a huge danger in that. I'm thinking about Trump, it's the same thing there. We don't have energy to care (*vi orkar inte bry oss*)...The most dangerous thing with Trump is when we stop caring (*när vi slutar att bry oss*). When we say, 'Oh yeah, typical him.' And then we go and do something else, instead of saying, 'No. This isn't good. No.' And now I'm saying Trump, but there are tons of Trump-people everywhere, it's not just him. And we can't- you can't stop caring

(*Vi får- man får inte sluta bry sig*).” When I asked Ulrika, “So does it also feel like that’s a goal at the school, to get participants to care about things in various ways (*få deltagare att bry sig om saker på olika sätt*)?” She answered, “I think that is actually one of the big goals (*en av de stora målen*). Which- And we’re failing a little bit with that. We would like it if students themselves felt like, ‘Yeah, we want to have a study circle.’ And we’re trying to encourage that. But it’s very many who are full up with themselves (*som har fullt upp med sig själva*). And if you should then engage yourself in that [collective activities], it becomes stressful (*jobbigt*).” Ulrika’s and Per’s accounts capture many teachers’ perceptions that students’ basic structure of feeling was defined by “not caring” about social, civic and political life in a social democratic way, or more accurately, not feeling well enough to care in the face of external circumstances that made young people feel exhausted and overwhelmed.

Teachers’ interpretation of students “not caring” in a social democratic way, in the sense of not mobilizing care or concern *within* a social democratic framework, does fit together with students’ own positions as expressed in their comments in the class discussion above. There is an instructive irony, however, in that even as students explicitly professed boredom, disinvestment, and antipathy toward contemporary political life in the discussion, they also implicitly conveyed enormous energy for discussing this theme, as this spontaneous conversation was one of the most animated we had in class all year. This political energy may not have been legible to teachers, however, as it was not expressed or channeled in the social democratic lens through which they saw these issues. Where teachers take “not caring” in a social democratic way to mean not caring at all, I examine throughout this chapter how students might indeed be understood to “care” about opportunities for social, civic, and political participation, yet for a variety of reasons not articulate or pursue this within the same social democratic idiom as teachers. I return further to these considerations at the end of the chapter.

In the class discussion above, teachers’ descriptions and students’ comments suggest that students’ stances of “not caring” in social democratic terms took two forms - apathy and

antipathy. Teachers saw apathy as resulting from feelings of atomization, which made participants feel powerless to effect change, and from being overwhelmed by the scope of information about large and small problems, which overloaded students' capacity to be concerned about social issues; They saw antipathy[46] as the result of channeling feelings of precarity and vulnerability into hate and dis-care towards those marked as "different" and/or into vehement rejection of a political and economic system labeled corrupt and broken. (Dis-)care and (un)wellness, in this framework, are interlinked in feedback loops whereby feeling dislodged from a meaningful social context and thus un-cared for leads people to feel unwell, and feeling unwell hinders people from being able to care about and for others and their larger social context. From teachers' perspectives, affective shifts toward unwellness and "not caring" in the forms of apathy and antipathy present grave threats to collective social and political life in Sweden and thus demand remedy.

In response to identifying unwellness as a key reason for structurally vulnerable young adults' waning civic investments, Ulrika talked about the role that the folk high school can play in bolstering participants' wellness as a necessary first step toward "getting them to care," and in so doing, reanimating a social democratic structure of feeling which is seen to be dormant rather than dead. While recognizing that generational shifts in structures of feeling toward "not caring" have been prompted by much broader social and economic circumstances, she and other teachers locate the nexus of change in their immediate work with students at school. She said, "we try to get [participants] to take care of themselves. And maybe understand that the responsibility lies with them, and also that they should have energy for that responsibility themselves. Because the person who doesn't feel so well can experience that as very stressful (*jobbigt*). And then you don't manage anything. That's basically our major mission. And also to be functional in a democracy, where one should dare to think things. We also try to get them to

[46] Ulrika talked more about far-right antipathy just prior in this same interview; I examine this theme in more depth in chapter six.

understand that their voices/votes (*röster*) are important. In a democracy, you have to go and vote. Then you have to understand why you should do that. It's not just because, 'I don't want to.' Or 'I want to.' Rather it has to do with a possibility, that you have to manage, you have to take care of that. It's a little- it doesn't happen by itself, but rather you have to make an investment. And that's what's hard in life, that not everyone has the energy (*orkar*) to do that. But if you have energy to do that, that's what we in the folk high school try to work with." Here, Ulrika describes "feeling well," in the mode in which it is worked on at school, as having the energy to care about and take care of one's social responsibilities toward immediate others and a larger social collective.

Åsa, a friendly, short-statured woman who also taught high-school completion courses at Oak Bay, was also hopeful that working with participants at the folk high school provided a way to pass on her own generation's social democratic "structure of feeling" to today's young adults, inspiring civically-oriented forms of care. When I asked Åsa whether there was one thing she would really want her students to get out of her course, she said, "I want them to reflect about their own taking part in this democracy and what they can do to make life better for themselves and for other people. So I do want them not just to look here (*points to herself*), but a bit (*looks around*). [T]hose who are young today, they've grown up during the period we call the individualistic period…If I compare from sixteen years ago[47] to now, we have to work more with the attitude. The attitude is more – 'No, you do it for me.'" I asked, "So there's something you remember about Swedish society and values from longer ago, that you want to keep bringing back and making stronger now?" Åsa responded affirmatively: "Mmm. Absolutely…I sound like [a] hundred years [old] (*laughs*), but it has to – we have to come back to that."

Ulrika's and other Oak bay teachers' descriptions of "getting participants to care" resonate strongly with Nel Noddings' writings on philosophy of education, with an added

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[47] Here, Åsa is referencing the fact that she started working at the folk high school sixteen years prior to our interview.

political dimension. Noddings claims that "moral education rest[s] on a foundation of affective relation," and "the primary aim of every educational institution and of every educational effort must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring" (2013: 171, 172). As such, the teacher, in the role of "[t]he one-caring[,] has one great aim: to preserve and enhance caring in…those with whom she comes in contact" (Noddings 2013: 172). In the folk high school's framework, caring relationships at school, which open the way for local forms of relational well-being, are seen as foundational components of participatory democracy. Åsa, Hans, Erik, Ulrika, Per and other teachers cast Oak Bay as a place to intervene on students' collective wellness and hence their capacity to care about and for social democratic values, making relational- and self-transformations in the classroom a key "psychopolitical" terrain for pushing back on and changing larger sociopolitical currents in an era when longstanding social democratic hegemony is severely threatened by increasing frustration at neoliberal reforms and the capture of a significant voting bloc by the far-right.

"Getting people to care": Passing on a social democratic structure of feeling at the folk high school

In practice, teachers pursue these intertwined projects of psychic and broader civic transformation using humanistic "pedagogies of care," informed by a Freireian philosophy[48]. While these pedagogies are meant to provide care *for* students, they are simultaneously aimed at inspiring a social democratic ethos among students by "getting them *to* care," in two senses of the word: both to *care about* issues and to *care for* others.

The sense of care that teachers hope to catalyze among students that has to do with "caring about" things centers on becoming aware of and concerned about their own and others' involvement and positionality in society. Teachers encourage students to "care about" social

[48] This relationship with Freire is explicit, as Oak Bay teachers not infrequently commented to me that his pedagogical approach, which gained wide popularity at the same time that many of them had entered the teaching field, resonated with them. As such, Freireian ideas comprised an integral part of the generational ethos that many folk high school teachers shared, and his pedagogical philosophy permeated their own "pedagogy of care." One recently retired teacher who was particularly drawn to his philosophy had even worked collaboratively with Freire and hosted him on a visit to Oak Bay.

issues both through course content, such as the unit on globalization that we saw above, and through pedagogical methods that invite students to encounter one another, sharing their experiences of social membership and building dialogue about society and social inequality. This mode of coming to care in line with a social democratic ethos is similar to the Freirian concept of "critical conscientization" (Freire 1970). Freire (1970: 81) explains that education that promotes critical consciousness

> denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers...people in their relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it.

Coming to care about one's surroundings, in this framework, is deeply social, being both catalyzed within social relations and transformative of how people understand and inhabit relations, helping them see relationships as the very fabric of the human world.

For both Freire and many folk high school teachers I talked to, cultivating students' investment in "caring about" social issues, based on critically understanding their own and others' place and potential in society, entails a second, closely linked form of care, "caring for." Within the teachers' social democratic structure of feeling, awareness and concern about people's fundamental interrelatedness as well as existing social inequalities entail obligations to act on that concern by engaging in acts of compassion and solidarity. Teachers hope that students will feel increasingly responsible for their mutual collective life and act in ways that are more responsive to one another's needs. According to Ulrika, feeling cared for - which, in the idiom of the folk high school means feeling seen, heard, and included - is foundational in feeling spurred to care for others. Ulrika explained that a large part of the school's work with students was aimed at helping them "be able to express something, because most often people feel well just from getting to say what they think (*oftast mår människor bra bara av att få säga det man tycker*)." She continued, "I think that if we try to listen to the questions that are really important for students, and try to do something about it, then they get a taste of how it's possible to

influence things." At the folk high school, pedagogies of care, which teachers use to create a caring environment for students[49], are seen to facilitate the development of a critical consciousness characterized both by caring about and caring for a shared world and immediate others.

Teachers approach this project in a Freireian framework, wherein

> the point of departure must always be with men and women in the 'here and now,' which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene…A deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation. Resignation gives way to the drive for transformation and inquiry, over which men feel themselves to be in control…[Furthermore, this process] cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity (Freire 1970: 85).

Teachers saturate daily life at the folk high school with pedagogies of care aimed at helping participants feel connected to – and compelled to act compassionately in relation to – others in the "here and now" (Freire 1970: 85) of their social environment at school; then, through kindling that sense of immediate connection, they hope to help students feel similarly connected to society more broadly. The conscientization process that many teachers hope the school environment will prompt for their students, which can also be thought of as a process of coming to care, is intersubjective, embodied and affective. Necessarily unfolding only in and through participation in a psycho-relational-social setting, such social democratic projects of conscientization leave experiential and social traces which can be examined ethnographically.

Teachers' attempts to stimulate these intertwined forms of care – caring about and caring for – were woven into the fabric of everyday life at school. The methods Erik used to facilitate the class session above, centering and responding to student-driven inquiry and dialogue rather than lecturing at them, or what Freire calls the "banking method" of education,

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[49] As noted in the previous chapter, what I refer to as "pedagogies of care" are not always explicitly thematized as caring or even as concrete pedagogical strategies. Rather, they shape teachers' general orientations to their work, giving their everyday interactions with students inside and outside of the classroom a student-centered focus, aimed at enhancing students' feelings of social embeddedness.

illustrate well how teachers use Freireian pedagogy to structure the learning atmosphere in a way that brings collective modes of concern and engagement into the learning process. Another example of this came up in a discussion of students' cleaning duties in the *externatare kök*, or the kitchen that students who commuted to school could use to heat up lunches brought from home[50]. Sofia, who lived in an apartment in town and typically went home to eat lunch, complained to our teacher, Hans, 'But if we don't eat in the *externatare kök*, do we still have to participate in cleaning it?' Without a moment's hesitation, Hans said, 'Yes, absolutely. The principle here is not based on whether or not you personally use it, it's based on the idea that you're part of a group of *externatare* [commuter students], or people who have this kitchen available to them. Taking on the responsibility of cleaning the space is part of what it means to be in a group and contribute to a group – you just have to do your share.' Such pedagogical moments served to call young people to become aware of and recognize the fact of their membership in larger social groupings and to advise students to productively navigate this with a social democratic ethos foregrounding mutual engagement. Teachers' social democratic structure of feeling leads them to believe - and coach their students, through facilitating social interactions at school - that even though people's social membership may be unchosen, the undeniable fact of social interrelatedness entails a moral responsibility to orient responsively and collaboratively toward others.

This use of the folk high school by teachers to intervene on students' affective (dis)investments in social and civic participation, encouraging them to adopt teachers' investment in social democracy through their participation in school sociality, makes the school function as an "affective arrangement." According to Slaby, Mühlhoff and Wüschner (2019), in an affective arrangement, "affect is patterned, channeled and modulated in recurrent and repeatable ways" (5). By shaping how people relate to one another through collective activities

[50] In contrast to commuter students, or *externatare,* who ate lunch in the *externatare* kitchen, students who lived in school dorms, called *internatare,* ate lunch in the school cafeteria.

oriented around local norms, affective arrangements impact the spread of emotional dynamics between people, influencing how participants affect and are affected by one another (Slaby *et al* 2019: 4). The social and pedagogical environment at school can be thought of as an affective arrangement in that it aims at “the kindling and sustaining of certain forms of intensive affect” (Slaby *et al* n.d.: 15) - more specifically, at fostering the relational orientations that are entailed by folk high school teachers’ investment in social democratic values, such as solidarity, responsivity, and participation - among young adult participants. Because the “feeling” dimension in structures of feeling is not primarily individual but social and relational, by “arranging” the way affect circulates among students, the school environment has the potential to intervene on students’ structures of feeling, or their “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt...[, the] specifically affective elements of [their] consciousness and relationships” (Williams 1977: 132).

Slaby *et al*’s (n.d.: 11) description that “[a]ffective arrangements bundle, crystallize, and intensify instances of affect, combining initially individualized or micro-relational affect into larger relational constellations” aligns well with teachers’ philosophy that intimate interpersonal encounters in the classroom and dorms are necessary first steps toward instantiating a broader social democratic ethos among the student body as a whole. The site of the folk high school, as an affective arrangement, “present[s] opportunities for attachment,” by giving people “incentive[s] to enter into and stay within the constellation” (Slaby *et al* n.d.: 7). The arrangement can realize its “purposes” more effectively, the more that individuals psychically invest in it (Slaby *et al* n.d.: 15). Through intersubjective pedagogical practices, teachers invite participants to “attach” to the school’s affective arrangement, hoping that their increasing involvement in the constellation will improve participants’ sense of well-being, mitigate the apathy and antipathy teachers see as associated with their unwellness, and ultimately reanimate a broader sense of shared investment in social democratic forms of civic participation.

Affective transformations?: Tracing students' social, civic and political feeling over time

In what ways and to what ends does the folk high school environment, shaped by teachers' attempts to pass on their generational structure of feeling, function in practice as an affective arrangement, impacting students' investments in social, civic and political participation? Through spending several months in a setting where social democratic values at least ostensibly set the parameters for everyday classroom interaction, do students begin to understand their own lives and moral and emotional commitments in terms of teachers' shared model of social democratic engagement? A whole-class discussion from the second semester, as well as individual year-end interviews with several students, provide some insight into how students took up and reacted to teachers' attempts to foster a sense of civic involvement and commitment to democratic participation among the younger generation, attaching in different ways to the school's affective arrangement.

In mid-February 2018, two and a half months after the classroom discussion above, Erik started class by prompting us to reflect on democracy and the folk high school. He wrote out several questions on the board:

> (1) What is democracy?
> (2) Is it connected to the folk high school? If so, how?
> (3) What is the folk high school's purpose/function (*Syfte/funktion*)? Why are we here?

He told us to take five minutes to jot down our own spontaneous thoughts, saying, 'Of course you can google this, but we don't want a definition from google, we want – what do *you* think (*vad tänker* ni)?'

After a few minutes of silent writing, he assigned us randomly into small groups to discuss what we'd generated, and then we came back together as a class to share. Max opened the discussion for the class by speaking generally about his experience at Oak Bay, saying, 'What I really love is how much discussion and conversation we have, where everyone shares different

opinions (*åsikter*), and where people accept our differences and respond to each other with respect (*bemöter varandra med respekt*).' Ebba, who had discussed these questions in the same group as Max, praised the folk high school as a place that brought together lots of very different people, saying, 'You meet people who you wouldn't meet otherwise, and amidst all this difference, everyone is welcome to share their ideas and be themselves.' In response to Erik's second question - how the folk high school was linked to democracy – she continued, 'I think the connection lies in that there is space here to express oneself (*utrymme för att uttrycka sig själv*).' In response to this group's very positive perspectives on the folk high school, Erik said, turning toward the rest of the class, 'Okay, what does everyone think? Is this a hopeless idealization?' Leilah affirmed, 'I recognize that (*Jag känner igen det*),' and Noor nodded and gave a thumbs up.

Erik turned toward Elias, Matteo, and Lukas, saying, 'From what I heard, your group had a much less positive view – if I understood it right, you think there's no democracy here [at school], and you don't get to decide anything?' Lukas said, 'The teachers aren't good at listening - there isn't enough communication.' Elias and Matteo distanced themselves from Lukas' harsh judgment, saying, 'Well, there was disagreement in our group…' From across the room, Sofia volunteered, 'If I can give a piece of constructive criticism – we have generated ideas, but we feel like they're not being listened to – like when we talked about what we wanted in this current unit, we said we wanted to hear from someone who had pulled themselves up out of a hard situation (*en träskperson*).' Erik said, 'And we have been working hard on that - we asked someone to come and talk about gambling addiction.' That seemed to settle things for the moment, and we moved to the next group.

Olle, who had tattoos on his arms and an outgoing personality though he nonetheless kept to himself much of the time, opened for his group, saying, 'Many people associate democracy with freedom, but there are countries that are called democratic but aren't free.' Fahim built on this idea, saying, 'I think there are two kinds of democracy, passive and active. In

Syria before the revolution, there was passive democracy, in that people chose not to advocate for political change because they just wanted to have a good life for themselves and didn't want to think about the bigger picture of society - they chose not to choose.'

Erik followed on Fahim's comment, saying, 'Passive democracy also has to do with the folk high school. If you have a formal democratic structure, but people don't care, or don't know about the system and their options within it, that is passive democracy. To participate meaningfully in democracy, you must have a certain amount of knowledge, must grasp the idea of the whole system, and even be able to be elected yourself (*man måste ha någon kunskap, måste fatta idéen med hela systemet, och måste till och med kunna själv bli vald*). All of this comes through general education (*allmän bildning*).'[51] He explained that through these means - helping people gain a baseline of knowledge, an understanding of the system, and then hopefully the will to participate - the folk high school was a place where people could develop more active citizenship (*medborgarskap*).

The last group, whose spokesperson was Sofia, had talked about New Public Management[52] and how this framework pushed education to focus on statistics and measurable outcomes rather than on the more holistic, critical goals of education Erik had just described. Erik affirmed, 'Yes, here at the folk high school, rather than just meeting statistical targets, you have to grow as a person (*man måste växa som person*).' Ending the discussion before we broke for lunch, Sofia said that, 'We have to take our own responsibility (*eget ansvar*). It's us, as people, who build society (*Det är vi som människor som bygger samhället*), and education needs to go into this core (*in i kärnan*), focusing on living people in the classroom and our development.'

While the discussion above shows some disagreement among students over whether the school provided appropriate scaffolding for enacting collective democratic participation, it also

[51] Here, Erik refers to the education we were receiving in our course, as part of the "general [education] track," or *allmänna linjen,* at the folk high school.
[52] New Public Management is neoliberal governance discourse we had learned about recently in class.

captures, on the whole, students' growing investment in the notion that social democratic forms of mutual recognition and dialogue should guide their interactions at school.

Below, I draw on the scenes above as well as individual interviews in case studies of three participants - Sofia, Olle, and Fahim – to illustrate how differently situated students responded to the school environment, reacting to and taking up staff's projects of social and civic conscientization - "getting people to care" - in ways that were both shared and idiosyncratic, meeting as well as falling short of teachers' hopes for passing on their own generation's social democratic structure of feeling. The basic outlines of how school care projects impacted each of their outlooks were relatively common in the student body, so that despite variations in the individual content, none of the most archetypal features of these experiences – in other words, whether students experienced movement along a trajectory toward teachers' goals, feeling both more socially included and well at school and thus more aware of their potential to connect with others in society more broadly, as Sofia did, or remained relatively skeptical of and alienated from collective social engagement at school and in society, as Olle did – were particularly rare. The cases show how students' social positionalities may have related to these outcomes in some ways, as I found it to be the case during my fieldwork in 2017-18 that students whose experiences echoed Sofia's were more likely to be women, students whose experiences paralleled Olle's were more likely to be men, and students whose experiences overlapped structurally with Fahim's were more likely to share his positionality as a migrant. It is difficult to say, however, whether these trends would hold from year to year.

Sofia

Based on her participation in the above discussion and her reflections on her own shifting stances toward social life in mid- and end-of-year interviews, Sofia's experience aligns most closely of the four cases with teachers' aims to inspire students' affective investment in a social democratic ethos. In the classroom scene above, Sofia's understanding of how the folk high school works - that students should drive course content in partnership with teachers, and

that the classroom social context prompts personal growth, which in turn animates and drives democratic society - shows how at school she adopted a felt sensibility and an articulable view similar to the teachers', which intertwines ideas of wellness with understandings of democratic citizenship. In the interview material below, Sofia describes how the folk high school environment provoked a growing sense of consciousness about her place and potential in society. The terms in which she describes this self-transformation mirror teachers' discourses, above, about the folk high school as a space where students are invited to awaken to the fact of their social membership and collective social responsibilities.

In an interview with Sofia near the end of the first semester in early December 2017, around the time of the opening scene of the chapter, I asked her, "does it feel valuable (*värdefullt*) to be here [at Oak Bay]?" She responded, "Yeah, it does. It does, really. I'm very thankful (*tacksam*). (pause). And I hope that when it's over later, that you (*man*) can look back and see a lot of positive changes. But it's- I feel already now that the social stimulation is doing a lot for me and it makes me feel really good (*den får mig att må väldigt bra*). I dare to take more for myself (*jag vågar ta för mig mer*), not just in our class, when we have lessons, but even out in society (*även ute i samhället*)- before, I was a bit more scared, you know, and didn't always dare to talk with people, like on public transportation and such, but today, if someone starts talking to me I talk back, and think it's interesting and rewarding (*givande*). I've become a bit braver, I think."

Six months later, in an interview just after the end of the school year in early June 2018, Sofia elaborated on how she had indeed continued on this trajectory so that in fact, "when it [was] over later…[she could] look back and see a lot of positive changes." Over a picnic of tea and ice cream Sofia had surprised me by preparing for us, I asked her, "Does it feel like you've gotten some new ideas about society, in a larger way than the social context at school?"

"Yes, truly (*verkligen*)," Sofia answered. "I've started to think more positively. I've always thought so negatively before, and I thought, everything is so corrupt, everything is ruined

(*förstört*), there's no possibility to fix things, and so on. But, no. When we were [on our field trip] at the eco-farm, for example, and [the farmer] talked so optimistically about all the solutions there are, he actually made it sound like it doesn't require so much, but it requires that more people see this and do this. But I feel like it also has a lot to do with how you yourself (*man själv*) think about your surroundings (*sin omvärld*) and your world, and your future…[and] I'm starting to think more about how little you can do by *yourself* (*man kan göra* själv) to change how the planet feels (*mår*) and things like that."

Continuing to reflect on my question of whether her time at Oak Bay had given her new ideas about society, she turned to the example of gender, saying: "But also around- society is very- it even feels like right now is women's time (*kvinnornas tid*)- women have gotten so much more to have a say in (*mycket mer att säga till om*), and more space (*plats*), and it's okay that women get to take up space, so when they feel like it, they dare to take more space, and sometimes it almost feels like it's becoming- I don't want to say all, but maybe many, men can feel threatened by that. And that it can be hard to handle those discussions that can spring up around that, and there's a bit of that macho-culture, which characterizes- that people maybe think a bit insularly sometimes. Like, in the worst scenarios, it becomes 'us and them.' But I don't know, I'm very curious about that, I'd like to study more social science at a deeper level, because I think that kind of thing is really interesting."

I responded, "Yeah. Does it feel like even now, during the school year with '#MeToo' - does it feel that right now in a way is a moment that's influencing you?'

Sofia answered, "Yeah. And in class, I've felt that for me it's been a given (*självklart*) that I should get to 'raise my voice because I'm a woman.' And I've done that with conviction (*övertygelsen*), it's also been received (*mottagits*) as if it's a given. And I think that's something positive. But it's also that, for me, I want to see it objectively, so I'd like to distinguish between what's trendy and what's relevant - what's actually happening that has influence, because I think that as long as it's two camps, it isn't something positive. Rather I think that small things, like a

conflict in a relationship, where people find a way to get past that and be more solution-oriented and work together as a team, then that's a positive development. In the same way that this can happen in relationships, I think it can also be found in societal constellations, and that it's very important for us to have these discussions, and have these disputes, also, because sometimes we have to fight to make up (*vi måste bråka för att bli sams*)."

Here, Sofia draws clear links between her experience at school and her changing thoughts about how her life is interconnected with others in a broader society and world. Sofia's understanding that her time at the folk high school had prompted her to "start to think more positively" fits closely with Freire's concept of the process of "critical conscientization," whereby "A deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation[, so that r]esignation gives way to the drive for transformation and inquiry" (Freire 1970: 85). Her exposure to ideas and people during her time at Oak Bay sparked a shift from a nihilistic view of society in which everything was "corrupt," "ruined," and past the point of possibly being fixed, toward a view that with collective effort, positive change could be made. This evidences a profound alteration in the "affective elements of [her] consciousness and relationships" (Williams 1977: 132), and a deviation from the prevailing political structure of feeling among socially and economically marginalized young adult Swedes - dominated by entwined senses of apathy and antipathy - which was illustrated in Sofia's and other students' comments in the class conversation that opened this chapter and has wider echoes in society. Instead, at the end of the year, Sofia's general orientation toward society had moved much closer to the teachers' social democratic structure of feeling, defined by optimistic personal investments in collaborative action aimed toward social good. Sofia's realization that "it [the potential for positive change] has a lot to do with how you yourself think about your surroundings and your world," seems to clearly materialize Ulrika's, Åsa's, Karin's, and other teachers' aims of "getting people to care" in the younger generation. Further, Sofia's move toward "starting to think more about how little you can do by *yourself*" - in contrast to

what can be achieved together - seems to reflect a growing alignment with the teachers' philosophy that caring about issues and caring for others in a social democratic idiom is foundational for achieving wider forms of societal and environmental well-being.

This final interview reflects Sofia's sense of personal investment in the school's affective projects and potentialities, illustrating how she came to experience the teachers' emphasis on collective concern and participation as personally rewarding (*givande*) and wellness-enhancing. Her changing consciousness of social issues and her own emplacement in society was knit inextricably together with transformations in how it felt to connect with immediate others at school, where feeling affirmed by classmates in being who she was helped her both "dare to take more for [her]self" as well as give more of herself in social interaction.

In Slaby *et al*'s (2019) terms, the affective arrangement of the school provided incentive for Sofia to attach to and adapt to its relational and affective dynamics and norms. Participating in a material-discursive arrangement at school that channeled relational affect in particular ways altered her structure of feeling, promoting what she described as a more "positive" overriding way of inhabiting concern for issues and people around her (Slaby *et al* 2019).

Following on Sofia's commentary about the school as a dialogue space, I asked, "And you said- it comes up more often at the folk high school that you have the opportunity to truly encounter people, or have time or space to talk about differences?"

She answered, "Yeah. It's partly that you've discussed something in the classroom and then that the discussion has followed along afterward, but one place I've been where discussions and encounters have been essential (*väsentliga*) was when we were at our morning coffee break (*fika*). I think that's so important, and I've heard that they're going to make it voluntary next year, and I think that really sucks (*tråkigt*). Because I think, no, it's needed, that time (*det behovs, den stunden*). It's very important, I think....[And] I've learned that- so much comes with the folk high school, it's not just studies - it's friends, and relationships, and you get new perspectives and new impressions, and you reprioritize your way of thinking (*man omprioritera*

sitt tank), and those pieces have given so much that the other- even if everything has been important, that has been a huge gain (*en stora vinst*), that experience (*den erfarenheten*)."

I affirmed, "Yeah! You can surely guess that I'm very interested in hearing more about what it is that feels like it's been important in that area, for you?"

Sofia reflected, "Yeah, well partly- friends that I've made and have gotten close to, and that I've been able to be a human (*kunnat få vara en människa*) with them. Sometimes I've just said, 'Oh, right now I feel like an awful person (*en hemsk person*)!' And in that way Simone has been my best friend here. She has been like a sister, almost. It's been at that deep level of friendship, that it feels like- I explained it to Lukas once, and I said, 'She picks me up (*fångar upp mig*) when I feel like I'm falling down (*ramlar ner*), then she helps me up,' and that's not such a given (*inte så självklart*) that you find that in people, even in your friends, that they see you in that way."

Somewhat later in the conversation, I asked, "Does it feel like you had a really good picture of your personal foundational values (*grundvärderingar*) before coming to Oak Bay? And has that changed in any way here?"

Sofia said, "Umm.. yeah.. I've always had this very humanistic way of thinking (*humana tanket*) and have always been on- I don't want anyone to be on the outside (*jag vill inte att någon ska vara utanför*). I've always stood on the side of the weak, and that remains as a foundation for me, in my identity...if I can help people, if it's just like, 'Oh, today I'm going to cook, do you want to come over and eat?' Then that can be a very small symbolic (*unintelligible*) where you help someone in the everyday....But then I've also been a bit more- I've gotten better values when it comes to, like, that I have responsibility as an individual in society (*jag har fått bättre värderingar gällande typ att jag har ansvar som samhälls individ*). Before I always felt that society is- it isn't something that you've chosen to be a part of, and that's strange, that you have to be a part of society just because you happened to be (*råkade*) a human, and a society existed here when I was born here. But I've gotten to rethink that, like, well it *is* that way, and I

can't just ignore it (*strunta i det*), and stop living (*sluta leva*) because it doesn't look how I want it to (*det inte ser ut som jag vill*), but rather I have to/get to (*får*) try to make the best of the situation and change things if it's possible (*om det går*)."

I asked, "I'm also wondering, whether you've gotten any new ideas about [political] parties? And the election is coming up, have you thought about who you would want to vote for?"

Sofia hesitated, "Mm.. no, actually not." (*both laugh*).

"That's fine too," I said.

Sofia continued, reflecting, "I haven't engaged myself so much (*engagerat mig så mycket*) because I've felt- what I've seen, I can't watch when a politician talks without seeing it as a business, and seeing like, that was that rhetorical tactic, and now she's talking about a problem in order to then present a solution, and it's so controlled (*så himla uppstyrt*), everything, like, 'Here's a product and I'm selling it to you, now if I sell it like this, then you'll buy it.' (*unintelligible*) and as long as it's so ingenuine and is just talk, then it's hard for me to buy the idea of it. Rather instead I feel like, no, I don't know. I can't- either I'll vote blank, or if [the far-left fringe party I've been interested in before] is still there in the municipal election then maybe I'll vote for [them]. I don't feel like I've had energy to engage politically, because I think politics is driven a lot by the surrounding world. So it's easier to just take responsibility for yourself, really. But it's also- many say it's an obligation (*skyldighet*) to vote, and otherwise you can't complain, but I don't know if I agree with that. I feel like it shouldn't be an obligation but rather a free choice (*ett fritt val)*."

"It's also really interesting for my research," I said, "the question of how people think about what it means to be engaged in society, especially if it *doesn't* take the form of politics or political parties, what does it mean for you? And it's totally ok if you don't know how to express it. It's not easy."

Sofia responded, "Yeah, it's a hard question. You can break it down in different ways. But I think that as long as you're a humane person (*en human människa*) and can help others who need help, and then also try to contribute to ecological thinking (*ekologiska tanket*), and such. Because it would have been fantastic if after you'd been out on your adventures and educated yourself in whatever, settle in somewhere, and have a bunch of pots with plants, and a greenhouse - and just in that way contribute to it getting better with carbon dioxide. There's always something."

I said, "That's very interesting. A way to just live your life while also having a broader way of thinking about how it could influence others, maybe not directly, but-"

Sofia agreed, "No [not directly], but I hope of course that the future will be more- like, environmentally friendly alternatives, that we stop driving with gasoline and diesel, fewer chemicals in food, and in textiles and everything. Because there was a time in my life when I realized all these things, and it was like I realized everything at once, and then I got this hostile picture of society and the world, and oh, how dark everything is, and I don't think it's good to get stuck in that way of thinking either, but rather- I think that you have to try to do the best you can, really, to try to influence others in good way, and allow yourself to be inspired by others who do it in a better way too."

Sofia's commentary reveals how, through her time at school, she began to understand her place in a larger social surrounding in ways that resemble teachers' social democratic cultural framework, increasingly orienting to people around her with an ethic of solidarity and mutual social responsibility. Sofia describes how this shift in her social and civic consciousness was scaffolded by the local infrastructure for social constellations at Oak Bay both inside and outside of the classroom, which facilitated experiences of recognizing and being recognized by others, through engaging in agonistic dialogue, or in her words, "fighting to make up," about social issues in class discussions; building relationships and a sense of shared social emplacement through everyday conversation at *fika* (the daily morning coffee break); and

forming close friendships such as the one between herself and Simone, through deeper conversations on forest walks and over home-cooked dinners shared outside school. These accumulated positive interactions brought to life in her own experience a sense of "caring about" the human condition of shared social membership. This, in turn, made real and compelling for her a related obligation to orient her actions toward "caring for" immediate peers and society more broadly, making it an important goal for her to "try to influence others in a good way, and allow [her]self to be inspired by others who do it in a better way too." The positive feedback Sofia experienced from engaging in these activities helped her develop what Slaby *et al* (2019) would call a positive attachment to the school's affective arrangement, giving her incentive to identify with relational and affective norms at school and thus take on core aspects of the social democratic structure of feeling teachers aimed to inspire.

However, the disjunctures that remained between Sofia's and teachers' structures of feeling at the end of the year merit equal attention to the growing similarities. In contrast to teachers' more consistent emphasis on collectivity, Sofia oscillates between collectivity and individuality. While she reflects that "I've gotten better values when it comes to, like, that I have responsibility as an individual in society," her new sense of social responsibility does not seem to override the individualizing neoliberal rhetoric so pervasive in her generation's time, uttered in almost the same breath, that, "it's easier to just take responsibility for yourself, really." Further, while teachers' social democratic structure of feeling also centers investment in political participation via formal democratic structures, Sofia's changed sense of social and civic involvement is not linked to a corresponding increase in her commitment to formal politics. Even while saying, "I've started to think more positively" about the possibilities for making social change in contrast to how "I've always thought so negatively before, and I thought, everything is so corrupt, everything is ruined (*förstört*), there's no possibility to fix things," she does not locate her newfound optimism in the political sphere, saying she does not share teachers' view that voting is an obligation and that "I don't feel like I've had energy to engage

politically." While many teachers hope to inspire explicitly political conscientization in their students, then, Sofia's time at the folk high school does not appear to have erased the skepticism and disenchantment about the Swedish political system held in common by many young adult Swedes in her generation, especially those in more precarious social and economic positions.

While several teachers expressed to me a sense of disappointment that Oak Bay staff were collectively "dropping the ball" in terms of encouraging students to learn more about and invest more in party politics, I did not read students like Sofia's unchanged wariness about collective investment in the political system as a failure on the part of either students or teachers. Rather, I read students' continued distance from political structures as reflecting a sense of anger among the younger generation that the collectively-fueled political system in which teachers came of age and remain affectively invested in no longer exists in the same way for themselves. Using the language of business and consumption that, instead, pervaded her own generation's upbringing, she describes how neoliberal influence has reshaped political representation, saying in the interview above, "I can't watch when a politician talks without seeing it as a business, and seeing, like, that was that rhetorical tactic…like, 'Here's a product and I'm selling it to you, now if I sell it like this, then you'll buy it.'" Yet, while not optimistic that formal politics can provide a path to positive social change in the current environment, she retains an openness to endorsing political alternatives that do not fuel neoliberal logics, saying, "if [the far-left fringe party I've been interested in before] is still there…maybe I'll vote for [them]." Rather than young people stubbornly holding onto an uninformed sense of political apathy, fueled by membership in a self-centered, individualistic generation, as teachers might see it, Sofia's sense of ambivalent disengagement toward collective political action reveals disappointment in the character she and many of her peers understand the mainstream political system to have taken on, becoming decreasingly responsive to popular organization in the face of increasingly powerful business interests.

In sum, Sofia's case suggests that the folk high school succeeded in inspiring a changed sense of social and civic consciousness for some students, in other words, "getting them to care" in a social democratic idiom, by providing a context in which they could forge meaningful interpersonal relationships. These relationships fed a sense of well-being grounded in social inclusion,[53] which made it possible for Sofia and others to imagine themselves as more widely included in society and to pursue new forms of civic engagement. At the same time, the school's strategy of reanimating social democratic investment specifically through affect, located in psychic and relational terrain, did not succeed in impacting Sofia's explicitly political consciousness – or any other Swedish-born students I talked with who related uneasily with the formal political system – in the way they had hoped, which I discuss further in this chapter's conclusion.

Olle

In contrast to Sofia's experience of feeling affirmed and included through relationships she built through the year at school, which in turn inspired her to seek out ways to connect with others and more broadly to society, Olle, a conservative-leaning student with wavy blond hair and an eagle tattoo, felt alienated by what he experienced as the shallow and exclusionary nature of much sociality at school, leading him to become disinvested in wider sociality and reconfirming a desire to focus only on his closest-knit social circle. Olle's case provides an instructive contrast to Sofia's in showing how, for a variety of personal and social reasons, students engage in different ways and to different extents with the same material-discursive structures at school. Whereas for students like Sofia, "It may have 'stabilizing' effects on individuals to be framed within the arrangement's specific relations of affecting and being affected, and this stabilization may give rise to an ongoing attachment" (Slaby *et al* n.d.: 7-8), for other students, like Olle, the affective arrangement may not provide compelling reasons to

[53] I have discussed at length in the preceding chapters how, at the folk high school, "well-being" is entwined with social inclusion. In the previous chapter, I also specifically discussed Sofia's experience of feeling increasingly "well" alongside feeling increasingly socially included at school.

attach, thus failing to act as a "stabilizing" force in the intended way, and even reinforcing commitments to other available arrangements.

As a result of students' varying attachments to the school's affective arrangement, Oak Bay succeeds in impacting some students' senses of social and civic consciousness in a social democratic direction, while entrenching others' skepticism of a social democratic structure of feeling in an era characterized by Trump and other far-right leaders. As Olle's narrative shows, the difference stems not only from individual students' motivations for and reactions to attending this school, but from the way particular constellations of students present at given moments in time provide relational contexts for one another that shape their experiences within the larger school site. Drawing on his perspective from the two academic years he spent in two separate high-school completion classes at Oak Bay, Olle explains how differently composed groups of students took up the school's affordances and potentialities at different socio-historical moments in distinct ways.

Olle's end-of-year interview took place over lunch together on the school's patio, at a table set a ways apart from the others, during the last week of the school year. I told him I was interested in hearing how it had felt recently and school and whether it had changed for him throughout the year, as well as his reflections on this year compared with the previous year.

Olle said, "I almost feel like I'm learning more this year, because last year everything was still very new for me. So whereas - I learned a bit [last year], except I'd want to say that I grew more than I learned (*jag växte mer än vad jag lärde mig*). And what I mean with that is that last year, I formed a kind of- another personality, you could say. Because all people do that, depending on who they're with. I don't behave the same way here that I do at home with my mom, for example. So when you end up in a new social milieu, you always try to adapt. You look up (*letar upp*), like, what's okay to talk about, and what's not okay to talk about. Who likes me, and who doesn't like me. And then you go from that, and create a kind of persona. That you use as soon as you come here. And last year had more to do with that. Whereas this year has to do

more with observing, how others are, how others behave. In that way I'm learning, how different groups function, how people (*människor*) function. The best way to understand people (*personer*) isn't to look at yourself, because you're not going to see yourself in the same way that you see another person. So the best way is to read other people, talk with them, listen to them, see how they are when they're not with you, how they are with their closest friends, how they are with their- how they are with people who they're not especially close to. That's (*unintelligible*) instructive (*lärorikt*)...For example, when I've seen that there have been warning signs for potential conflict here at school, I've chosen, instead of reacting outwardly, and becoming emotional, I've chosen to react inwardly, and have an inner dialogue with myself, to try to see it from their perspective, and try to see how I would react if I'd been in their situation, and how I'd try to solve whatever it may be that can lead to a conflict. And now when I've gone here, I've realized that it's very important to first and foremost read (*läsa av*) situations, and always keep the calm. Because if you react highly and make it clear in some way that you've taken it badly, then the person will also take it badly, because people read each other (*människor läser av varan*) all the time....That [learning about people] is definitely an aspect of the folk high school (*det är väl en del av folkhögskola*)."

"Could you describe a bit more," I probed, "so last year when you grew a lot as a person, how - in what way? What happened? And which new insights did you get then?"

Olle shared, "I'd want to say that it was a bit more personal (*det var lite mer personligt*), because I got really close with a guy who I'm still really tight with, named Vincent. We became really good friends. And the friendship grew actually from two things. First and foremost that at first he and I just began talking with each other. So then it was very shallow (*ytligt*), classmates, not true friends. Whereas a bit later, a lot of things happened at school. There was a girl who committed suicide, who knew him. So then you felt a little bit responsible (*skyldig*), because I didn't know her, but I saw how he reacted to it. And it's rather human (*mänskligt*) to want to help someone. So what I focused on then was to try to lift him up, to be there for him. And I

learned then that this surface level friendship that was just really just something related to school, grew to be a true friendship (*en riktig vänskap*). When you actually met outside of school and so on, and you traveled together. So, I don't know if that answered the question."

I responded, "That's really interesting. Does it feel like that influenced you a lot personally when you two got closer? And how?"

Olle said, "Yeah, really. It felt like I maybe learned a little bit how it works when you create contacts, because how do you actually know how you make a friend, it isn't just going forward and starting to talk to someone, and then you also have to learn that there's a difference between contact and a friend (*en vän*). According to me, a friend is someone, who you talk with, who understands. Whereas a contact is just someone who you maybe party with, who you meet at school, and it was interesting to see the development from how it went - from being just a classmate, to a friend (*en kompis*). So that, I'd like to say, taught me a bit more on how you first and foremost encounter/respond to someone (*bemöter någon*), and how you take these different steps in order to always keep developing the friendship (*hur man tar de här olika stegen för att utveckla hela tiden vänskapen*), because most often you of course want to have a friend, you don't just want to have a classmate. So I know, now, that if I'm actually going to get close to someone, I also have to dare to expose a bit more of my more personal side (*om jag ska faktiskt komma nära någon så måste jag också våga, liksom, blotta min lite mer personliga sida*). And then I have to hope that that person dares to do the same, otherwise it becomes just one-sided, if I dare to talk about deeper things, while that person doesn't dare to do that. So I learned a bit about how important that is."

I reflected, "So you got the chance to dare to do that, and to see also that someone else met (*mötte*) you in that way?"

"Yeah, absolutely, "Olle affirmed. "And unfortunately that trust came then from tragedy, because a person had just died, so he had no choice, he couldn't hide his feelings any longer. Like, when someone dies, you get sad, you cry, you start to ponder life, and what the meaning of

it is. And it wasn't an easy period for him. He ended up in the hospital, because he'd tried to kill himself. And I was there, actually, behind the crisis, and tried to come forward so that I could show him that I was there, because when you feel so bad (*när man mår så dåligt*), it's very hard to know whether anyone is actually there for you, you feel most often alone, even if you aren't. People maybe call you, and ask how you feel, but you feel like, 'It doesn't matter, I'm still alone.' So I did everything I could to show that, 'You're not alone, I'm there for you.'"

I asked, "Did you also find a new side of yourself in that way? That you got the chance to live in that way, or be there for someone else, was that a new experience for you in some way?"

Olle responded, "It wasn't a new experience, because I've known rather many people around me who haven't felt so good (*som har inte mått så bra*), who I've tried to help. But what was new with that, was precisely being a friend. Most often it's been maybe a girlfriend, or a family member. And this was a person who I hadn't known especially well. And even though this person (unintelligible) could even have been seen as only a stranger, I tried very desperately to make sure that this person didn't become a stranger to me. But rather that that person became a friend. So what I learned about myself (*det jag lärde mig hos mig själv*) then, was actually how empathic I am as a person, because you usually don't think about that. Because when you live life, you don't think about how people around you maybe feel very bad (*mår väldigt dåligt*), and actually need help. Rather you're so focused on yourself, and your goals, that you kind of forget a bit what's around you. But because this was a person that I'd just met, who suddenly became impacted by something very horrible, this sense of obligation (*skyldighetstänket*) came in to me (*kom in hos mig*), that this person needs help, you need to do something. So I absolutely learned something about myself then."

Continuing to reflect on the difference between his first year at Oak Bay, when he became friends with Vincent, and the current year, Olle said, "Last year in class I thought there was a bit more unity (*enighet*), even though there was more difference between participants - mixed ages, and so on. And most people came from different places - we had one from [northern

Sweden], one from [southern Sweden]. It was more fractured and diverse in that way, but anyway it felt like most people agreed more with each other (*kom lite bättre överens med varan*). And that can also depend on the differences, because people were more interested in each other- 'Where do you come from? What does your background look like?' We also had some students from Ethiopia and Syria. And we have that this year, too, except this year it still feels more fractured (*splittrad*), I think. Because most people are a little bit more alike, when it comes to age and so on, so it feels like it's become clearer with groupings and cliques."

I responded, "Yeah. Did it feel last year like people were a bit more motivated to build bridges?"

Olle reflected, "Yeah, they felt a bit more social, more motivated to get to know each other. And then it can also have a bit to do with timing, because [this year] we have a vote in September, and that makes it so that people's political views and ideologies start to play a bigger role. It has to do a bit more with what you think, and what you believe in. And that's also a way to divide people (*splittra människor*). Certainly, that can create unity in the case that people have similar views, but what happens if you (*man*) don't have that? Then you suddenly have differences between persons."

I said, "I'm interested - I know you have a strong interest in ideologies and politics and such - does it feel like for you, through your two years here at school, you've experienced changes in your own views in some way?"

"That's actually a good question..." Olle pondered. "I don't think there's a big difference. I feel like I've become a little more open, I'd like to say. Because you become that way with age and so on because you meet more people all the time. Like, you experience new things, and you get to hear others' opinions, and you think, 'Hmm! That person thinks in a very interesting way,' and so you almost get a little bit inspired, and start to imitate that person's way of thinking, as a way of thinking for yourself...it's a way to develop, because you've learned how to think in new

ways. But I wouldn't want to say directly that I like, converted to a new ideology in that way (*laughs*), but rather that I've grown as a person (*jag har växt som människa*)."

I asked, "Is there something you could point to, even if it's not so big, that, 'I started to think about, maybe, that thing in a different way'?"

Olle answered, "Yeah. I think it's a little scary when you talk with certain people, if you see how certain people react when you express your opinion, because some people are very careful with wanting to immediately distance themselves from you. One example is last year, we had a guy who said that he could never imagine having *fika* with someone on the right. So he took right away, a distance, and what I thought of immediately was, 'You have already done that [had fika with someone on the right] several times,' because in Sweden rather many people are afraid to express themselves, so he doesn't know that he has actually already done that [thing] which he had taken distance from. But because you act the way you do, people are scared to say what they think to you. So they [people with opposing views] have had *fika* with you, but stayed quiet in order to not upset you in some way. What I've realized is most important that one can actually do in such a situation is just to be honest. Because if you are scared of someone, how they'll react based on what you think, what you should do is explain exactly how you feel to the person, and then that person can determine if he is open minded enough or not to have contact with you."

I asked, "Yeah, so you realized it's important to say what you think, and then also motivate that and explain from your own experience why you've come to that and so on?"

Olle affirmed, "Yeah, exactly. It's very important to have a continued dialogue that doesn't shut people out, because people aren't going to understand that, then. They'll just put a label on you, and then take distance because of something you said one time, or something bad on facebook, or something like that. There's no acceptance, then, and no understanding. And that's very dangerous. Because it also leads to that you can maybe dehumanize a person. And in the end the person isn't a human anymore but rather just an opinion. A symbol, almost."

I probed, "Can you talk a bit about how you've experienced that at the school? Last year and this year, when you have talked about your views, and you've heard others' opinions, how has it been?"

Olle responded, "Last year, even though there were some extreme cases where that person completely distanced themselves from others who had these kinds of labels, it was still much more open and you still could talk with each other, and it was okay not to agree on everything. We had one guy who believed in some hippy-like thing, and there was another guy who was really strongly against this. They had very long debates. And one became angry at (*sur på*) the other. He basically said straight out, 'you're stupid.' But then ten minutes later, he apologized and invited him to have a coffee together at *fika*. Just to continue talking. Whereas this year, people have been a bit more careful, if someone in some way doesn't fit in (*passa in*) in the class group, then people are very fast to take distance from that person. To not talk at all. And not even pointing fingers, but you almost get scared, because people become - I don't know what you say in Swedish, but in English you say, a 'black sheep.'

I said, "So you see, how can I say it-"

"A shortage of dialogue, you can say (*En brist på dialog, kan man säga*)," Olle answered. "Because in order to have a discussion, you have to be able to talk about things (*måste man ju kunna prata om saker och ting*). And there's a difference between talking about something and being accused of something (*anklagad för något*). I think what many in the class mistake for discussion is that they take up something that is generally seen as being negative. And they just point out shortcomings in it. And create a discussion around that. And I think that's completely wrong. And when we talk about conservatism, for example, then it's the same thing. You noticed right away that conservatism is what's bad, among these ideologies [that we discussed in class]. Why? Of course it's connected to negative things, but there are surely connections to something positive as well. And, shouldn't we try to understand why some people find these ideologies attractive, while others don't find them attractive? But there are a whole lot

[of people in class] who don't do that. Many want to instead just throw it out - 'That's trash. We'll talk about the other [ideologies] instead.' Or they say, 'That's trash, we'll talk only about that, to show just how much it's trash.' That's, for me, not really a discussion. That's more a one-sided analysis. So first and foremost there are surely only some people who are on board with that idea, but the thing is since they think so very little of it, they're voices become louder. It's them, who become so emotional about this ideology. And that's not really a discussion, that's more analysis from one perspective. There must always be someone who counters, so that there's balance. Not that one side is heard more than the other.

I asked, "Does it feel like there isn't so much space to share different points of view?"

"No, I don't think so." Olle responded. "Because when certain people have made up their minds, it's very hard to convince them that there actually is an opposite to what they think. It's like, if you try to argue with someone who knows he's right. Now, I'm not saying that you can be right about something like that, but it's a little bit like that. When there isn't any clear right or wrong, then there's enormous room for discussion. But when someone has decided, no, I'm right, then it's really that they've closed the lid. Then the discussion is over."

After discussing several other topics, I posed, "I'm also very interested for my research in *mående* - how people feel here in the context at school. Does it feel for you that you've felt better (*har mått bättre*) here? Or that it's been up and down, or that you've felt worse (*mått värre*), or has it influenced how you've felt [at all]?"

Olle said, "Yeah. It probably really does. (*Det gör det nog verkligen*). I'd say that it's influenced me. Both positively and negatively, but mostly negatively. And I think that depends on that this is a fantastic place if what you need is new contacts and new friends. Then this is probably the best it can be, because it's just to move into the dorms and then you suddenly have 100 new friends. But if you're looking for something deeper, maybe – the meaning of life, if we come back to that – if you're searching for meaning in what you want to do, if you're searching for a partner who will be with you the rest of your life, then this isn't the best place. Because this

place gives you absolutely no meaning because it's - you can only be here for a limited time... And if you're looking for a partner, unfortunately it's such that even though when people drink and become more open with what they feel, it's, again, during a limited time. Because when you're sober, you'll maybe think, 'Why did I say that? Why did I do that?' So to be in a place where so much alcohol is consumed (*en plats där det drycks så mycket alkohol*), that's maybe not so great if you want to get close to someone, because there's a difference between real love and drunk love."

"That's interesting," I said. "So [you think] alcohol characterizes a lot of the social life here?"

"God, yes. Oh god, yes," Olle said, laughing.

Wrapping up our conversation, I said, "It was really interesting to hear the other day at lunch when you talked about how earlier in your life you ran with some people you later realized weren't for you, seeking out a feeling of-"

"Belonging (*tillhörighet*)," Olle interjected.

I continued, "Did it feel like after that, you gave up on finding that? Or that you found it, but in a different way?"

Olle responded, "I've figured out (*listade ut*) that it had to do more with myself than with others, because I expected back then that in order to be happy (*lycklig*) I had to find others who could fill certain needs in my life. I felt that I was forced to find someone that I could talk more deeply with, someone I could hang out with, and meaning (*en mening*). So what I actually wanted was to end up in a school, almost, where I have certain classmates and where I learn things. But what I've realized now is that all of that already exists in me (*allt det där finns redan hos mig*). If I want to learn something, then I learn something, and go out and seek the knowledge. If I want to talk to someone, first I have to look for who is always there for me (*vilka finns alltid hos mig*), my family. And if I want to have someone to hang out with, then it's just a matter of contacting a friend (*det är bara att ta kontakt med någon kompis*). I mean, I'm not

alone. I'm not isolated from society (*Jag är inte isolerad från samhället, liksom*). It's just that I felt that I needed something stable (*konstant*). And that depended mostly on the fact that I'd given up, not only on others, but even on myself."

Throughout this interview, Olle speaks ambivalently about the infrastructure for sociality and social openings at school. He casts in a positive light how during his two years there, the school functioned as a space to observe and learn about himself and others through everyday and deeper relationships. Engaging in classes and meals provided a scaffolding for him to come into contact with people and gave him a context in which to experiment with and reflect on different identities and modes of relating. His friendship with Vincent was significant in allowing him to experience the give and take involved in developing a mutually meaningful connection outside of the familial or romantic spheres. Further, he describes how recognizing Vincent's suffering as a friend inspired a sense of obligation to care for him and gave him an opportunity to act out this care. This served as a catalyst for a form of social conscientization (Freire 1970), spurring him to reflect on his own capacity for empathy and to realize that making others feel seen could have as much value for him as coming to feel seen by others – a way of thinking which is foundational to teachers' social democratic ethos.

Yet at the same time that Olle highlights the school's role in facilitating his increasing awareness of these positive feedback loops between self-discovery and mutual relationality, he casts harsh negative criticism on other aspects of school sociality, especially during his second year as a student, describing connections that he felt were largely shallow, short-term, clique-ish, and often alcohol-fueled at school. As the national election loomed closer in the 2017-18 school year, he also painted a picture of increasingly polarized class discussions that made people such as himself who held right-wing conservative views feel excluded and dismissed as "stupid" or "trash."

Olle's perception of the daily *fika* break captured the ambivalence he felt about the school's social infrastructure, in it served to connect people in more and less genuine ways. On

one hand, he remembers fondly how people who had a dispute in his class the previous year could extend their conversation at *fika* and attempt to recognize one another as humans despite their differences. Yet, on the other hand, he describes with disappointment how other *fika* conversations served simply to mask over differences and divisions, with conservative students hiding their true opinions for fear of confronting judgment and antagonism.

Despite this ambivalence toward the possibility for school as a site for social openings, Olle's closing comments show that his narrative ultimately leans more toward casting the school as a site of social closure. While Olle had experiences at Oak Bay that were personally meaningful and relationally transformative, the school was not a place, as staff like Ulrika and Per hoped it would be, that helped him feel cared for and thus inspired him to care in a social democratic idiom. Instead, he describes his experiences at school as having entrenched his commitment to the relationships and sociopolitical outlook he already had, rather than inspiring him to continue to seek new relationships and a deeper sense of imbrication with society more broadly. While his description of how he came to the realization, in part through attending the folk high school, that, "I'm not alone. I'm not isolated from society," sounds similar to Sofia's reflections above, this stance is quite different from Sofia's realization, shaped within a social democratic cultural framework, that connecting with others could fulfill personal needs as well as contribute positively to broader social and civic projects.

I suggest that Sofia's and Olle's differing levels of attachment to the school's affective arrangement, which was geared toward inspiring social democratic modes of feeling and relating, led to different impacts on their respective social, civic, and political consciousness, and thus different outcomes of teachers' projects of "getting people to care." Feeling that she was accepted for who she was and appreciated for her contributions in the school's multiple social arenas of classroom, *fika,* and free time gave Sofia incentive to cathect into these relational constellations. Experiencing sociality at school as generally rewarding and inviting, which in

turn helped her to “feel well” (*må bra*)[54], gave rise to her newfound sense at Oak Bay that an outward-facing orientation was personally and societally fruitful, reshaping her affective landscape in a social democratic direction. In contrast, the lack of wider recognition and acceptance Olle felt at school, conveyed in his descriptions of feeling that he had to hide his views at *fika* and that his views were “trashed” in class discussions led him to feel un-cared for and unwell, saying in response to my question about whether the school had impacted how he felt, “it’s influenced me…but mostly negatively.” Overall, then, despite Oak Bay providing social scaffolding for Olle to build new relationships, which provoked new thoughts about people’s mutual obligations to care for one another, his time at school did not prompt significant change in “getting him to care” about broader forms of social, civic, or political life within a social democratic framework, as teachers had hoped. Instead, his experiences of feeling judged and excluded kept him from investing very much in school social life and its affective arrangement, ultimately reinforcing an inward-facing orientation, in which he “figured out that [his search for belonging] had to do more with [him]self than with others, because…[he] realized that all of that already exists in me.” One consequences of Olle’s lack of attachment to the school’s social democratic affective arrangement may have been that he remained more open to other available affective arrangements, such as the growing presence of far-right media and xenophobic and isolationist rhetoric online, which would have resonated with and perhaps bolstered Olle’s sense that it was right to attend to those already within the fold without opening space for new social membership.

Olle’s case, like Sofia’s, illustrates how his reaction to the school project of redirecting the social and political energy of young people perceived to be apathetic and/or antipathetic in a social democratic direction was informed in interlocking ways by his own particular psychology, by the relationships he formed in the school environment, and by the larger political moment.

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[54] “*Att må bra*,” which translates literally to “to feel good,” is a local framework for understanding well-being at Oak Bay which has been described at length in the preceding chapters.

Fahim

The exasperation Fahim expressed in the class discussion about democracy at the opening of this chapter, urging his classmates to think about how 'Coming from a dictatorship in Syria where we felt watched all the time, [you should] be thankful here and think about the democratic possibilities and privilege you have,' captured a unique dimension of migrant and refugee students' experiences of teachers' social democratic conscientization projects. Coming from a different sociocultural, political, and historical context precluded the possibility of Fahim and other Syrian students "not caring" in the sense of taking baseline possibilities for civic and political participation for granted in the way many Swedish students did.

One evening after school in late February, a couple of weeks after the second class discussion included in this chapter, which focused on students' understandings of democracy and the folk high school, Fahim and I talked about his experiences of this aspect of school at greater length. He stressed that he was a person who for better or sometimes worse, was very curious and really liked to challenge himself and develop as a person, even if it meant experiencing stressful (*jobbiga*) things. Oak Bay was a different, more left wing environment than he had been in before, he said, and he had enrolled because he wanted to challenge himself to try out being in that environment and seeing what he could learn there.

He had thought about going to a different school after the fall term at Oak Bay, he confided, but had stayed because he felt there was more he wanted to learn from this environment and people first, and he thought that being at school was influencing him somewhat. He explained that he still hadn't taken a political position and didn't identify as either conservative or liberal but rather was still forming, and the school provided an interesting milieu in which to explore this aspect of himself. He didn't like the idea of a general political label, he said, but wanted to be flexible in his thinking in different situations and in relation to different issues. He was distressed that it sometimes seemed like there was a clear leftist political agenda at school and that a conservative viewpoint was lacking. Although he wouldn't

necessarily agree with the conservative stance, either, he wanted to be able to think through all of the various discourses in class discussion rather than be shocked by meeting certain discourses for the first time outside the classroom. Sometimes, he said things he didn't agree with because he wanted there to be a wider breadth of perspectives in the discussion.

At times, he shared, class discussions were disturbing for him in ways shaped in part by his positionality as a migrant. He recounted feeling very uncomfortable and even attacked (*påhoppad*) during a discussion we'd had in class about gender norms and transgender issues, both by people in the class who'd become emotional and by our teacher, who he felt had shut him down. Feeling that his point of view was misunderstood, being taken out of the context of his own cultural and familial experience and inadvertently offending others, made him want to contribute less in class discussions, he said. He wanted to be able to discuss things more neutrally, since he was very sensitive to people's feelings and at these moments, he became concerned about how other people were feeling and would lose track of what he actually wanted to say. People would interrupt him, he said, speaking too quickly for him to be able to keep up and formulate responses in Swedish. He also felt a lot of responsibility (*ansvar*) as an immigrant in Sweden, in terms of adapting to new culture norms while also maintaining an understanding and practice of the culture he grew up with and his roots. He said it felt enormously complicated and often stressful (*jobbigt*), that he would sometimes start to feel like he was getting a grasp on Swedish cultural patterns and norms and how others expected him to behave, and then he would realize there were a bunch of holes in his understanding. All of these different factors, he said, made class discussions about social issues upsetting for him on multiple fronts.

While Fahim describes Oak Bay as a social site that served to foster personal and political formation for him, his narrative above echoes Olle's more than Sofia's in that the dominant tone he conveys is one of feeling excluded and upset by interactions at school rather than affirmed and motivated. Feeling misunderstood in these sorts of interactions, Fahim often felt 'punished,' in a sense, for his efforts to participate in collective social and political

discussions, precluding him from positively attaching to the school's affective arrangement. In stark contrast to Sofia, Fahim, in part because of his own painful relational history preceding his time at the folk high school, perceived social life at school as a series of relational interruptions and misinterpretations more than rewarding, deepening connections, leading to him not experiencing the sense of enhanced well-being and inclusion, nor developing the sense of value in collective social engagement or outward-facing social orientation that Sofia had at Oak Bay. However, there was much to distinguish Fahim's experience from Olle's as well. For example, Fahim's description of the special form of responsibility he felt as a migrant - in being expected to and seeking to adapt to cultural norms, while also maintaining a sense of connection to the culture he grew up with - was shaped by his migrant status, bringing into relief the additional complexities of social membership that migrants and refugees must negotiate in contrast to the broader, more generic reflections on social responsibility, based on taken-for-granted social inclusion, which are available to – if not always taken up by – white, Swedish-born teachers and students. Further, the widely circulating xenophobic discourses which provided an attractive sphere for Olle to build an emerging sense of social and political identity were repugnant to Fahim as a newly arrived migrant, targeted by these discourses' animosity.

By virtue of his structural position as a migrant, certain aspects of Fahim's perspective have resonance with other refugee students' experiences, revealing how these students were uniquely positioned with regard to teachers' projects of cultivating a social democratic ethos among the younger generation. Conversations with other Syrian students expanded on the complex relationship between teachers' aims to "get people to care" and migrant students' experiences. Yussef, like Fahim, sometimes felt out of place in having more conservative views, particularly in terms of gender, which were informed by different social norms. Many migrant students I talked with echoed Fahim's assertion about wanting to participate more in class discussions, yet facing social, cultural and language barriers to inclusion, expressing that they felt unable or illegitimate to speak because they were not fluent enough in Swedish or not

educated enough in Swedish history to keep up with class conversations. While all of the Syrian students I talked with described the Swedish context as full of social, civic, and political opportunity, many said they were confused and/or upset, as were teachers, by the seeming dis-care – both apathy and antipathy – of many Swedish-born students in this arena.

Fahim's and other migrant students' reflections reveal ironies in how teachers' projects of animating young people's investments in their own generation's structure of feeling intersected with differently situated students' experiences. Fahim and many other Syrian students seemed to enter the folk high school with the most energy and enthusiasm, compared to other students, for opportunities to engage civically and politically in Sweden. Yet facing language and other social barriers, precisely the students who came in seeming most excited about social, civic, and political engagement in Sweden at the contemporary moment became those who, within this structure, felt least able to act on it. Opening space to understand these students' points of view on what it would mean for them to invest in and act on a sense of shared social membership in Sweden, as well as the social, cultural, and historical resources they bring with them to do so, is crucial in order to understand contemporary possibilities for Swedish social and civic engagement at a time when migrants and refugees make up an increasingly large share of the population. Where teachers' understanding of the possibilities for renewing civic participation in the present moment are shaped by their experiences coming of age in the Swedish past, their vantage point can make it difficult to see what aspects of social and political engagement in the past might not actually translate as viable paths forward in a changed context. Bringing young adult migrant and refugee students' perspectives more centrally into the conversation might help in setting aside the preconceptions contained in the older generation's social democratic cultural ethos, opening up space to explore the new civic and participatory possibilities of this historical conjuncture.

Conclusion: Caring against overwhelming odds

At one level, Sofia's, Olle's and Fahim's cases show that there is no universal experience of folk high school sociality, illustrating why there cannot be a uniform path for pursuing teachers' goals of animating social and civic investment among students at school. A person-centered lens (Levy & Hollan 2014), which enriches participant-observation with the addition of in-depth interviews exploring each person's life historical circumstances, is essential in order to understand how different students' situations intersect with the school's affordances. Attending to individual variation illustrates how and in what ways students who felt overlooked and marginalized in various ways at school and thus un-cared for and unwell, experienced and reacted to staff's projects of "getting people to care" differently from students who experienced the school as affirming, caring, and wellness-promoting. Students such as Sofia, who felt largely included in school projects to reinvigorate a social democratic ethos, rooted in relationship-building in daily life at school, at least partially experienced a changed consciousness with regard to social, civic, and political investment in social democratic terms, while those such as Olle and Fahim, who felt overridingly excluded, did not experience similarly changed civic sentiments.

At another level, these cases show how teachers' attempts to pass down to students the social democratic ethos formed in their own youth, using the school's social infrastructure to orchestrate positive interactions among students, were not matched to the forces against them in the current sociopolitical climate. Over a conversation in the teachers' office one day, Per put words to what I later came to see as the impossibility of rekindling teachers' generational structure of feeling, defined by a widely shared sense of personal investment in collective democratic participation, in the face of broadly changed social, political, and economic conditions in Sweden. He told me about the negative impacts that larger changes in social norms and modes of relating in recent decades had had on the student body, in ways that ultimately limited the scope of the folk high school's impacts, regardless of their potential successes.

Per explained that, 'Today, there is a more pressing sense that the folk high school has to work against certain trends in society and how they impact people negatively. For example, our task now has a lot to do with working with the internet and technology and how that changes sociality and collective participation. Whereas years ago,' he recalled, 'the dorm kitchens used to be full of people, now everyone sits in their room and watches TV. It's our responsibility as educators to understand the impacts of socializing online and how this fuels normativity and competitiveness and isolation and polarization – we have to keep up with that and be knowledgeable about it, and seek to contribute to working against the negatives. More and more, though,' he continued, 'the school has had to take on working with the larger social problems that affect students, and people come to us now with huge shortages in self-confidence (*stora brist på självförtroende*) and all kinds of problems from all directions in society, that are really just too big and multifaceted to expect the folk high school to be able to solve. We are just one place with only a year or two with people, and there is only so much we can do.'

While Per shared the determination we also saw above in Ulrika, Åsa, Karin, and other teachers' narratives to 'work against certain trends in society and how they impact people negatively,' in contrast to other teachers, Per points to how, regardless of individual variations in how each student experiences the school, contemporary features of the surrounding political, economic, and social context make attaching to the school's social democratic affective arrangement, and thus 'get[ting] good ideas about how to...make contributions to society'[55] more difficult for all participants. Per points out how longstanding folk high school projects aimed at self-transformation in a social democratic direction, which he has been part of throughout his career, face new pressures and constraints in the current context, defined by the atomizing and polarizing social effects of ongoing neoliberal political-economic reforms and increasingly pervasive internet-based technologies. These characteristics of the historical

[55] This quote references an interview with Per cited earlier in this chapter, in which he described how 'making contributions to society' used to be a main goal – and common outcome – in the folk high school's work with young adult participants.

moment, as Per says, may be 'really just too big and multifaceted to expect the folk high school to be able to solve,' making folk high school staff's hopes to revive investment in social democracy through reshaping young people's understandings of themselves as fundamentally connected to others, both in everyday life and through formal political systems, in some ways unfulfillable. We have seen that some students, such as Sofia, partially take up teachers' social democratic conscientization projects, shifting toward thinking of themselves as emplaced in a larger societal context and developing new a new sense of the social responsibilities entailed by shared social membership; Yet Per's perspective on how the contemporary social political and economic context harms students' well-being, and Sofia's own perception of politics as antithetical to wellness and a series of "rhetorical tactic[s]," help explain why even the 'success stories' of students who undergo some forms of social democratic conscientization at school still do not become convinced, as teachers are, that the formal political system is a tool for pursuing – rather than spewing empty rhetoric about, or even undercutting – a sense of *trygghet* (security/comfort) and solidaristic social change.

In a post-2016 classroom, the disjuncts between teachers' and students' political stances seem to have even further sharpened as the social impacts of decades of neoliberal reforms appear to have entered students' awareness in new ways, with widely circulating discourses of elite, corrupt government in an era of global right-wing nationalism providing a new vocabulary for young adults to articulate disillusionment and frustration resulting from weakened union participation, worsened work conditions, and increased social and economic division that have emerged even as multiple Social Democratic-led administrations have held onto a rhetoric of collectivity and equality largely unchanged since the 1960s and 70s. The school did not - and perhaps could not have, as Per hints - shaped this generation's explicitly political consciousness in the social democratic framework valued by teachers, without either counteracting larger changes that have taken place since the 1970s in how Swedish government actually works and who it serves, or presenting an updated version of the social democratic ethos and political

model - alternative to that proposed by the far-right - capable of responding to a present moment shaped by these changes. Scenes from class discussions and interviews above, which actually convey a strong sense of energy among many students for engaging with politics, even if this energy is expressed in an antagonistic way to teachers' social democratic approach to formal politics presented at school - indicate that many students are eager to engage in constructing this sort of alternative, although they may not know where to start.

While folk high school staff's goal of using psychological and relational work to inspire high-school completion course students' collective (re)engagement with social democratic ideals may appear from some angles as a project to resurrect an idealized past, school care projects *might* just as well serve to begin sketching *new* iterations of social democratic engagement in practice, which are seen as needed at the current historical moment. As mentioned in the introduction to the dissertation, Daun (1996) showed how at the height of the Swedish social democratic welfare state, routing social care through bureaucratic institutions ironically resulted in pervasive patterns of interpersonal indifference outside of tight-knit networks of family and friends, as a sort of bystander effect based on the assumption that the state would provide care rather than people doing so for one another. This approach coexisted with widespread collective civic engagement and investment in the value of societal solidarity by routing solidarity with those outside of one's closest networks through impersonal, structural formations and seemingly precluding the need for broader forms of face-to-face mutual recognition.

As social welfare institutions supported by the state, folk high schools might fuel, from the outside, a sense that they are "taking care of" socially marginalized youth, and thus "taking care of" the societal need to care, precluding the need for other forms of interpersonal care for – or from – their participants. Yet a view from inside the institution shows how its practices of care today can actually push back on this traditional view of social democratic care by being grounded at the community level and aiming both to enlarge students' immediate circles and stimulate them to embody mutual responsivity and caring face-to-face engagement beyond

these circles. Sofia's recounting that immersion in the folk high school community gave her the courage to talk with a stranger on the bus is one small example of a successful outcome of this sort of care project, tied to different ways of enacting social democratic values in interpersonal interaction that might open the way for sharing feelings of social vulnerability at a moment when these feelings have become much more widespread. Amid growing inequality and precarity, increasingly using everyday interpersonal interactions as opportunities to imagine solidarity with others in society could provide a new way for youth to enact social democratic values that would combat feelings of atomization or antagonism.

Finally, the similarities in Fahim's and Olle's narratives above about feeling judged and excluded at school merit analytical attention, perhaps especially given that they occupy very different structural positions in Sweden, with one being a Syrian refugee student and the other a Swedish-born white student who felt a sense of identification with increasingly popular right-wing xenophobic discourses. At a historical moment when social demographics as well as civic and political discourse in Sweden are undergoing sea change, with the arrival of unprecedented numbers of migrants in 2015 under Sweden's short-lived "open-door policy," largely from Syria and Afghanistan, and the concurrent explosion of far-right sentiment, accompanied by a significant spike in far-right parliamentary presence, students in these two very differently positioned groups are part of the changing face of Swedish society and politics. If the folk school is to impact how young adults conceive of their relationship to Swedish society, including an understanding of who Swedish society is and what forms of collective care and responsibility this social membership entails, I suggest that neither migrant students nor right-wing students can be made to feel marginal but rather must be equal participants in dialogue about the value of and possibilities for social, civic and political involvement. However, there are different ways to pursue this in practice, and the difference makes a difference. In chapters four and five, I consider some ways that staff and some students at school indeed attempted to draw both refugee students and students who have expressed hate, respectively, into the center of projects

of relational care. I discuss further how school care projects can provide a means to (re)imagine solidarity in interaction across lines of social difference, and explore divergent social consequences of different approaches to going about this.

Chapter 5: "Being seen" through colorblind lenses: Refugee participants' ambivalent experiences of social emplacement

Chapter overview

This chapter builds on the preceding chapter's examination of how folk high schools have sought to defend social democratic values in a changing political landscape. Here, I turn to exploring how folk high schools use projects of care and well-being to pursue integration and inclusion for migrant and refugee participants, and in so doing, push back against growing far-right xenophobia. Yet, in examining how social democratic modes of "imagining sameness" have provided both a morally valued way to pursue welfare equality and national belonging as well as a limited vocabulary for "seeing" difference, the chapter explores how struggles to navigate social difference haunt both the right and the left in Sweden. Tracing how the school's ideals materialize in practice through messy negotiations in the classroom, and paying special attention to the experiential effects of these projects from the point of view of migrant and refugee participants, I show how using the school's social democratically-valenced projects of care and well-being to foster integration and belonging produces ambivalent experiences for migrant and refugee participants. On one hand, many migrant and refugee participants experience recognition at school that feels significant in terms of their own aspirations for inclusion. In spite of teachers' deep moral commitments to universal equality, however, the liberal social democratic discourses they draw on to enact the school's projects of care and inclusion at times thwart their intentions, shaping classroom sociality in ways that inadvertently position refugee participants unequally in the mutual relational processes central to cultivating belonging and well-being.

'A way in' to the folk high school environment and to Swedish society

In late April 2018, Oak Bay staff and representatives from the school's two social-justice based Christian sponsoring organizations gathered for the school's annual board meeting, the theme of which that year was "Integration and inclusion" (*integration och inkludering*). The

meeting opened with the attendees, mostly in their 40s to 70s, middle to upper-middle class, and all Swedish-born and white, sitting listening intently around a ring of tables, while the chair of the board, one of the school principals, and representatives from each of the sponsoring foundations took turns speaking animatedly about their shared values and goals as well as their ongoing work with integration.

The chair of the board, Jörgen, a warm, energetic man in his 60s, began by summarizing the contemporary migration situation in Sweden along with the folk high school's response, saying[56], 'In 2014-15, something happened in our surroundings – something that took us by surprise, that we weren't prepared for. In Syria, and Afghanistan, people became refugees, and were dying in the oceans. This has been described as a crisis for Europe, but we can critically question (*ifrågasätta*) whether that's the right designation! Many millions became refugees. Lebanon took the most refugees. One million came to Europe, and 160,000 came to Sweden. Of those, 30,000 were unaccompanied minors, and some of them ended up in our town. The folk high school asked, "What can *we* do?" Our role is to give young people a chance – often a second chance. One major thing we decided to do was to create two residences [for them on our campus][57] – to give people a *little* chance.'

Jörgen's narrative consciously pushes back against popular framings of the arrival of large numbers of refugees in 2015, fueled by the rise of the Sweden Democrats Party and its xenophobic, Islamophobic rhetoric, as a "crisis for Europe," foregrounding instead the sense of crisis for the refugees themselves, who needed somewhere to live and opportunities to begin rebuilding their lives in a new place. Emphasizing the folk school's longstanding understanding of itself as a place that facilitates "chances," and often "second chances," for socially vulnerable

[56] Throughout the dissertation, I use single quotation marks to denote dialogue reconstructed from detailed fieldnotes taken in real time in Swedish, while double quotation marks capture audio-recorded, transcribed direct quotes.
[57] Jörgen refers here to the conversion of one of Oak Bay's student dorms, through a partnership with the local municipality, into housing for 30 unaccompanied minors seeking asylum from Afghanistan waiting to receive Swedish residence permits.

young adults, his account framed the folk school as being well-positioned to address Sweden's expanding need for migrant integration post-2015.

One of the school principals, Johanna, a new mother recently back from maternity leave who had an easygoing, engaging presence, followed on Jörgen's opening. Underscoring that throughout history, folk high schools had played various social roles in Sweden, she said that 'Folk schools have never been as significant as they are *right now* with regard to civil society work (*civilsamhällsarbete*).' Johanna felt strongly that the folk high school should be able to do even more for those seeking asylum than they were currently allowed to under municipal policy, which required capping the proportion of the folk high school student body without residence permits[58] at 5%. She exclaimed, 'This isn't enough – we need to be able to take in more!' She finished by explaining some of the new initiatives Oak Bay had developed since 2015 to provide 'a way into the folk high school environment' (*en väg in i folkhögskolemiljö*) for migrant and refugee participants, including a new course aimed at intermediate-level Swedish speakers.[59] In addition to bringing in migrant and refugee students in this new course and a pre-existing beginning language course, in 2017-18, there were also several migrant and refugee students in each of Oak Bay's high-school completion courses[60] – mostly students from Syria who had been

[58] The students Johanna references here who would attend the folk high school without residence permits would mainly include refugees from Afghanistan, such as those for whom Jörgen described the folk high school had provided temporary housing, as most of them were still waiting to hear whether they would be granted asylum in Sweden.
[59] Oak Bay's new language-focused course, which Johanna references here, was created for migrant and refugee students who were more advanced in their language skills than those in Oak Bay's beginning-level "establishment courses" (*etableringskurser*), yet did not yet have enough language fluency to participate alongside Swedish-born students learning high-school level content in the school's "general" (*allmänna*) high-school completion courses. In theory, students from the "establishment courses" as well as the new language-focused course were invited to mix with the broader school population at *fika* (the school-wide mid-morning coffee break), whole-school assemblies, and other events, yet in reality, this was difficult due to communication barriers and logistical difficulties with coordinating class schedules and locations, which staff lamented and saw as problematic. (For example, none of the students in language-focused courses lived on campus, and due to space limitations in the main building, the classrooms for these courses were set apart from other classes.) There was a range of 'integration' activities, then, from housing for asylum-seekers and classes targeted specifically at migrant and refugee participants, to spaces meant to mix "everyone," in which some migrant and students participated – such as high-school completion courses and 'regular' dorms. This chapter focuses on the latter end of this spectrum.
[60] To contextualize this figure, there might be 3-4 migrant and refugee students out of a total of 15-25 students per class.

in Sweden for 2-3 years already and spoke Swedish with intermediate to advanced fluency. While there is a great deal to discuss about the school's multiple approaches to meeting migrant students' needs, this dissertation's focus on the "general track" (*allmänna linjen*), leads the chapter to concentrate specifically on the branch of integration activities at school that attempted to integrate migrant and refugee students through "universal" activities open to migrant and non-migrant students alike – namely, high-school completion courses, dormitory housing, and a range of structured and unstructured student activities directed at students who participated in high-school completion courses and/or lived on campus, both inside and outside of school.

In the scene above, as at many different meetings and in informal conversations throughout the year, staff present the folk school's response to migrants and integration as a civic as well as a moral obligation, all the more pressing in the face of the exploding popularity of far-right xenophobic and Islamophobic discourse following the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015. The passion and compassion with which Jörgen, Johanna, and others in the meeting described here spoke conveys a strong sense of investment, widely shared among Oak Bay staff, in using the folk high school as a site to push back on exclusionary rhetoric by mobilizing social democratic care to respond to the 'crisis for refugees' in ways that help welcome them and open possibilities for their participation in society. Teachers' and administrators' identification with a social democratic ethos fueled deep, good-faith intentions to recognize and advocate for all people's equal rights to the same conditions of social inclusion.

"A meeting place for everyone": Conceptualizing integration at the folk high school

Above, Jörgen and Johanna stressed that the folk high school was well-equipped to give migrant and refugee participants 'a chance' and 'a way in,' both to the folk high school itself, and through that entryway, to Swedish society more broadly. Yet how do administrators and teachers at school envision what it means to facilitate this in practice? What are the particular

affordances of embarking on this mission in a setting which defines itself in one of its key policy documents as “a meeting place (*mötesplats*) for everyone, which takes for granted the inclusion of people with social, psychological and physical disabilities [as well as of] participants born abroad with deficits in Swedish language” (my translation), and which has increasingly focused on facilitating well-being for these diverse participants?

As discussed at length earlier in the dissertation, Oak Bay’s discourse of supporting participants’ well-being generates and structures possibilities for staff and participants to think about and work on larger-scale projects of social inclusion and integration. This is because, in the folk high school’s idiom of “wellness,” well-being isn’t located solely in the individual, but rather is seen to emerge from relational in-between spaces, materializing through interpersonal encounters and in social processes of imagining and enacting community and belonging (Garro 2011, Heil 2009). Using a “pedagogy of care” to enact mutual recognition, staff hope to spark students’ personal existential growth in ways that lead them to respond to one another in prosocial ways. In turn, this shift in how students orient to themselves and one another will foment senses of well-being that are necessarily collective and relational, based on experiences of increasing “social emplacement” (Vigh 2015). To describe how experiences of feeling recognized as unique individuals lead participants to feel included in the group – an important step on the way to feeling “socially emplaced” – staff and many students use the metaphor of “being seen.” Ultimately, where being “well” in the idiom of the school means in large part feeling included, the school’s vision of inclusion and integration for migrant participants is also one of “well-being,” conceived of by staff much in the same way for migrant and refugee participants as for other participant target groups.

The policy document referred to above, which details Oak Bay’s plan to support vulnerable participants across various target groups, begins by defining the school in the terms previously quoted, as a “meeting place for everyone.” It lays out the school’s guiding philosophy that, “Everyone, regardless of functional impairments or language ability, has the right to

learning and growth. Our hope is that their time at the folk high school will foster self-esteem (*självkänsla*), mutual affinity and belonging (*samhörighet*), and integration in society for all of these students" (my translation). Here, it is clear that Oak Bay envisions integration as a key goal across *all* of their target groups, seeking to facilitate many diverse socially marginalized participants' "struggle [toward]...being positively situated in a relational landscape" (Vigh 2015: 99) and thus catalyze widely shared processes of "social emplacement." Drawing on this articulation of the school's self-image, I suggest that preexisting understandings of the folk high school as a "meeting place for everyone" have shaped how school staff define integration for migrant and refugee participants in the post-2015 moment, so that they pursue integration for these participants – along with structurally vulnerable participants in other target groups – through more broadly applied pedagogical modes of care and recognition meant to catalyze social emplacement.

For Bjarnesen (2013: 40, cited in Vigh 2015: 99), "social emplacement" encompasses both a feeling as well as the social context in which that feeling takes shape, thus including:

> subjective sentiments, on the one hand, and the structural forces that both contribute to defining the sociocultural criteria of these sentiments (e.g., through cultural idioms about the good life) and the constraints to achieving such ends (e.g., local social hierarchies, broader socioeconomic structures, etc.), on the other.

The stress Bjarnesen places on the role of sociocultural and structural criteria in potentiating subjective experiences of social emplacement point to the importance of considering the cultural influences and institutional parameters at play in Oak Bay's attempts to integrate migrant participants. The school's approach to integrating migrants and refugees described above is informed by deeply-rooted assumptions about national identity, belonging and difference in Sweden. Below, I explore the historical construction of what Bjarnesen calls "cultural idioms about the good life" in social democratic Sweden, showing how these underpin school staff's understandings of social emplacement; I also review past and ongoing processes of racialization in Sweden to shed light on the "constraints to achieving such ends" faced by migrant and refugee

participants. In so doing, I analyze how the folk high school is genuinely, in many senses, a "meeting place for everyone," but how differently positioned students experience different outcomes from the encounters that take place within it.

Emplacement through "egalitarian ethos": Pursuing inclusion the social democratic way

The folk school's care and wellness projects, which are also proposed to function as integration projects for migrant, refugee, and other structurally vulnerable participants, are informed by a broader "egalitarian ethos" associated with welfare-state care and solidarity that is deeply entrenched in Swedish national identity. During the long period of continuous Social Democratic Party rule in Sweden from the 1930s through the 1980s, when social democratic hegemony solidified (Murphy 2015), understandings of national community became closely linked with metaphors of family and home. This analogy originated with early Social Democratic Party leader Per Albin Hansson's concept of the *folkhem* or "people's home," which he introduced in a 1928 speech, saying:

> The foundation of the home is fellowship and feelings of togetherness. The good home doesn't admit privilege or backwardness—neither favorites nor stepchildren…In the good home there is equality, compassion, cooperation, helpfulness. Adapted to the great *people's* and *citizens'* home this would mean the breaking down of all social and economic barriers that now divide citizens (Hansson, cited in Schall 2016: 37, emphasis in original).

Over the next several decades, in which social democratic welfare state ideology became so pervasive that it produced a "welfare society" (Murphy 2015), this metaphor of the welfare apparatus as benevolent parent in a "good home" took root as an orienting concept for the pursuit of inclusion and equality in Sweden.

One entailment of using this model of the family to envision societal relationships is that it has embedded assumptions about welfare assurances of egalitarianism into the "imagined national community" (Anderson 2006). Sven Hort's (2014) concept of the "imagined national welfare community" highlights the central position given to the welfare state in Swedish

processes of imagining the nation - and imagining equality within the nation - since the advent of social democracy. Hort shows how as a result of "social programs and policies…[that] constitute the core of…the social-welfare industrial complex…[and which] bind and bond beneficiaries, citizens, clients, denizens, taxpayers, wage-earners, workers and voters with the well-known institutional set-up of the welfare state…[I]n the mind of each [of these persons] is the image of a sovereign governable communion of belonging" (Hort 2014: 31). As state-supported institutions, folk high schools form "imagined *local* welfare communities" (Hort 2014: 31, emphasis in original) which dynamically index belonging in the larger imagined national welfare community, a point I will return to below. Given that as much as seven decades after Hansson's speech above, studies of Swedish public services show that they "have both assumed and actively sought to create cultural standardization and equality" (Graham 2002: 201), it is clear that social democratic processes of imagining national identity that prioritize the eradication of social divisions has had far-reaching purchase. From the start, as it embarked on building the Swedish welfare state, the Swedish Social Democratic Party adopted "class cooperation, a flattening of social hierarchies, and cross-class inclusion" as guiding principles (Murphy 2015: 52). In this regard, choosing the family as the unit of focus was helpful in symbolically downplaying social difference and defining equality as sameness (Murphy 2015: 76).

The strong emphasis on equality upheld by the image of the nation as family/home has not led to the eradication of social inequality in Sweden. Indeed, although material inequality was significantly reduced during the 20th century under Social Democratic rule, naturalized middle-class hegemony survived the rise of the welfare state and the subsequent collapse of rigidly structured class divisions (Murphy 2015: 19). Instead, the explicit cultural focus on equality has led to a symbolic valuing of "conformity" and "sameness" which can exist quite at odds with other forms of social equality. In this context, where "an egalitarian ethos has rendered discussions of class difference taboo" (Isenhour 2010: 520, emphasis added), Isenhour

advises paying attention to less immediately visible ways that inequalities manifest in Sweden. This is especially important given Bruun and colleagues' findings that in Denmark, "forms of proper sociality…[such as] [e]quality as sameness…do not involve simply conforming to social values but also introduce a hierarchy…even in spaces that are otherwise understood to be egalitarian" (2011: 2). In this way, Scandinavian ideologies of equality, what Isenhour terms the "egalitarian ethos," may not only obfuscate inequality, but by disavowing difference, actively produce and sustain it.

Theorizing how egalitarian ideologies operate in Norway in ways that mask or exacerbate difference and inequality, Gullestad delineates interactional processes by which actors actively "imagine sameness" (2002: 46), "not necessarily [by marking] actual sameness but…[by] under-communicating difference during social encounters" (1989: 85). One outcome of imagining equality through enacting sameness in this way is the construction of 'different kinds of social difference,' such that "there is a problem when others are perceived to be 'too different'" (Gullestad 2002: 47). Gullestad (2002) tracks how, through everyday interaction, race/ethnicity and immigration status become marked as more visible and more threatening categories of difference than class. Processes of maintaining 'imagined sameness' involve downplaying difference in interactions with those who are seen as different but compatible and avoiding interaction with those perceived - in racialized terms - as 'too different' to facilitate 'imagining sameness.' Then, "The result is that the dividing lines between people in terms of social class have become blurred[;] At the same time the differences between 'Norwegians' and 'immigrants' have become discursively salient" (Gullestad 2002: 47). Through these interactional processes, "ethnic boundaries are maintained because of, not in spite of, intensive social interactions between ethnically diverse individuals and groups" (Gullestad 2002: 60). In this context, increasing interpersonal contact between people assigned to different racial groups, as Oak Bay aims to facilitate by providing a "meeting place" as a springboard for integration, cannot be

assumed *in itself* to break down perceived barriers of difference and encourage mutual affinity and belonging.

In addition to these broadly shared Scandinavian dynamics of racialization, which construct race as a simultaneously disavowed and 'extra-salient' social category in daily life, it is also worth more closely tracing how constructing race in Sweden has played a role in constructing Swedish national identity, in order to more fully understand the social context migrant and refugee participants encounter in the Swedish folk school setting. During much of the 20th century, Sweden played a leading role in pioneering scientific racism, and its long history of state-run eugenics programs extended into the 1970s (Hübinette & Lundström 2014). In the 70s, popular discourse on race in Sweden took a sharp turn, as the antiracist movement grew and people called for a repudiation of the country's explicitly racist past. In 1975, a political approach of "inclusionary multiculturalism [was] established in Sweden," to increase the democratic popular participation of "ethnic" and "cultural" groups, along with policy that facilitated permanent settlement and citizenship for migrant labor populations (Dahlstedt & Neergaard 2019: 124). This rhetoric of celebrating cultural diversity bolstered Sweden's national self-image as an exceptionally "good" social democratic society, in which Sweden positioned itself on the global stage as a beacon of morality and inclusive solidarity. While Swedish multicultural policy has rightly been critiqued for having essentializing and subordinating effects (Ålund & Schierup 1991), it also underpinned an authentic distinction between Sweden and its neighbors in Scandinavia and Europe in upholding for decades "one of Europe's most enlightened asylum policies…indicat[ing] a Swedish exceptionalism that has…manifested in, among other things, the relatively high rate of asylum granted to refugees from Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan, compared to other 'western' nations" (Schierup & Ålund 2011: 59).

Hübinette & Lundström (2014: 423-4) examine how today, despite these historical moves to repudiate explicit racism, "white privileges can be maintained in a country ruled by a deeply cherished antiracist ideology." One major factor in this has been that the antiracist

movement's attempt at a radical distancing from the country's racist past has ironically made critical examination of this past difficult, literally removing the vocabulary to understand and speak about social dynamics of racism and racialization, without significantly disrupting these dynamics. Lena Sawyer (2002: 13) describes how "a particular Swedish moral discourse in relationship to racism," which paints the past as homogeneous, "strategically 'routes' racism to specific transnational spaces and time periods that are outside of the Swedish community." This logic underpinned the politically unanimous decision in 2001 to ban the term "race" in all official Swedish government documents (Hübinette 2014). As "racialization and the social construction of race [were] replaced by terms such as migrants, integration, culture and religion" (Mulinari & Neergaard 2017: 89) in government, academic, and popular spheres, "racism without race" (Balibar 1991), or a 'culturalist' racism that rests on an essentialist logic reifying cultural and/or religious differences strengthened the foothold it had gained under multicultural policy. In this context, 'white' and 'Swedish' have remained superior in an implicit hierarchy in Sweden, marking "[']immigrant[' as] a racialized class category, one a white educated 'western' foreigner cannot easily slip into" (Anderson 2008: xiii).

Another factor facilitating the maintenance of white hegemony in the face of the turn toward antiracism was the shift in the late 1990s from the corporatist-focused "immigration policy" that drove 1970s Swedish multiculturalism to a more atomized, neoliberal "integration policy" in which "the question of ethnic and cultural identity was now regarded as, first and foremost, a question for each individual" (Ålund & Schierup 2011: 49). This change ushered in an even more explicitly "colorblind" racial ideology in Sweden, which deploys an abstract liberal humanist frame – implicitly centering a white European, middle class subject while lauding universal human rights – to highlight individual choices while masking social constructions and structures of race and class (Bonilla-Silva 2017: 54-56). This colorblind racial ideology has disguised the systemic racist effects of neoliberal reforms to migration and labor policy passed

by left-right coalitions since the 1990s, which have significantly increased socioeconomic inequalities along racial lines (Dahlstedt & Neergaard 2019),

A third factor in invisibly maintaining the hegemony of whiteness in Sweden through the antiracist turn has been that Sweden's antiracist movement, unlike in many other countries, was created and continues to be dominated by white people, ironically marginalizing the perspectives of persons of color and maintaining an implicit valorization of white voices (Hübinette 2014). Swedish antiracism has carried over logical continuities with its explicitly racist past by refining rather than disrupting the historical relationship described above between 'Swedishness' and whiteness, so that Swedishness is now defined in terms of white antiracism. This, in turn, constructs the notion that it is impossible for someone to be both Swedish and racist (Hübinette 2014). Here, the rejection of racism becomes part of the naturalization of ideas of (white) belonging in Sweden.

These dominant racial ideologies are submerged in cultural consciousness, and are likely to be invisible to those whose actions they shape. Allan Pred (2000: 94-95) describes how "self-unacknowledged practitioners of cultural racism," even if they are "vocal proponents of multicuturalist or active in antiracist organizations…in some instances may all the same remain blind to their own cultural racism, despite making contradictory assumptions regarding assimilation, despite expecting Swedification in every realm of practice other than the culinary and the musical." Simultaneously, racialized 'Others' are encouraged not to ruffle the waters, as "'Immigrants' who do not play down their difference are perceived…to threaten…[the nation] as a homogenous, tolerant, anti-racist, peace-loving society" (Gullestad 2002: 59). By constructing and enforcing this particular landscape of imagined equality through sameness, colorblind white antiracism "'allows [white] people to relax and feel less threatened, as if [they] have already 'solved [racism]' and there is nothing else to do'" (Ahmed 2006: 121, cited in Hübinette & Lundström 2014: 425).

This brief history can contextualize Sweden's paradoxically exceptionally low levels of interpersonal racism (measured in terms of self-reported negative attitudes towards diversity) and robust system of anti-discrimination laws, alongside its comparatively high levels of structural racism in terms of stark residential and labor market segregation (Hübinette & Lundström 2014: 424). As discussed above, this seeming paradox has much to do with the discursive invisibilization of racism through disavowal rather than a lack of systemic racism. Even while explicitly championing equality, an implicit racial framing for who belongs in the family/nation has long positioned whiteness as a central, yet unthematized, feature of membership in the imagined national welfare community (Arbouz 2017). Echoing Hage's (2000) contention that racism and nationalism are inextricably entangled, Mulinari and Neergaard (2017) use the term "racial regime" to capture the systemic nature of racism "as a structural phenomenon at the core of the construction of nation-states generally and Sweden in particular" (89). Hübinette & Lundström (2014) seek to visibilize the typically unmarked category of whiteness as a site of social power with the term "hegemonic whiteness." They describe how understandings of race and national belonging intersect in Sweden such that "Swedish whiteness [has served as] a structuring principle for Swedishness" (425-26).

The seachange that has swept far-right representation into the contemporary Swedish political landscape has destabilized a longstanding, taken-for-granted social democratic ethos of antiracist tolerance and acceptance, igniting "an existential insecurity and a crisis of the polity and of [national] identity" (Schierup, Ålund & Neergaard 2017). Yet current discourses of social democratic "identity crisis" are misleading insofar as they frame racialized modes of exclusion both as largely new dimensions of Swedish sociopolitical life and as oppositional and threatening to the social democratic value system. Critical researchers thus argue that what is under threat in today's "crisis of antiracism" (Hübinette 2014) is a centrally a widespread *self-understanding* of Swedish national identity, where the "new presence of a racist party in the Swedish parliament disturbs the exceptionalist *image* and the privileged position of Sweden…as

being humanity's avant-garde and…everything that is considered to be good and progressive" (Hübinette 2014: 423, emphasis added).

These debates about Sweden's self-image are tied to contemporary shifts in understanding the terms and boundaries of Swedish membership, reflecting how "the boundaries [of imagined national and local welfare communities]," given their social origin, "are elastic" (Hort 2014: 31). Where notions of family and home, long a central metaphor for Swedish national belonging, are not objectively given but rather socially constructed in cultural and historical context, the social democratic metaphor of nation as family/home has been both durable and flexible, morphing to fit the tone of different times, such that social framings of immigration as well as the place of migrants in the imagined national community have shifted through time. Because "welfare services and social integration measures [both]…problematize difference as a basis for intervention" (Eastmond 2011: 289), actors can employ different understandings of difference in conjunction with policy-framing to launch competing claims about the relationship between migrants and national identity at a given moment. As a result, discourses on migration have sometimes cast it as a boon to the welfare state and at other times as a threat to welfare society (Schall 2016). For example, Sweden's acceptance of refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s was intensely politicized in popular "discourses of fear and mistrust [that] built upon the notion of refugees as the 'unwanted other'" (Eastmond 2011: 278). Eastmond explains that because in the 1990s, "The increase [in refugee acceptance] coincided with the economic crisis and restructuring…asylum and welfare were intimately linked in political and public debate" (Eastmond 2011: 278). In such moments, the framing of nation as family can be used to frame immigrants as "a threat to the imagined moral community and the Norwegian welfare state as the incarnation of this community" (Gullestad 2002: 59).

Whether migration is framed in positive or negative terms, using the home as a metaphor for nation "naturalizes the ethnic boundary as a relation of power" in a way that casts white Swedes as 'hosts' and immigrants as 'guests,' so that white Swedes' power to frame the

situation is taken for granted (Gullestad 2002: 54). Further, through the lens of Ahmed's (2007) "phenomenology of whiteness," one could understand white-marked bodies as seeming to appear more 'in place' and thus being made to feel more 'at home' in the family/nation in the context of a relatively stable, persistent framework of Swedish "hegemonic whiteness" (Hübinette & Lundström 2014), regardless of which discourse dominated in framing migrants in a given moment.

In an analysis of the long history of shifting discursive framings of national belonging in Sweden, Schall argues that bounding the nation and understanding the place of migrants is necessarily an ongoing social, cultural, and political process, in which a variety of actors and institutions have stakes. While the terms of inclusion and exclusion are sometimes taken more or less for granted and at other times become hotly contested in "crises of national closure," the boundaries of imagined community always require continuous maintenance. I suggest that the folk high school functions as an "imagined local welfare community" (Hort 2014) which relates dialogically with the imagined national community, playing a role in this process of "bounding the nation." As such, I saw ongoing negotiation of the terms of inclusion and exclusion in daily relational practice in the folk high school classroom as having larger ramifications in terms of imagining moral community and belonging in the nation.

Refugee participants' aspirations for inclusion: "Coming into society" through the folk high school

As they started out the school year at Oak Bay, many migrant and refugee participants' hopes that folk high school participation would serve as a step toward broader social integration in Sweden were influenced by previous encounters with both inclusionary and exclusionary discourses in Sweden, as staff also addressed in the board meeting in the opening of this chapter. Yet unlike teachers and staff who we heard from above, who implicitly framed "exclusion" as a far-right phenomenon and "inclusion" as the domain of the social democratic left, which the folk high school sought to enact through providing a 'chance' and a 'way in,'

migrant and refugee participants did not see the dichotomy between right/left and exclusion/inclusion as mapping onto one another so neatly. Interviews at the beginning of the school year with three participants from Syria – Yussef, Aisha and Fahim – illustrate their intuitive understanding, even without necessarily having detailed historical knowledge, of the complex and in some ways contradictory values and structures that have characterized Swedish orientations toward immigration and social difference reviewed above. Reflecting the entanglements of inclusion and exclusion that have historically characterized migration discourse and policy across the Swedish political spectrum, migrant and refugee participants' expectations for and experiences of integration in Sweden and social emplacement at the folk high school similarly highlighted feelings of genuine inclusion alongside feelings of confusion or, rarely, more explicit rejection. While they all expressed gladness for the 'chance' that the folk high school opened up for them to connect to social and economic opportunities to build a life in Sweden, their different awareness of this ambivalence may give a somewhat different texture to participants' hopes for, in Yussef's words, "coming in" to school and society, versus staff's approach to providing what Johanna called 'a way in.'

Yussef

During the first week of classes[61], I sat talking in the school library with Yussef, a kind and diligent student in the "Being Human" class who was always punctual and sharply dressed, but also a lighthearted and playful class clown. More somber than I had yet seen him, he recounted the difficulty of his arrival in Sweden two years before. His relief was apparent as he described how entering the environment of the folk high school had provided a stark contrast to this, offering a way to start the project of, in his words, "coming into society."

Yussef told me, "In the beginning it was really hard that I felt alone. Because I lived in a small room, me and my dad and two other guys. We were four people in a small room. It was

[61] This first week of classes was the third week I had known Yussef and my other classmates, given that we first began with two weeks of school-wide activities, aimed at building social connections between students at school and introducing them to the school environment before beginning coursework.

really, really hard for me, to sleep on the floor. I didn't think like- I thought, this is Sweden, I'm going to get- when you say, 'Sweden,' you think of something else. But I was a bit surprised. I didn't know I'd have that life. In the beginning it was very hard. But I didn't think like this, I said, I'll start learning Swedish and English at the same time. So I started watching Youtube, listening to a lot of English, learning Swedish from English. So I started trying, how can I say, to come into society (*komma in i samhället*)."

I asked him, "When you came here [to the folk high school], what was your goal?"

Yussef answered, "So, my goal was that I wanted to learn more Swedish. I wanted to develop and improve my Swedish. And I wanted to talk with Swedes. And get more knowledge (*kunskap*) and experience (*erfarenhet*), that's why I've come here. That's my goal. And another goal, that I want to be ready to get into university. So I have to study hard and learn good Swedish. So I think it's the only path - or the best path to do that. To start at the folk high school."

"So now that you are here," I responded, "what are your first impressions of the school? How does it feel for you here?"

Yussef answered, "In the beginning I felt like, it's a bit hard to come in here (*att komma in här*). Also now, because…they treat me like I'm a Swedish student. But actually, I'm not Swedish. It's a bit hard for me to understand everything they say. So I've found it a bit hard in the beginning. But I hope it gets good later. Yeah, I'm sure it will get better. But it takes some time…Otherwise, the students, they're very nice, and kind, and so on. I like everyone, and I could come in (*komma in*) with everyone. I think there's no problem - when I've said to them, for example, I don't understand what it says here, they try to explain and help me. And I think that's fantastic. So, I really like the school, and I'm satisfied."

At the end of this interview, Yussef's enthusiastic emphasis on his budding feelings of inclusion reveal his hopeful sense that there was room for pursuing social emplacement at the folk high school. At the same time, in the contrast between "I could come in with everyone,"

"there's no problem," and "I'm satisfied" on the one hand, and "it's a bit hard to come in here" on the other, his narration conveys feelings of ambivalence and uncertainty about how this will play out. Saying, "they treat me like I'm a Swedish student. But actually, I'm not Swedish. It's a bit hard for me to understand everything they say. So I've found it a bit hard," he points to the inadvertent exclusionary effects of attempting to enact inclusion through ignoring or denying difference. At the outset of the school year, Yussef did not see this as a defining social dynamic of the space, but instead guessed that it was simply part of starting anywhere in a new language, and would pass. He "hope[d] it [would] get good later" and, given that "the students, they're very nice, and kind," he was "sure it will get better" after "some time." As a commuter student living with his parents and siblings in a nearby town, who split his days between juggling school, family, and two jobs, the time Yussef had in the folk high school environment was mostly limited to the classroom, *fika* (the daily mid-morning coffee break), and lunch with other commuter students, making his experience in the sociality of the space less immersive than for many other participants.

Aisha

Similar themes of having felt on the outside, and then experiencing positive surprise of feeling welcomed at the folk high school, surfaced in Aisha's first telling of what had brought her to the folk high school. Laid-back and friendly, with a quick smile, and as a fan of American culture and music, often sporting pop band T-shirts, Aisha was in a different high-school completion class than mine, but we often saw each other at lunch and around campus, as we both lived in the school dorms. Speaking English together provided us with common reprieve during the day, as it was more comfortable for both of us at the start of the year than Swedish - a point we often commiserated about. Early in the school year, over cups of tea in my dorm room, she explained that a childhood friend from Syria who had also come to Sweden had encouraged her to move to Oak Bay, based on her own experience there the year before.

Aisha said, “Yeah, [my friend] told me it’s gonna be good for me to move here, especially like, it’s gonna be *way* better if I could live here, if I lived here then I’m gonna be able to meet new people and speak Swedish all day. So that’s it. That’s how I ended up here.”

I asked, “So how did you feel when you first came, what were your expectations and how has it been now so far, when you think back to what you expected?”

Aisha answered, “I didn’t have, like, a huge expectation about this place. I thought it was gonna be cool and fine, but I was a little bit afraid, maybe like, a little bit of anxiety about meeting new people, especially Swedish people. I thought it was gonna be a little bit hard. But then I was really surprised by how kind people are here, especially the students. I remember my first day being here, I was really struggling with the language, in Swedish, and I tried so hard to play it cool, like okay, it’s been a year, I should be able to be better at Swedish, so I’m gonna really go. I was really trying hard to start conversations with people in Swedish and the first two students I met, I tried to start a conversation with them, it was a little bit awkward (laughs), but it went fine. Like I said, I was really surprised by how kind people here - I mean, teachers, and students, and stuff. I wasn’t expecting that. Because like, maybe everyone’s gonna stay by themselves, no one’s gonna- like, no, I’m not gonna be able to socialize with other people. But it was exactly the opposite. It was a really, really, good experience. It *is* a really good experience, it’s *still* going.”

I asked, “So when you think about your future here, and kind of where you see yourself fitting into or integrating into society, what are your thoughts around that?”

Aisha told me, “I mean, I- right now I already feel that I integrate to society. And I already feel like I’m kind of one of them. If I should put it like that. I don’t find it like, really hard, but I don’t know. It’s a really great society, even though it has a little bit of being hard to socialize with people sometimes. But otherwise, it’s like everyone welcomed me in open hands. Everyone was very kind to me. I haven’t encountered anything that has to do with racism or something. So I feel really glad about it.”

In saying that conversing with students at school "was a little bit awkward, but...I was really surprised how kind people here [are]"; and that "it's a really great society, even though it has a little bit of being hard to socialize with people sometimes. But otherwise, it's like everyone welcomed me in open hands," Aisha draws a parallel between her experiences in the folk high school and her impressions of Swedish society more broadly. In doing so, she indicates that the folk high school's mainstream-left orientation reflects a more pervasive spirit of race relations and migration that she has encountered in Sweden. At the same time, she seems to implicitly acknowledge growing racist discourse in Sweden by saying she "[hasn't] encountered anything that has to do with [interpersonal] racism."

Fahim

Shortly after I arrived at school to begin my research, in August 2017, my classmate Fahim and I sat chatting under a tree near his dorm. Fahim had entered the folk school after three years in Sweden feeling guarded. He recalled having faced Islamophobic discrimination from teachers in prior adult education classes, and was wary that the same pattern might arise at the folk high school. That afternoon, we were debriefing about a comment that another one of our classmates, Lukas, who was quick-witted and sometimes abrasive, had made to him in a group exercise earlier in the day. Lukas had questioned why Fahim had come to Sweden, saying that he thought it would be better for Sweden to help people in other countries such as Syria by helping them "there," rather than taking in people "here," and that he thought the Swedish welfare system was losing a focus on its "own" people.

In our conversation by the dorm, Fahim tied this uncomfortable encounter, building on a past of multiple such encounters during his previous several years in Sweden, to his own motivations for being at the folk school. He said that a big part of the reason he came to Oak Bay was to develop *himself* as a person, and he said he thinks that people on both "sides," meaning those who grew up in Sweden and those who immigrated here – have a responsibility to develop themselves and to engage with each other. Fahim described his perception that many people in

Sweden really don't like to talk about or acknowledge difference, saying that he thought people on the left often have a utopic vision where everyone is the same. They denied any real forms of difference and never asked him about differences that felt important to his identity like his religion, which he found sad and difficult (*tråkigt*). Then, he said, there were those on the right, who focused only on difference and ignored common humanity. In this context, he said that he felt in some ways invisible and in other ways deeply socially vulnerable, and he said that he often worries about his own future and his children's future in Sweden.

Fahim's feelings in this conversation echoed many other students' feelings of worry and hope at the outset of the folk high school year, although widely differing backgrounds and life situations underpinned these affects for different participants. In Fahim's case, as a migrant from Syria, experiences of social exclusion and precarity and the feelings of unwellness they gave rise to were often grounded in encounters with racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia, and the perception that others failed to grant him human recognition as an individual. In saying that both those born in Sweden and those who migrated there 'have a responsibility…to develop themselves *and* to engage with each other,' Fahim foreshadowed the folk high school's own philosophy of social integration as being necessarily rooted in more intimate existential encounters that bridge diverse social positionalities and provoke self-growth. He and I wondered together that day about the folk high school as a potential space for alternative modes of conversation about identity and difference, that might open up space for different feelings of connection and social stability for participants like Lukas as much as for Fahim himself.

Individual experiences and common perspectives

While there is much that is unique in these three different participants' experiences, some common perspectives emerge from their accounts – not because of intrinsic likeness, but as a result of their shared positioning within the larger social, cultural, and political structure in which they have now found themselves, which presents them with similar challenges and potentiates similar aspirations. All three foreground issues such as language, sociality, and

expectations for sameness or fitting in reflect the imbrication of personal desires with wider structural demands and cultural norms, which, as Bjarnesen notes above, is key to constructing social emplacement. Yussef's and Aisha's accounts of their motivations for entering the folk high school explicitly highlight learning Swedish and socializing with Swedish people as primary aspirations. These aspirations are necessary stepping stones for meaningful inclusion in the Swedish social setting, both from an existential-relational perspective as well as in terms of formal and informal requirements for employment. Ali's, Yussef's, and Fahim's hopes and worries at the outset of the year all also portray "coming in" to the "imagined local welfare community" of the folk high school as a pathway to "coming into society," and thus a means of pursuing imagined national belonging as well. They anticipate that classroom discussions and other moments of social encounter among diverse participants at school - while not guaranteed catalysts for their hopes for fitting in and achieving a good life - will serve as central and active spaces of *potential* for pursuing these ends. Their stories underscore, too, how many migrant students' understandings of becoming integrated in Sweden through the folk high school setting, which Yussef termed "coming in," rest on their hope of being recognized and included as full individuals with unique pasts, histories, families, and identities, rather than either being grouped together as "migrants" or, conversely, becoming "Swedish."

Configuring integration through social democratic care in the folk high school setting

The larger cultural-historical social democratic milieu described here historical context shapes the philosophy and practice of care, well-being and inclusion at the folk high school in multiple ways, including at the most basic level positioning care as a route to pursue integration. Words like fellowship, togetherness, cooperation, compassion, and helpfulness that are central to the vision of the nation as people's home in the excerpt from Hansson's speech above point to how within this analogy, 'Swedishness' and social inclusion have been envisioned in significant

measure in terms of solidarity and care (Murphy 2015). Closely tied up with solidarity and care in imagining 'Swedishness' is the concept of *trygghet*,[62] which refers to conditions and feelings of comfort, safety, and/or security. This term is difficult to translate, in part because of its cultural content. *Trygghet* is seen as a crucial foundation for, as well as an outcome of, enacting care and solidarity in the national welfare community. Seeing the cultural construct of *trygghet* as foundational for bringing about a sense of inclusion and well-being among participants, teachers use folk high schools' "pedagogy of recognition" (Paldanius 2014) as a mode of care for their students[63], trying to engage participants in collectively imagining and constructing the classroom as a space of *trygg* intersubjective encounter. At school, social contexts characterized by mutual recognition are thought to open up possibilities for participants to feel valued and secure, or *trygg* in the group, which, in turn, allows participants to actively enact belonging by becoming more open and responsive to others. In these ways, collectively constructing *trygghet* is closely related to social emplacement and thus is an important component in enacting inclusion and feeling "well" in the idiom of the school. Ideally, a domino effect fosters experiences of social emplacement among all in the class group, creating, in the words of one former folk high school teacher, "epidemics of well-being."[64]

As aspects of national community, notions of solidarity and care have long been mobilized in addressing migration and integration in Sweden at a larger scale, and in so doing, have intersected with processes of racialization. In the 1990s, migration policies that distributed a certain quota of migrants to each municipality framed integration as a social burden on (white) Swedish society best responded to with acts of (white Swedish) solidarity, insidiously

[62] *Trygghet* is the noun form, denoting safety/security/comfort, while *trygg* is the adjective form, denoting safe/secure/comfortable.
[63] In other chapters, I have used the term "pedagogy of care" to communicate how folk high school teachers use what Paldanius (2014) termed the "pedagogy of recognition" in pursuit of participants' well-being; in this chapter, I use Paldanius' term "pedagogy of recognition" in order to focus specifically on the central role of recognition – embedded by many of my interlocutors in the metaphor of "seeing" and "being seen" – in enacting care at the folk high school.
[64] I discuss this metaphor at more length in chapter two.

reaffirming white dominance (Eastmond 2011). More broadly, the fact that the "dominant ethos of Swedish refugee policy has been that of therapeutic intervention in order to help refugees adapt to the Swedish setting" (Graham 2002: 206), hints at slippages between care as support and as assimilatory pressure. With regard to Swedish mental health care structures' response to increasing cultural diversity, Bäärnhielm *et al* (2005) caution "that people living in Sweden could enjoy the benefits of 'folkhemmet' on the condition that they subordinated themselves to its demands and fitted in with the prevailing order of things…[based on] an expectation that people, regardless of background, have the same hopes, goals, and capacity" (Bäärnhielm *et al* 2005: 399). This highlights how care as a mode of acceptance, when couched in a framework of demanded samness, can become oppressive. Beyond the folk high school, in other sites of the welfare state, promoting solidarity and providing care have thus been key sites for reproducing and managing racialized difference.

The longstanding role of popular movements and folk education in constructing democratic citizenship as an "essentially Swedish" aspect of national identity has also shaped folk high schools' possibilities to intervene on integration today, through providing civic education. As key drivers of the Swedish "national project," popular movements were historically tasked with creating a Swedish democratic citizenship, establishing "'Swedes'…as standing at the forefront of the 'modern'" (Dahlstedt 2009: 384), and equating "modern individuals [with] mature, democratic citizens" (Dahlstedt 2009: 385). Through participating in popular movements, citizens are thought to gain "the capacities and virtues, the fundamental sense of responsibility and community that is felt to be required for democratic government. At the same time as [sic] they have been 'fostered into Swedishness'" (Dahlstedt 2009: 389-390). Examining another sector of popular education, adult study circles, Ali Osman (2013) explains how wider understandings of national identity and integration in Sweden have constructed and valued particular kinds of belonging in popular adult education shaped around hegemonic white Swedish norms. Prevailing discourses of national identity in Sweden "define the 'valid

knowledge' which immigrants should acquire, in other words, what the immigrants have to internalize to be included in the fraternity of the popular education community, and in the final analysis Swedish society" (Osman 2013: 151). Osman argues that attempts to integrate migrants in Swedish society through popular education are often couched within a "cultural deficit paradigm," which construes difference in terms of a more 'politically correct' language of 'culture' rather than 'race' yet which has similar effects in terms of reinforcing inequality (Osman 2013: 153). In this regard, folk education settings can be assimilatory, based on ideas about 'modern,' 'essentially' democratic Swedes mentoring 'backward' others, expanding both the civic opportunities and the civility of these 'others' by teaching them how to become 'more Swedish.'

Insofar as Oak Bay's approach is framed as providing a single language for talking about and working on what might otherwise be thought of as different kinds of integration projects, based on different modes of socially-marked difference and marginalization experienced by participants in various target groups, similar understandings of equality as sameness surface in some aspects - though not all - of Oak Bay's idiom of care and well-being. The school's goal of promoting integration for "everyone" glosses over the fact that participants in different target groups, including "persons with neuropsychiatric, intellectual, physical, or psychological disabilities, reading and writing difficulties, medical problems, or social difficulties, [and] participants who were born abroad and who have deficits in the Swedish language" (my translation), face social marginalization for potentially very different reasons. In adding language deficit to the list as just one more among many possible forms of potential hindrance or impairment to fuller social participation, folk school policies make it seem as if preexisting modes of conceptualizing integration and inclusion for socially vulnerable Swedish-born participants are expansive enough to adequately address the needs of migrant and refugee participants entering the Swedish context. Where language ability is consistently the only dimension staff thematize to indicate how migrants' experiences of marginalization might differ

from those of other target groups, and staff seldom if ever discuss how migrant and refugee participants are impacted by issues of racialization and racism, the school's discourse of inclusion collapses differently configured forms of social exclusion into a monolithic image of social vulnerability.

Wider historical and cultural legacies underpin and inform, though do not determine, Oak Bay's internal institutional conception of integration for migrant and refugee participants as well as concrete attempts to facilitate their inclusion. Through time, how does Oak Bay's pursuit of integration through care actually impact the experience of migrant and refugee participants such as Fahim, Yussef, and Ali, as well as white Swedish participants' perceptions of them? To what extent do this particular folk high school's interventions for migrant and refugee integration serve to materially intervene on substantive issues of racialized inequality? In the next sections, I explore an extended group discussion, together with interview material from further on in the school year, to illuminate how the dynamic, temporal unfolding of classroom interaction simultaneously makes space for the reiteration of broader societal patterns highlighted above as well as for the emergence of new ways of thinking about and relating to difference, identity, and belonging.

Enacting egalitarian ethos and negotiating social emplacement in everyday practice

In this section, I examine how ambivalent spaces of potential at school are fleshed out and experienced by teachers and course participants, noting that these are unstable processes, which require constant re-energization and risk breakdown. To do so, I build on Linda Garro's (2011) examination of "the relationship between *enacting ethos* and *enacting health*" (301, emphasis added), which shows how pursuits of well-being necessarily unfold in dynamic relational processes. The stress Garro places on "enacting" adds a more fine-grained social and situational lens to Bateson's understanding of ethos, to emphasize that the pervasive 'tones' of feeling and behavior that Bateson called ethos must be repeatedly brought to life through

negotiation and interaction. Where both ethos and local constructions of health reflect local values, Garro explains that because "enacting ethos is enmeshed with what it means to live a good life and how to do so in concert with others," it is "[t]hrough enactments of ethos, [that] the family enacts health" (2011: 301). In other words, by supporting locally valued relational orientations among group members, the collective realization of a broadly shared emotional and behavioral tone facilitates the embodiment of socially-grounded understandings of health and well-being for group members.

Where Garro's study focused on how a Mexican-American family sought to collectively "enact health" through enacting an ethos of individual contentment and family harmony, I focus here on the dynamic interactional processes by which teachers and participants in my folk high school class sought to collectively realize the school's ethos of care and well-being, couched within an overarching Swedish "egalitarian ethos" (Isenhour 2010), in order to "enact inclusion" for participants occupying various social positions of vulnerability. In this setting, where enacting the folk high school ethos is inextricably entangled with historical and cultural patterns of marking belonging and difference in terms of national identity and racialization, more complex social power dynamics are at play than in a family. White school staff attempt to deploy the school ethos of care, well-being and inclusion in service of integrating migrant and refugee participants in collaboration with participants in the folk high school classroom who occupy a variety of different racialized positions. Thus, an intersectional lens sensitive to participants' structural positionalities extends the consideration of different actors' uneven influence in struggles over how to best "enact inclusion." Where hegemonic whiteness is not thematized or challenged in the classroom, I suggest that the "feel" and communicative environment in this context more consistently serves the well-being of white participants, while alternately facilitating and constraining participants marked as culturally and/or racially 'other' from experiencing well-being as it is defined at school.

While issues of migration and integration were always present as background dimensions of classroom life, they rose more directly to the surface on a handful of occasions, particularly during a class unit about contemporary Swedish society. One day in February 2018, one of our three class teachers, Elsa, a warm, intuitive woman with salt and pepper hair, sharp blue eyes and a rotation of large, colorful sweaters, arranged an activity called "the hot seat" (*heta stolen*) to elicit participants' perspectives on diversity in Sweden. The way participants engaged in and experienced this activity provides an illustrative example of the possibilities opened (and closed) by using the folk high school's philosophy of care and well-being – routed through a "pedagogy of recognition" (Paldanius 2014) – in order to facilitate experiences of inclusion and belonging for refugee and migrant participants together with participants who are socially marginalized in other ways. As mentioned previously, this method centers the social democratic values of solidarity and *trygghet*. Both as a condition of the environment as well as a feeling of being secure and comfortable, *trygghet* is located in an intersubjective affective landscape. Where participants occupied different positions in a social structure perceived to be shifting, amidst an influx of political discourse from the far right, and against a larger societal backdrop seen by many to be socially, economically, and politically polarizing, questions of demographic change and civic engagement were at times intensely emotionally charged. In this context, rife with potential social disjunctures, moments of collective *trygghet* were seen as necessary to bolster participants' ability to actively enact belonging, which requires both experiencing being accepted and valued by others, and expressing that one accepts and recognizes others. During a discussion explicitly about diversity and integration, this framework made achieving a sense of shared *trygghet* in the group a central dimension of building and sustaining dialogue and relationships across potential social divides.

On the day of "the hot seat," we moved the desks aside and sat in a tight circle of chairs as Elsa read aloud from a list of statements about migration and culture, titled "My view of Sweden." When we thought a statement was true, we stayed in our seats; if we thought a

statement was false, we moved seats. Without tables, notebooks, or phones between us, we sat shoulder to shoulder, igniting a heightened atmosphere of co-presence. Elsa read aloud, 'Sweden has a humanistic, solidaristic system for addressing immigration.' There was a flurry of movement as people navigated past each other, expressing their disagreement. 'What do you think?' Elsa probed, looking around the circle at those who had moved. Helena, a petite, pale student whose appearance contrasted with her fiery, passionate advocacy for social justice issues, drew on the idea that immigrants are welcome, saying that they should be given more rights and better living conditions in Sweden. 'And *how* did you come to know this?' Elsa added. 'Is it through your own experience, the media, friends, or something else?' Helena recalled bearing witness to her neighbors' struggles in a culturally diverse suburb as the basis of her knowledge. We shuffled once again as Elsa read aloud, 'Swedes are full of stereotypes toward others.' There was another flurry of movement as some of us moved seats. 'What do you think?' Elsa probed, looking around the circle. Ebba, a participant from rural northern Sweden who had long braids and a no-nonsense attitude, spoke up, saying it was really important to build up your own picture of people based on your experiences interacting with them, and not make assumptions about them based on the group they belong to. 'And how did you come to know this?' Elsa asked. 'Through your own experience, the media, friends?' Ebba said her experiences over the last few months at the folk school had led her to think that. Other participants nodded in agreement. Another burst of movement followed the next statement: 'Swedes are open to other cultures.' This time, Elsa turned to me, asking if I wanted to explain my position. I said I thought it depended which Swedes, because at Oak Bay, many people were really open and warm in reaching out to newly arrived migrants (*nyanlända*), and yet I saw in the media and elsewhere that some weren't; Also it depended on which cultures, because being from the US, I had only been met with openness and positive responses, but I knew that was not necessarily true for people with backgrounds in other cultures or areas. Mira, a trendy, confident and outspoken participant who had grown up in Sweden with Christian Lebanese parents, followed

on my comment, saying she thought people were sometimes suspicious of her because her family was from the Middle East. Then Yussef, normally gregarious and full of jokes, said quietly that he thought Swedes could be judgmental of other cultures and closed off to people from 'elsewhere'. 'And *how* do you know this?' Elsa asked him. Looking pained as the rest of us studied his face, listening closely, he said, 'This has been my experience with a number of people here, that people have treated me in a way that makes me think this.'

At another point in the discussion, Julia, a spunky, thoughtful young woman with an intense energy and streaks of pink in her hair, interjected a point as food for thought, saying to the group, 'This conversation is reminding me of something I think is important. Think of your own experience with this - if you have it - that many immigrant families are incredibly hospitable in terms of making you feel welcome and offering you tons of food and drinks and wanting you to be comfortable when you visit. And think about the contrast of this to most Swedish families.' There was a quiet moment as people looked around at each other, letting this sink in, and a murmur of agreement passed around the circle. Ebba said, 'Yes, but at the same time I think this might also vary depending where you are in Sweden – for example, I grew up in the countryside and my grandma always had tons of baked goods – people always wanted to come over to our house because they loved eating what she offered.' Julia responded, 'Well yeah, but it's one thing to get baked goods from your grandma, and anyone in Sweden could probably expect that!' Implicitly, her comment questioned whether grandma would share her baked goods with immigrants, which would be a different situation entirely. A few people affirmed Julia's response, and Ebba seemed to hear this and take this on to think about too.

Finally, toward the end of the discussion, Ebba posed the question to Noor, Yussef, and Fahim, who had all recently migrated to Sweden, 'Do you feel like you're Swedish? Or something else?' While such questions might easily bundle in accusatory undertones, Ebba's tone and open body language communicated that she was genuinely interested in hearing their perspectives, and not invested in any particular answer. Noor, who loved all things academic, gave a

philosophical response, describing how society encourages people to think in “us and them” terms. Seeking to understand Noor’s emotional experience rather than her gloss of a more general principle, Ebba answered by probing, ‘And how do *you* identify, in your heart?’ and she pointed to her own heart.

Suddenly, Helena jumped in and cut them both off. Standing up, she said, ‘I don’t think that’s a legitimate question to begin with! Like why are we having this conversation where we say ‘us Swedes’ and ‘them non-Swedes’? Everyone who lives in Sweden, as all of us in this class do, is Swedish, and that’s the end of it!’ Other students seemed unsure how to respond to this, so that Helena’s intervention effectively shut down that line of conversation.

At the end of the “hot seat” discussion, Elsa wrapped up by asking the class how we thought this conversation would have gone if we had done it in the fall, when we’d all just met, versus how it had gone that day, in February. Most participants agreed that it wouldn’t have worked at all in fall, and that we could only have been this present in a dialogue about our experiences of challenging issues because we had gotten to know each other much better and come to feel *trygg* with each other.

Discussion: Affordances and limits of a social democratic pedagogy of recognition in pursuit of inclusionary care

For me, this scene illustrates some of the key ways in which “enacting inclusion” at school is fraught, in ways that reflect larger social dilemmas. Both underpinned by dominant structural dynamics as well as inflected with the potential for challenging and changing these dynamics, group interactions such as these produce ambivalent experiences for migrant and refugee participants. In this frame, collective attempts to enact an inclusionary ethos through class dialogue can facilitate feelings of inclusion for these participants, even at times challenging and expanding mainstream understandings of who belongs. Yet at the same time, participants marked as white and Swedish are often implicitly oriented to as ‘leaders’ in the process of defining and enacting the ethos at school, which reinscribes the normative boundaries of

belonging and results in a sense of at least partial exclusion for those marked as non-white and non-Swedish. Where the school seeks inclusion and integration for migrant and refugee participants through locally constructed projects of care and well-being, the truncation of these participants' inclusion also has detrimental effects on their well-being, completely contrary to staff's genuine good intentions.

Social emplacement, expanding the social: trygghet*'s transformative potential*

This scene, together with further interview material, fleshes out certain ways and moments in which the school's integration projects seem to be successfully facilitated. In contrast to many other arenas, staff and participants in the folk high school environment make sharing experience in dialogue across lines of social difference a central dimension of sociality. This emphasis can open social space for migrant and refugee participants to share their perspectives, engaging in and enriching more widely shared processes of interpersonal recognition and personal growth among class members. In an interview in the middle of the school year, Yussef described how his time in this sort of collective environment had facilitated his own goals in coming to the folk high school through mutual practices of enacting *trygghet*.

I asked Yussef, "I'm also curious a bit more about- you said you've developed as a person a bit here, and also developed with language, and I'm curious to hear more about, what does that mean for you? How do you think you've developed here at school?"

Yussef answered, "I think I've developed in my personality. Like, maybe that you- For example, when we sit in a group and work together, then you get to dare to say what you think, or that you can share ideas with others. Yeah, I think this system or method of learning - you get to learn a whole lot, actually."

I clarified, "Do you mean group work?"

Yussef responded, "Yeah, for example. That's one example. Because it's influenced me a lot. Like when I sit and talk with others. I dare to say what I feel, what I *want* to say. I don't know if you got an answer or not..."

I said, “Yeah, that’s really interesting! Does that feel different from school earlier and also generally in life? Have you been a bit more unsure of sharing your opinions earlier?

Yussef affirmed, “Yeah, absolutely. When you don’t have a lot of knowledge, then you don’t dare to talk a lot. For example, for one year, I didn’t know a lot in speaking Swedish, so I didn’t dare discuss with other people. Because I thought maybe, I would say something wrong, or they won’t understand me - so you get the feeling - you get *fear* [so] that you don’t say everything. But in the folk high school it was very different. That you can speak freely, and like, if I compare the folk high school with my old school in Syria, it was a big difference. Like in my school in Syria, you aren’t allowed to discuss with teachers. “This is true,” the teacher says, “this is true.” You can’t say “No,” or “That’s not true.” Everything the teacher says is true, is right. So here it’s very different. If I have a question, I’ll go to [our teacher] and share my thoughts with him, and he helps me, too. So there’s a lot of collaboration between teachers and students. And this is very good! Really good, actually.”

I asked, “So does it feel- so you have more knowledge that you can share, and then it also feels more comfortable and more open?”

Yussef responded, “Yeah, exactly.”

In this interview, Yussef communicates his sense that he experienced personal changes at school which arose *within* and *because of* the particular social context of the school environment, which “influenced [him] a lot.” He identifies classroom practices of “sit[ting] in a group and work[ing] together,” “shar[ing] ideas with others,” and “talk[ing] with others” as the catalyst for “get[ting] to dare to say what you think” and “dar[ing] to say what I feel, what I *want* to say.” His emphasis on “daring” (*våga*), “want[ing],” “speak[ing] freely,” and losing the feeling of “fear,” as an outcome of “collaboration between teachers and students” shows that the emotional impacts Yussef experienced from involvement in group dialogue resonated strongly with the school’s aspirations for participants’ inclusion outlined earlier in the chapter, which envision increasing self-esteem as being dialectically linked with growing mutual affinity. When

Yussef notes that speaking more Swedish at school has been key in facilitating these social and emotional shifts, he also points to the folk high school's success in focusing on language, described by the school principal, Johanna, above, as 'a way into the folk high school environment' for migrant and refugee participants. Where Swedish language deficit is equated in school policy with a wide variety of other forms of hindrance to social participation, receiving support in gaining greater Swedish language facility, much like receiving support in learning social skills, is a central part of how the school facilitates participants' feelings of inclusion and their ability to actively enact belonging at school. In several ways, then, Yussef's reflections on his own growth and increasing sense of comfort in the group mirror those of many other participants from across different student demographics, verifying the folk high school's conception that its care and wellness projects, aimed toward a broadly defined integration, function for migrant and refugee participants as well as other target participant groups.

Where processes of personal and social growth are thought to be connected at the school, we can see not only how Yussef was impacted by group engagement but also ways in which he impacted the group and others in it through his engagement. In the "hot seat" scene as a specific instance of such group interaction, Yussef's sense of at least partial *trygghet* helped him feel included as a member of the group whose voice counted; in turn, in using the space opened up by the class to share his experience of discrimination, Yussef extended an invitation for white classmates to engage with him about it and hear about belonging and exclusion from structurally non-dominant perspectives. While in a setting other than the folk high school, participants might not necessarily have expressed that their understanding of a social problem had roots in their own experience, Elsa's efforts to enact the school's philosophy of care and well-being, by calling forth participants' affective perspectives through face-to-face dialogue, generated a unique potential ground for communication across the boundaries of different social positions by prompting visceral recognition among participants of how vulnerability is patterned in relation to larger social structures. This focus on communication based on lived

experiences of recognition and belonging - or the lack thereof – can play a role in opening more space for empathy and recognition between participants who occupy different structural locations. Here, experiences of *trygghet* and recognition in the small group setting may be understood to create a positive feedback loop, where social settings that allow participants like Yussef to feel aspects of "wellness" as defined at school simultaneously empower them to have social impacts on others.

In the context of "seeing" and "hearing" each other in dialogue, a shared sense of *trygghet* can make it feel safe for white participants to hone their recognition of racialized social exclusion and even critically (re)consider previously held views. For example, it seemed that Ebba could openly take space to consider Julia's rhetorical challenge about who her grandmother was serving buns to because it seemed like she also felt heard and addressed by Julia. Ebba had talked at length about the importance of the folk high school in her feelings of being recognized and accepted as she is and feeling *trygg* in the group. In the context of a *trygg* relationship between her and Julia, characterized by intersubjective recognition, respectful disagreement didn't threaten the core of her self. Instead, a sense of positive self-esteem in the relationship, bolstered by Ebba's perception that she was secure in the group, may have made it more possible for her to be open to Julia's push to consider how white norms reproduce the exclusion of migrant 'others.' Here, we might be able to think of the cultivation of interpersonal empathy through encounters made possible by group *trygghet* as a ground for building both social affinity and political solidarity. In this way, collective practices based in building shared senses of *trygghet* at school within the context of a "pedagogy of recognition" *could* simultaneously help to cultivate larger collective modes of moral imagination in terms of who is included in Swedish society as a national community. In the example of Ebba and Julia's exchange, as with the example of Yussef sharing his experience above, it seems that possibilities for (at least white students) reimagining the boundaries of society at a larger scale are rooted in

intersubjective modes of recognition and acceptance that underlie feeling "well" in interpersonal encounters and emerge in the process of spreading "epidemics of well-being."

It is worth noting, however, that these lines of conversation, laden with social significance, were *not* pursued much further than what was recorded above. In the complex setting of the group, interactional patterns are shaped by just as much as they may challenge underlying structural and cultural dynamics. At any given moment, there are multiple perspectives and interpretations of the encounter, which may clash with one another and can easily derail the potential for a more extended intersubjective engagement and its possible personal and relational impacts. Sarah Willen's (2013) study of a clinical psychiatry course on cultural competence is helpful in understanding how, because of their intense emotional charge, discussions on how race, class, and culture impact people's experiences, which are of pressing importance to group members, ironically tend to fizzle out because of the difficulty of collectively managing a conversational space structured by multiple incommensurable perspectives. As a result, cutting this sort of discussion short might seem to provide a welcome end to a tense exchange, even as doing so leaves significant potential contributions unspoken.

Enacting egalitarian ethos, erasing intersectional experience: trygghet *as control and constraint*

While an overarching atmosphere of *trygghet* during the "hot seat" discussion bolstered participation in some way for most students who participated, including refugee participants; deploying local forms of "proper sociality" (Bruun *et al* 2011) such as *trygghet* and "imagining sameness" to pursue belonging can simultaneously hinder meaningful inclusion for migrant participants. In the larger Swedish cultural context, where hegemonic antiracism and the "egalitarian ethos" obfuscate racialized social inequality, inherent tensions arise in attempting to build a *trygg* environment for all, on one hand, and making space to address group members' divergent social positions and experiences, on the other. The class's general agreement in response to Elsa's question that the discussion had worked well because we felt *trygg* as a class

group elided subtle but important differences in what this experience meant for different participants.

With a foundation of *trygghet*, the group seemed to have created a space where there was potential room to discuss how participants from Syria identified in an exploratory and dialogical, rather than interrogatory way. The cultural and historical context of Ebba's question may have made it, in some ways, inescapably a loaded question, no matter how open she seemed. Yet its entrace into the space of the "hot seat" activity – in which issues of xenophobic exclusion were explicitly addressed within a space of reflective dialogue and mutual listening, bringing migrant students' lived perspectives on integration to the fore – lent it the potential to be a more productive mutual exchange, as opposed to in less reflective moments, for example, when Lukas questioned Fahim's motivations for coming to Sweden, relayed earlier in the chapter. Had the peers that Ebba addressed actually had the chance to answer – or to choose for themselves whether they did not want to answer – that *may* have opened a deeper, more immediate space of encounter in which migrant students could have voiced their thoughts on identity and experiences of inclusion and exclusion from their own perspectives. Listening to this, in turn, may have potentially encouraged students such as Lukas to reconsider the impacts of xenophobic rhetoric in their peers' experience. While in reality, none of this might actually have happened regardless, when Helena sought to show solidarity with her migrant student peers by defining their identity for them, as "Swedish," and thus bringing the conversation to a close, even the potential for this alternate outcome was decisively foreclosed. Very much against Helena's intent, her well-meaning comment that "everyone who lives in Sweden, as all of us in this class do, is Swedish, and that's the end of it!" thus subtly reproduced dominant social patterns in which white Swedes set the terms of conversation as well as the terms of belonging.

In order to express the value she placed on equality and maintain a *trygg* space for our classmates from Syria by avoiding the possibility that they would be 'othered,' Helena asserted that they were "Swedish" in explicit contrast to "migrant" or "Muslim." Seeking to preclude

discrimination, she "imagined sameness" by "undercommunicating difference" (Gullestad 2002), effectively stopping dialogue about difference in its tracks. A former high school teacher highlights frustration encountering similar dynamics, explaining, "I wasn't raised as a Swede and my worldview isn't that of the 'typical Swede.' But when you say to me, 'You're Swedish,' you intend that as praise. You assess me based on how much I resemble you, as if you were the standard. That is fundamentally a self-righteous position: [that] successful integration is when everyone is the same, and they should all be exactly like me" (Priftis 2016: 127, my translation). While far from Helena's intention, the discourse she drew on nonetheless has the effect of assuming that to be 'Swedish' is the unquestionably desired goal. This perspective is also reminiscent of what Fahim had told me in the beginning of the year – how many well-meaning Swedes prefer to mask difference completely rather than risk causing offense, yet in disavowing difference through "imagining sameness" can erase recognition and hinder greater understanding about diverse social experiences and realities. Such discourses do not originate in the folk high school, but when they are not challenged or even thematized when they come up in interactions in that context, broader structural power dynamics become reinscribed.

By preventing more 'sensitive' discussions of difference and racialized experience, a focus on *trygghet*, compounded by antiracist interactional norms that prevent explicit discussion of racism and inequality (Priftis 2016: 135), can fail to challenge - and even reinforce - existing structural imbalances. *Trygghet* "as a locally valued form of sociality can be constraining, because "the intention…to keep [a study group] nice and cosy…may prevent certain questions from coming up on the agenda" (Andersson & Laginder 2013: 117). Toward this end, Helena drew on the logic of white antiracism to frame further discussion of experiences of difference as 'insensitive' toward refugee participants. Yet from another vantage point, examining ongoing experiences of discrimination might actually be construed as 'insensitive' toward left-wing white Swedes' own self-conceptions as exceptionally "good," accepting people. In this lens, migrant participants are expected to maintain *trygghet* for white students by not

challenging the assumption that they are infallibly anti-racist (Pred 2000). This resonates with Ahmed's (2010) notion of a racialized "happiness duty" wherein nonwhite migrants are made to mask their experiences of racism and maintain positive emotional display, so that white people can keep their own happiness - and their disavowal of racism - intact. These unvoiced demands for refugees to bolster white students' preexisting self-image of "goodness" sustains the racialized hierarchy. Further, where mainstream antiracism maintains hegemonic whiteness as a structuring principle of Swedishness (Hübinette & Lundström 2014), white participants such as Helena, Ebba, and Julia are often subtly given greater agency in setting the tone and direction of conversation. For example, the students with dominant agency to ask and to speak about national identity in the "hot seat" scene were first and foremost Helena and Ebba – students born in Sweden rather than those from Syria. For example, Helena claimed the power to define Yussef, Noor, and Fahim's identities for them, as "Swedish," and to ascribe belonging to them, in a frame where the key to belonging is being Swedish. In these ways, larger social inequalities reflected in group members' different social positions become reinscribed in real time through interaction. These dynamics illustrate the fragility of projects of existential encounter and dialogue at school, where dominant discourses, always in the background, can emerge to the forefront and, holding more sway in collective negotiations to "enacting ethos" in pursuit of inclusion, override alternative ways to connect.

Building relationships, reconstructing boundaries of imagined belonging

As discussed earlier in this chapter, "the boundaries [of imagined national and local welfare communities] are elastic" (Hort 2014: 31), and as such require continuous social maintenance through everyday relational processes. Through intense dialogue about difference and identity such as the conversation sparked by the "hot seat" activity, as well as more mundane daily interactions in the classroom, cafeteria, and dorms, participants negotiate the terms of inclusion and exclusion in the folk school setting. I suggest that when participants expand the boundaries of group belonging through building interpersonal relationships across

lines of social difference at school, their understandings of who belongs in the nation may simultaneously expand. In this way, social processes of imagining belonging at school are dynamically interconnected with processes of imagining the nation.

For many white students at Oak Bay, simply having contact with migrants and refugees at a more personal level, whether or not in the context of close relationship, served to break down stereotypes that provide fuel for exclusionary demarcations of "us" and "them." As Ebba mentioned in the "hot seat" discussion above, her experiences over several months at the folk school had convinced her that it was important to build up her own picture of migrants based on direct experiences interacting with them as individuals, rather than making assumptions about people based on the group they belonged to. Similarly, during an end-of-year interview with another white Swedish classmate, Jakob, he told me that the folk high school had given him the opportunity to form closer friendships with migrants than he had earlier in his life, pointing to his close friendship with Aisha as an example. Being friends with migrant and refugee participants at school, he said, hadn't influenced his opinion on the whole migration issue so much, except to give him a more fleshed out and more positive picture of migrants, which strengthened his conviction that it was good to take people in and help. Through these relationships, he said, he had realized that there was really no difference between migrants and Swedes. Jakob's reflections show how through sustained interpersonal encounters at Oak Bay, he had started to see migrants and refugees as full, complex individuals rather than a homogeneous group. At least within certain relational constellations, then, the folk high school indeed catalyzed a significant dimension of what many migrant students, including Fahim, Aisha, and Yussef sought in their efforts to "come in" to Swedish society.

At the same time, contact among diverse classmates does not necessarily, in itself, move participants to reimagine the boundaries of belonging. An interview at the end of the year with Olle, a white, self-identifying conservative student with wavy blond hair and an eagle tattoo, revealed that the folk high school, with its vision of inclusion, had important personal impacts

on him in exposing him to migrant and refugee peers; yet at the same time, the *kind* of contact he had with these peers, in the mainstream-left antiracist context of the school, failed to challenge common patterns of reifying difference and implicitly affirming hegemonic whiteness that cross the left-right spectrum.

I asked Olle, "Does it feel like, when you talk about participants who come from different countries, and [who you said] have a bit more motivation/impetus (*drivkraft*) in a way, is it inspiring for you? Or how do you look upon that? And does it feel like you've gotten to build up friendships with them or come closer to them, or just see them from a bit more of a distance?"

Olle reflected, "Inspiration, yeah, definitely. I think it's very interesting because some of them come from other countries, I can learn a whole lot from them, and at the same time they can learn a lot from me. So there's that chemistry between one another, where you can talk about things and actually feel like, wow, I'm learning something here. And then in terms of coming closer, no, I wouldn't want to say that, because one- there's always this feeling of wanting to help someone like that, you maybe for example hear someone who doesn't speak perfect Swedish, so then you can always do your little part of the whole (*göra din lilla del av det hela*), which is just to talk with the person. It's not a lot that you need to do. Just, like, use your mouth! And they might learn something from you, and then it becomes a balance. Chemistry with each other. Whereas if I maybe talk more with- I don't know, someone I've maybe known since earlier, like Elias, because we've known each other pretty long, like, I don't really feel like I've gotten something from it (*som jag får något ut av det*), because I know already what he's doing, and who he is. And that's also nice, because he's familiar, and I know exactly what he's doing, so you don't really need to feel like you're learning something, but rather it's more like, 'Hey, what's up?' And then you move on. Whereas when it's someone who hasn't been here so long, there's a driving force/impetus (*drivkraft*) in that person, and that impetus most often inspires you, it gives you energy to want to talk more."

Olle's attitude towards relating with migrant participants does not differ significantly from many self-describing left-wing Swedish participants at school in that it belies an understanding of migrants as a largely homogeneous group, rather than as diverse individuals. 'Immigrants' and 'Swedes' are defined through an oppositional binary where people from outside Sweden are used as a foil to understand Swedish identity. Elsewhere in this interview, Olle said that most young Swedes "don't know what they want," and aren't internally motivated; here, when migrants are cast as "good" because they are motivated, it is a way to understand "flaws" in Swedish people. In this dichotomous lens, it doesn't occur to him to attempt to "come closer to" migrant participants. Rather, relationships between 'Swedes' and 'migrants' are defined around (and largely limited to) what is visible at a surface level. In line with the school's focus on Swedish language deficits as they key area of intervention for integrating migrants, Olle's notion of reaching out to migrant participants is also centered on language difficulty, so that "just to talk with the person…who doesn't speak perfect Swedish" is enough to accomplish "your little part of the whole" and socialize migrant peers into "Swedishness." The language of "doing [one's] little part" brings to mind how Swedish framings of migrant integration in the 1990s cast migrants' presence as a burden on Sweden, which required white Swedes to band together in solidarity with *each other*, as opposed to building solidarity with migrants themselves (Eastmond 2011). Further, by emphasizing how "help[ing] someone like that" "giv[es] you energy" and allows one to "learn a whole lot from them" and see them "learn a lot from me," this frame for understanding 'Swedes' and 'migrants' relational possibilities reiterates white hegemony by affirming tolerant white "goodness" and bolstering white Swedes' sense of agency and growth. That the underlying assumptions in Olle's view here remained in tact through more than a year at Oak Bay demonstrate how even at the folk high school, which seeks explicitly to break down stereotypes through interpersonal encounters, "ethnic boundaries [can be] maintained because of, not in spite of, intensive social interactions between ethnically diverse individuals and groups" (Gullestad 2002: 60).

These participants' divergent comments illustrate how the context of the folk high school, characterized by broadly pervasive social democratic understandings of belonging and social solidarity among 'Swedes' and 'Others,' opens the door to multiple potential outcomes for (re)defining belonging. As compared to many other sites in a contemporary Sweden marked by significant labor and residential segregation along racial lines, folk high school class discussions and dorm living opens a significant space of encounter in which Yussef was heard in voicing his experience encountering xenophobic stereotypes in Sweden, and Aisha built close individual friendships with Jakob as well as with Helena. Yet this opening of space is constantly haunted by moments of puncture that may close it down, for example when Noor, Fahim or Yussef found themselves precluded from expressing their perspectives in response to Ebba's question about their experiences of identity. In this setting, daily interpersonal interactions leave as much room for Jakob's and Ebba's reconsideration of migrants' 'Otherness,' and subtle associated shifts in expanding their understandings of who belongs, as for Helena's and Olle's reiteration of tropes of "sameness" and "difference" that reinscribe preexisting notions of belonging based on processes of flattening or exclusion. The intertwining of possibilities for inclusion and exclusion through everyday interactions at school, in turn, which often go unnoticed for white Swedish staff and students, mirror a broader pattern of invisibilizing entangled processes of inclusion and exclusion that has long characterized Swedish social democratic integration projects (Dahlstedt & Neergaard 2019).

"Being seen" through colorblind lenses: Ambivalent experience and the unfulfilled "promise of belonging"

Through the long duree of the school year, migrant and refugee participants are impacted by this context in mixed ways, so that feelings of otherness and exclusion rest alongside the positive feelings produced by social encounters at school. As described above, Swedish white antiracism has been characterized by ambivalence, contained in the discrepancy between the explicit moral assumption that everyone belongs because everyone is the same, and

the implicit assumption that some people are 'more the same,' in other words, necessarily closer to *desirable* forms of sameness, which are defined in (white) "Swedish" terms. Operating within the logic of white antiracism, white students like Helena do not experience this as a contradiction. In contrast, as objects of this discourse, migrant and refugee participants experience the ambivalence of white antiracism and the construction of *trygghet* through "imagining sameness" in greater relief, though not necessarily in ways that are easy to articulate. These forces seep into and shape their existential access to social emplacement, such that their feelings of belonging are also characterized by ambivalence. As I hope to have emphasized throughout the chapter, Oak Bay staff are fully and genuinely invested in their shared intention to provide all students with experiences of recognition in the local idiom of "being seen," and many students also take up this project with deep sincerity. As such, the mixed results of school projects of care and/as recognition, and wellness and/as inclusion, in migrant students' experiences are very much at odds with what staff desire and hope to cultivate.

Aisha's reflections on the school year in our final interview in June 2018 illuminated the complex feelings of ambivalence that many migrant and refugee students ended the year with, in spite of and also perhaps as a result of being exposed to school projects of care and inclusion. As we sat chatting in a clearing in the forest behind the school, I asked, "So yeah, how did it go with all those different kinds of things you wanted to do?...If you came here and were like, 'I want to see what it feels like to be accepted into a Swedish social world and get a closer look at Swedish social and cultural practices,' like what it's all about, do you feel like you have a better idea of that?"

Aisha said, "I mean sure, yeah. I have a better idea now, but after this whole year, I can't say if it's- if I have now, I don't think I have a positive or a negative perspective of what I just went through this year, but overall, I would say it's a positive, but..."

"If you can talk a bit about what's positive and what's negative," I said, "I'm really interested in that."

Aisha responded, "I mean the positive thing is that - I guess - I've been accepted, and they didn't act like they were weirded out when I first came to talk to them and something like that. And that I actually - I find out this year that actually I have a lot of similarities between me and the Swedish people. Because I used to be a huge fan of the West. And I already know their traditions. But I don't know, the negative part, I would say, just me trying *so* hard to adapt, and I thought it's gonna be natural. I thought I didn't have to try so hard. But I really tried hard to adapt to them and not freak them out with my old habits, with the Arabic habits, and just tried, most of the time just thought in my head that I have to be a good image of the immigrants here in Sweden, and I have to show my best. This thought always goes through my mind…that if I'm gonna do something, I've gotta do it right and I've gotta do it well, otherwise they're gonna get a bad picture of immigrants here in Sweden. So it feels like someone's always watching me, everything I do, and I really hate that idea. I mean why do I have to like, keep schooling myself, and keep like- it feels like I'm always being watched. Yeah. This is the negative thing, I would say. That I feel always, like, watched, and everyone's gonna comment about everything I do. I mean it's just a small example, but if I was smoking somewhere and I threw the cigarette [butt on the ground], it's a big deal."

I said, "Right, cause it's not just you as a person, it's like-"

Aisha agreed, "No, yeah, I mean – 'See what the immigrant is doing!' But when a Swedish person does it, it's not a big deal. It's- no one's gonna bat an eye to that. That's one of the things I would say is negative. Just the idea that I'm always being watched. But of course that's- not everybody does that. But this is the idea that's going through my mind."

I asked, "Do you feel like there are certain people who, when you're around them, that feeling goes away? Or is it just like all the time, everyone?"

Aisha clarified, "No no no. Not all the time. I mean there's certain people I can be myself, but with others, especially when I meet someone who is, like we're not close friends, I always have to behave myself, and not do anything crazy or weird, otherwise I'm gonna show

them the bad picture of immigrants. But yeah, it's not with everyone. Especially at parties, I mean you've been at parties here, so they *all* go crazy, but even though when I get drunk, there's this old Aisha in the back of my head, 'Don't do that, don't do this' - otherwise you're gonna get bad feedback." (laughs)

I asked, "So you kind of have the sense that you are accepted, but only if you behave yourself?"

Aisha answered, "Yeah, exactly. But as soon as I do something stupid, everyone's gonna start commenting on that. Yeah."

I affirmed, "Yeah, that really sucks!"

Aisha elaborated, "It sucks actually, yeah. But it feels like I'm used to it now. But it is true. It happens everywhere, especially on the internet. Sometimes I go through videos on the internet about immigrants in Sweden, and there's a *lot* of comments, there's like a counter strike, trying to comment on someone, like, 'See, this is how immigrants are behaving themselves in Sweden.' They're generalizing. So yeah, this is the thing that I always keep thinking of. Being watched."

I asked, "In the context of the school, do you feel like people have these kinds of ideas – that there are certain people watching you and other students from Syria for example, critically?"

Aisha reflected, "I mean, no one confronted me directly. But like some looks, the way they look at you and those kinds of things, it makes you believe that you're being watched. But I'm gonna be honest, most of the people here, they never have done stuff like they are watching me or something. But especially in class, you always have to do your best – otherwise the teacher – especially my teacher, she always wants me, like, to be the best, and to push myself further, and I always have this idea that I'm not gonna prove her wrong, and I have to show her that I'm gonna work as hard as the other students, otherwise she's gonna get a bad picture of me. I mean just the idea of 'doing my best.' There's a difference between doing your

best because you wanna be the best, or doing your best because you're being watched. And doing your best, like, not intentionally. This is the thing that I keep thinking of…"

I asked, "Do you feel like you had that feeling before you came to the school? Or now that you're immersed in this kind of Swedish context [as opposed to spending time mostly with other migrants before coming to Oak Bay] you're more aware of that feeling?"

Aisha responded, "Yeah, I mean I've had those kinds of feelings before I came here, but those feelings, they grow up, and they became more like, lethal (chuckles). Because now I'm *living* with them. Before I was like, with my friends in Ekby [the town where my family now lives in Sweden] with my Arabic friends, and at my home, no one is watching me or something. But here [at Oak Bay] we're always together, so I all the time try to do my best. So it feels more hard here in school. Yeah, it is harder than in Ekby."

At the end of that same interview, Aisha concluded by praising the school, saying enthusiastically that, "the teachers here, they don't see race. They think that everyone is the same. It doesn't matter if you're Swedish, white, black. You know that already. Yeah. But, I don't think there's a difference between like, I don't know. Being – I don't want to say an "outsider" – but they really treated me like I'm one of them. That's the only thing I can say. Teachers and students."

Aisha's comment that race doesn't matter at school, striking in its dissonance to his earlier reflections about feeling watched, captures how while (white) Swedish teachers and students "don't see race," there is still a clear understanding of Swedes versus "others" whose place is hard to categorize. Being immersed in a "Swedish" social environment is a double-edged sword, as it can increase feelings of social inclusion and acceptance even as, at the same time, it causes subtle signs of exclusion to accrue and become "more lethal." These disjunctures, which remain implicit at the level of feeling, preclude a more seamless sense of belonging for many migrant students.

Ahmed's (2010) concept of the "promise of happiness" sheds further light on how the folk high school's focus on well-being contributes to this result. In a chapter titled "Melancholic Migrants," she examines the colonial history of UK integration discourse to show how hegemonic whiteness structures normative conceptions of happiness in racialized ways. In this discourse, migrants marked as racially and culturally 'other' are offered an elusive "promise of happiness" in exchange for internalizing and assimilating to white British norms, which are ultimately unfulfillable in the absence of white bodies. In the folk school context, we might see an equally elusive "promise of belonging." Hübinette and Lundström (2014: 426) explain that in the Swedish context,

> Minorities can without doubt also identify with and strive to perform whiteness. The most important idea of the hegemonic whiteness of contemporary Sweden is that being white constitutes the central core and the master signifier of Swedishness, and thus of being Swedish. This means that a Swede is a white person and a non-white person is therefore not, and cannot fully become a Swede.

If in some ways, the school's care, wellness, and integration projects aim toward a larger Swedish national self-project, articulated through a perceived need to revitalize now-waning social democratic investments, the school truncates the very goals of belonging it helped to shape and attempts to facilitate for migrant participants, since these students can never fully reach the ideal of a fully integrated social democratic citizen, who is implicitly Swedish and white.

Staff and the majority of students wholeheartedly hope that the folk high school's projects of care, routed through a "pedagogy of recognition" (Paldanius 2014) in which experiences of "being seen" are thought to enhance students' feelings of well-being, will generate meaningful experiences of inclusion and self-esteem in social context for all of the school's diverse participants; Yet when white participants conceive of migrant and refugee participants in terms of group membership, whether conceived as part of 'us' or 'them,' they end up withholding more fleshed-out forms of individual recognition from their peers, in spite of their

good faith intentions to be inclusive. When migrant and refugee students are regarded through "colorblind lenses" – which, drawing on liberal social democratic discourses of universal sameness and equality, don't account for and thus inadvertently reproduce subtle forms of racialized inequality – experiences of feeling genuinely "seen" as an individual are precluded, replaced instead by a sense of "being watched" as a flattened member of a group. Further, where the capacity to enact belonging, an inherently intersubjective activity, is partially based in one's own agency and partially decided by others in one's milieu, unacknowledged, underlying racial dynamics limit non-white participants' ability to enact belonging as full, unique participants, so that the "pedagogy of recognition" fails to work equally for all (Fraser 2000).

In attending to how these under-the-surface elements of the school social environment denies them a fuller potential for embodying the school's own vision of well-being, migrant participants gesture toward their lived experiences of a failed "promise of belonging." For example, in line with Aisha's sense, above, that she was always at risk of being assessed (whether positively or negatively) as an "immigrant" rather than an individual, Fahim expressed to me that even during the "hot seat" discussion, grounded in dialogue about personal experience, part of him felt seen by the class not as an individual, but as a Muslim, responsible for representing all Muslims. Insofar as the imagined experiences of belonging at the core of the school's integration projects are not equally available to migrant participants marked as culturally and/or racially 'other,' these projects inadvertently truncate migrant participants' aspirations for inclusion even as they also nourish them.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show in this chapter how and to what effect the folk high school, with its humanistic framework for cultivating inclusion through care, well-being, and social emplacement, serves as a site for contemporary work on national projects of migrant and refugee integration in Sweden. At a moment when Sweden's self-image of "good whiteness" has been seriously threatened by the rise of the far-right Sweden Democrats (Hübinette 2014), folk

high schools have stepped in with support from the state to defend this image and reassert the viability of mainstream-left social democratic values through reaching out to migrants and refugees with the promise of popular inclusion.

While legitimately positioning its mainstream-left orientation as a more humane framework for addressing migration than that of the growing far-right, the social democratic approach underpinning school projects, which places a strong moral value on equality yet pursues this through colorblind modes of “imagining sameness,” risks reproducing an inclusionary/exclusionary ambivalence toward migrants that has long been central to Swedish social democracy. As a result, multiple possibilities exist in the fraught space of folk high school group encounters for pursuing inclusion through care and well-being, so that everyday social interactions tend to both spark and preclude experiences of belonging and inclusion for migrant and refugee participants. Here, possibilities for what Giordano (2014: 240) sees as “caring” forms of “acknowledgment,” which preserve “the right to exercise one’s own existence” by “listening to difference,” sit uneasily alongside the assertion of more flattening forms of “recognition” that attempt to “cure” difference by “exercising control.” Experiences of being “well,” participating in the group, and even perhaps expanding imaginaries of democratic belonging are contingent on unstable shared experiences of inclusion, recognition, and *trygghet* that are also shaped by structural inequalities, which are exacerbated in the absence of more explicit attempts to thematize and discuss dominant modes of racialization, ‘othering,’ and exclusion. At the same time, the rhythm of shared daily life in the dorm, moments of mutual recognition and reflection in the classroom, and deeper individual friendships forged on campus can and do facilitate feelings of authentic inclusion and acceptance for refugee participants as full individuals. Secondarily, insofar as personal relationships built at school across lines of constructed social difference may break down some white Swedish participants’ stereotypes about migrant ‘others,’ these relationships may also inspire subtle shifts in the social fabric.

This chapter's examination of the ambivalent dynamics of migrant and refugee students' experiences in the folk high school setting is not aimed whatsoever at erasing or sidelining the many genuinely welcoming efforts and genuinely inclusive effects of the school's social democratic approach to care in the face of a much more starkly exclusionary and quickly encroaching far-right. Far from mounting a destructive critique, I hope instead that illuminating some of the potentially unconscious structuring influences that shape everyday interactions aimed at integration will call attention to how folk high school attempts to cultivate social emplacement for migrant and refugee students remain open-ended, and thus contain generative potential for realizing critical visions of integration and inclusive democracy that rest on truly universal lived investments in mutual recognition, participation, and solidarity.

Chapter 6: Whose recognition? Caring for and against the far right

Chapter overview

As discussed in the preceding chapter, political polarization has recently been perceived as a major issue in Sweden with the rise of the xenophobic far-right Sweden Democrat Party, even more so in the aftermath of the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015. In the previous chapter, I focused on how the folk high school attempts to counter extreme-right calls for migrant exclusion by using local discourses and practices of care to integrate and include refugees. In this chapter, I continue to examine how the folk high school serves as a site for responding to contemporary far-right discourse from a center-left position, this time focusing on how the folk high school attempts to meet and mitigate rising Islamophobic sentiment through enacting care for socially marginalized white youth who espouse far-right views. Where the school reads expressions of hate as symptoms of unwellness based on perceived vulnerability and exclusion, staff seek to "treat" hate at the root by orchestrating student-driven care practices for disaffected, far-right aligned participants. They hope that feeling recognized by peers in a diverse social context will encourage these participants to undertake the self-work involved in rejecting and shedding exclusionary ideas of national community, while adopting more inclusionary forms of (inter)subjectivity based in a local articulation of social democratic ideals, characterized by acceptance, responsivity, and solidarity. Unsurprisingly, simultaneously addressing the needs of participants on both the giving and receiving ends of xenophobic, Islamophobic rhetoric is a challenging task, and, as the previous chapter also explored, using care practices shaped by a legacy of social democratic antiracism to achieve this goal can have unintended consequences.

Examining a class conversation about an incident of hate speech and its aftermath, with a focus on two figures in the situation who were in need of care — Silvia, a white Swedish student, and Leilah, an Iraqi Swedish student, I draw on critical phenomenology scholarship to analyze how and to what effect a critical mass of folk high school teachers and students

attempted to mobilize the school's philosophy of inclusionary care as a strategy to confront far-right rhetoric in real time. Following Sarah Willen's (2013: 254) observation that "a range of unacknowledged assumptions can torpedo good faith efforts" at inclusion, I argue that, against the best of intentions on the part of teachers, underlying frameworks of racial differentiation that have long haunted Swedish social democratic belonging invisibly structured the way care and recognition was enacted, inadvertently framing white Swedish students, such as Silvia, as the main recipients of care, while leaving participants who were the targets of far-right rhetoric, such as Leilah, to experience compounded exclusion and unwellness. Finally, I examine how several students' alternative interpretation of how to best enact care in this situation, based on what I call a "counter-politics of recognition," offers other possibilities for approaching the complex task of enacting care "for and against the far right" with potentially more broadly inclusive results.

"It makes it so you get hateful and scared": Vulnerability, unwellness, and Islamophobic rhetoric

During the second week of the school year, in early September 2017, I sat across from Silvia, my classmate and neighbor in the folk high school dorm, in the evening quiet of the empty school library. With her long dyed black-and-purple hair up in a bun and one knee curled up to her chest, she told me about a lifetime of relational difficulties before coming to the folk high school. As she described it, she'd found herself in very bad social surroundings for most of her life. She recalled traumatic memories of early life spent in foster care and then a difficult childhood with a great deal of stress in the family. Now in her late twenties, she recounted memories from her previous schooling in Sweden that included bullying and being socially outcast, pregnancy and motherhood in formal high school (*gymnasiet*), and multiple diagnoses including ADHD. She thought she hated learning, because she never got the support she needed – her teachers had said that they couldn't deal with her. These experiences had felt like constant

reminders from others that she was on the social margins, and powerless to do anything about it.

She hoped that coming to the folk high school, however, would change this. As a folk high school participant, Silvia was far from alone in her feelings of unwellness, as many of her new classmates on the "general track" (*allmänna linjen*), most of whom also hadn't finished formal high school (*gymnasiet*), also faced significant mental health stresses including depression, social anxiety, ADHD, and PTSD. In a setting where teachers were sensitive to the fact that most students had had their own share of difficult experiences and sought to provide students with a more positive collective social experience at school, she felt like she might have another chance at being accepted by others and by herself. She told me, "I have no self-confidence and I have no self-esteem, and that's because of my time in school, they've broken me (*de har knäckt mig*), basically. So I hope I'll be able to find my self-confidence here [at Oak Bay]."

While creative and kind, Silvia had been quick to blame others when things provoked her extreme sensitivity to noise and mess, often saying things that would alienate people as we settled into the dorm over the first couple of weeks. She described how her extreme anxiety had her up and cleaning our collective dorm kitchen at 5:30 every morning, and propelled her on long walks through the woods behind the school in the afternoons. She didn't have close friends aside from her ex-boyfriend, who remained part of her life after their relationship had turned sour. She often felt sad and alone, but lit up in our first interview when talking about the sense of validation she found in far-right online communities. Participating in these forums, she'd become emotionally invested in xenophobic, Islamophobic discourse. Speaking about migration issues in Sweden, she told me, "I love to discuss [that] online, but I get a lot of hate mail for [it]. I'm terrified that the things these Muslims have brought with them to Sweden will ruin this society we've built up – democracy, everything – it goes completely against all of these principles, and it makes it so you get hateful and scared. And then these groups get created – for

example, ‘Sons of Odin,’ to preserve the Swedish culture – they’re hate groups, and I’m a member of that group – these groups get created because Sweden couldn’t control these Muslim men and say ‘This is how it is in Sweden, and you can’t practice your religion on the Swedish people and make them feel unwell and force away their rights.’”

This divisive rhetoric that Silvia employed at the outset of the school year, which located the source of her feelings of unwellness in the presence of Muslim “Others,” reflected a far-right lens for interpreting feelings of anxiety and vulnerability that, following the rise of the far-right Sweden Democrats Party, has increasingly saturated the digital sphere, circulating through YouTube, clickbait headlines, and algorithmically-created “echo chambers” of likeminded opinions[65]. Couched within a larger trend of political polarization across the US and Europe, when far-right narratives are becoming increasingly commonplace and even mainstream in Sweden, Silvia’s story exemplifies how far-right discourse can work to help disaffected white Swedes make sense of their experiences of psychological suffering and senses of social and/or economic precarity in a neoliberal era through hate.

Combating hate with inclusionary care

Reflecting on the contemporary social landscape, it was common for folk high school staff to link rising expressions of far-right sentiment to growing feelings of marginalization, displacement, and unwellness in society. Reading hate as reflective of a desire for social inclusion, many teachers saw a path toward combating the growth of xenophobic discourse by responding directly to the feelings of vulnerability thought to underpin far-right rhetoric, meeting far-right aligned students with the school’s recognition-based “pedagogy of care.” Working with a school population where most students in the high-school completion courses were understood to be socially vulnerable, students such as Silvia, who were perceived as

[65] These “echo chambers,” also called “filter bubbles,” are generated by search engine and social media algorithms that present new content based on users’ previous searches and “likes,” thus limiting people’s exposure to alternate points of view.

displaying a particularly high level of emotional instability and social insecurity, were seen as especially vulnerable.

Ulrika, a language teacher, articulated in an interview how the folk high school's "pedagogy of care" could provide an antidote to hate. Like most other Oak Bay teachers, Ulrika is a white, middle-aged, middle-class, left-leaning Swede, deeply personally invested in the folk high school's humanistic pedagogy and what she understands as its social potential. She told me, "I think about how you see a growing group with antisemitism and all that that's happening out in society [that] there's a big group who haven't, themselves, found their- they don't know what they have power to do. Because they haven't gotten to know or experience a positive power. And then you want to exercise power over other people, because it's easier to talk to other people than with yourself. When you can't quite manage your own [stuff], and you don't feel well. Then it's easier to blame others." She recalled an example of this, saying, "I read an article in [the paper] about a young man who was in the [neo-Nazi] Nordic Resistance Movement, and he quit. And he contacted celebrities that he harassed. It was really interesting! Because there, I think that he has suddenly, himself, gotten tools to manage his life. And that made it so that he could see, 'What am I *doing*? I'm doing wrong things. I'm destroying things for people.'"

Ulrika saw the folk high school, which aims at fostering relational well-being in inclusive community, as a pivotal place for getting such "tools to manage [one's] life," which could change a destructive orientation toward the self and others into a more generous one. According to Ulrika, the care that the folk school seeks to provide for all of its participants, helping them to feel socially emplaced (Vigh 2015) in a context of "human warmth and community," could have transformative effects specifically for disaffected white Swedish youth. She explained, "I think that if people are allowed to join– and it's both finding out facts, what it means, but it's also getting the opportunity to feel some kind of human warmth and community. Then I think it's easier to see that you maybe should or will invite others in. And not be so scared. Because I think it's built on fear, what's happening." Both for far-right-attracted and for all other students at

school, Ulrika said, care “has to do with the encounter. When you get them to find their own strength in themselves, one part is that they become seen. When one becomes seen, and is also present and included in a context where one understands that, ‘I am important, I’m needed in order for this to work,’ then it can be that they get rid of the [heavy baggage].” Further, if this mode of care is to effectively combat far-right sentiment, it is essential that these caring encounters take place in an environment of social diversity. Ulrika said, “Some [participants] come here having lived in a very small world, where they’ve maybe sat at home a lot, they haven’t gone to school, haven’t encountered different kinds of people. Here you get the opportunity to encounter incredibly many different people, and [this diversity] is important in the conversations.”

Where far-right aligned youth may be used to coping with the “baggage” of feelings of exclusion, invisibility, and powerlessness by lashing out at socially constructed ‘Others,’ staff hope that the pervasive emphasis on care at the folk high school will serve to both lighten the “baggage” they carry and offer alternative ways to cope with it, by catalyzing shared feelings of collective agency, solidarity, and belonging that obviate fear and blame. The school’s focus on face-to-face interactions are seen as an especially potent tool for interrupting the toxic digital proliferation of alienation and hate, challenging stereotypes that flourish in far-right “echo chambers” online with experiences of mutual human recognition in the flesh. Through concrete practices of attunement and recognition woven into everyday engagements among diverse peers at the folk high school, the staff hope that alienated white participants will come to see social difference as meaningful rather than threatening.

Ultimately, in attempting to shift far-right aligned participants’ lived experience of the relation between self and others to a frame of inclusive community and “positive power,” folk school staff seek to redirect these young adults’ own understandings of their suffering in the contemporary socio-political and economic milieu back through a solidarisitic, social democratic - rather than a xenophobic, Sweden Democratic - optic. Yet as discussed in the preceding

chapter, a social democratic approach to combating racist discourse has its own shadow side, and constructing projects of care in this idiom risks implicitly reinscribing racial differentiation.

Materializing care in interaction

This chapter's focus on how school care projects are aimed toward mitigating white Swedish youth's investments in xenophobic and Islamophobic sentiments, which preclude inclusion for their migrant and Muslim peers, mirrors the last chapter's exploration of how folk high school care projects are aimed toward integrating migrant and refugee participants, whose social inclusion is threatened by far-right discourse. The interlinked care projects these chapters explore are, of course, carried out simultaneously rather than sequentially, so that teachers and students were tasked with attending to a wide range of socially marginalized participants who were all seen as being in need of inclusionary care, including both far-right aligned white students and migrant students and Muslim Swedish students who were the targets of far-right rhetoric. The ethnographic material below illustrates how the task of "distributing" care among differently positioned participants played out in a class discussion about an incident of hate speech and its aftermath, with a particular focus on two central figures who were in need of care in this situation – Silvia, introduced above, and Leilah, a Swedish Muslim student in the same class.

True to her self-described "type-B" personality, Leilah communicated an easy self-confidence that contrasted starkly with Silvia's nervous energy. Typically expertly made up with a hijab pinned neatly over her hair, she radiated an aura of put-together calm. In an early interview, Leilah told me about growing up in a large, racially- culturally- and linguistically-diverse city suburb with her parents and several aunts and uncles, who had migrated to Sweden from Iraq before she was born. Pushing back explicitly against widely prevailing stereotypes about the area as dangerous and run-down, or in the new language of the far right, a "no go zone," she described how she felt rooted there, happily surrounded by tight-knit family and community, despite deteriorations in public services that she thought reflected decreasing state

investment in their welfare. She hadn't been very interested in school as a teen and had bounced around between different formal high schools (*gymnasieskolor*), but had always felt she had a cohesive, supportive social network and hadn't struggled with sustained episodes of mental ill-health as so many others in the folk high school had. Outside of the context of her neighborhood, she said, and increasingly so in recent years, she had been forced to live with constantly being 'Othered' in white Swedish society.

While staff hoped that ideally, mobilizing "pedagogies of care" in the classroom would foster group affinity and cohesion among all of their students, including far-right attracted students, like Silvia, and Muslim students who were constructed as 'Other' by far-right rhetoric, like Leilah, they readily acknowledged that in reality, social processes at school were fragile and unpredictable. Never being settled once and for all, nor fully in teachers' control, school practices of care required constant effort and negotiation in interaction. In order to understand the intersecting social processes that drove the specific contestations over care that emerged in the class discussion on hate speech recounted below, which involved Silvia and Leilah as central figures, I draw on key concepts from critical phenomenology, including Jason Throop's (2010: 269) "cultural phenomenology of moral experience" and Sara Ahmed's (2007) "phenomenology of whiteness."

Throop's phenomenological approach provides helpful groundwork for understanding how people's experiences of an interaction, shaped within social parameters, guide their ethical responses to those with whom they are engaging. Explaining how people come to interpret their worlds in ways that feel clear and coherent even as complex, chaotic surroundings threaten sensory overload, Throop points out that "what is called our 'experience' is almost entirely determined by our habits of attention" (James [1892] 1985: 39, cited in Throop 2010: 9). In our subjective experience, we do not perceive ourselves as selecting one among a number of possible interpretations of the situations around us; rather, our experience is simply that the world *presents itself to us* as naturally being a particular way. However, our "habits of attention" guide

us, without any conscious effort, to regularly respond to certain stimuli more than others, so that certain things, situations, and people become foregrounded to us as "meaningful," "beautiful," or "repellant," while others are backgrounded and unnoticed altogether. Throop's anthropological perspective insists that attention is organized, and stimuli are implicitly evaluated, not on an idiosyncratic, case by case basis, but "*in relationship to cultural processes*" – in other words, in relation to local norms, values, and assumptions (Throop 2010: 9, emphasis in original). A cultural phenomenology approach to care, then, illuminates how cultural, social and relational "pulls" on our attention make certain people and situations simply *appear* as being more or less worthy of our consideration, undergirding how we imagine what constitutes ethical care, and for whom.

Where a cultural phenomenology lens reveals that our experiences of and moral responses to the world stem from how social and cultural processes direct our attention, it follows that processes of racialization are part of what guide our attention and thus an important basis for how we materialize care in interaction. Sara Ahmed's (2007) concept of the "phenomenology of whiteness" provides a granular view of how racial dynamics, such as those characteristic of Swedish hegemonic antiracism (Hübinette & Lundström 2014)[66], shape people's mutual orientations in everyday interaction. Drawing on "Fanon's work show[ing that]…bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism, which makes the world 'white'…a world [that is] 'ready' for certain kinds of bodies" (Ahmed 2007: 153-4), Ahmed argues that the socially constructed valuation of whiteness invisibly directs people's modes of inhabiting social space in ways that reinscribe the value of whiteness. Through the ongoing reification of whiteness as "the very 'what' that coheres as a world" (Ahmed 2007: 150), people's attention becomes "directed towards some objects [and people] and not others [as part of] a more general orientation towards the world" (Ahmed 2007: 151), "put[ting] some things [and people] and not

[66] I discussed Swedish hegemonic antiracism in depth in the preceding chapter.

others in our reach" (Ahmed 2007: 152). In this model, "Race becomes…a question of what is within reach, what [and whom] is available to perceive and to do 'things' with" (Ahmed 2007: 154). In conversational interactions, Ahmed describes how implicitly racialized understandings of likeness and difference direct white people's concern and emotional investment toward those 'like' the white self, who are imagined to share common qualities, and away from apparently 'unlike' others: "Whiteness becomes…'like itself', as a form of family resemblance…[so that] other members of the race are 'like a family'…[In this] version of race and…family, predicated on 'likeness'" (Ahmed 2007: 154). This lens is useful for understanding how historically sedimented, invisibilized processes of racialization, such as those that link ideas of Swedish belonging with "hegemonic whiteness" (Hübinette & Lundström 2014), underpin constructions of "care as the way someone comes to matter and the corresponding ethics of attending to the other who matters" (Stevenson 2014: 3) in real-time conversations, as in the scene below.

The incident: Negotiating care "for and against the far right," face-to-face

At the end of September 2017, one month into the school year and almost a month after our first interview in the school library, Silvia became the center of attention – and tension – in our class when she posted a comment that included the statement "I hate Muslims" on her Facebook page. Shortly afterward, one of our classmates picked up the post and shared it to our class Facebook message group.

After Silvia's post had been copied into the group message thread, a long group conversation ensued online, with class participants reacting to Silvia's xenophobic statement in various ways.

Mira, a fashion-conscious, outspoken student who had grown up in Sweden and whose family was Christian Lebanese, voiced her offense at this on behalf of the Muslim students in our

class, questioning[67], 'Why would someone write this? This is honestly very offensive, this view of Muslims is wrong, and I personally don't respect it.'

Nina, one of the youngest participants in the class, asked Silvia, 'Why are you posting offensive things on Facebook? Facebook should be a place where all feel welcome and not offended.'

Ebba, a self-confident student with long braids, who had grown up in rural northern Sweden, said that everyone should just chill, and that we shouldn't jump to any conclusions. She said, 'No one hates anyone in our class, which includes us not hating Silvia.'

Julia, an energetic and spunky student with pink-streaked hair and a kind word for everyone said, 'Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, deserves to be accepted for who they are, and has reasons for thinking what they think. Also, everyone says stuff they regret, and we need to all accept and love each other no matter what. I respect you and your view, Silvia, and you don't need to worry that we in the class will be mean to you or start to hate you.'

Fahim, a bright and relatable student from Syria, well-liked in the class, said to the group, 'Silvia's post wasn't that big of a deal, everyone says things they regret sometimes.' He said directly to Mira, who had challenged Silvia's comment and said it was not okay, 'Come on, Mira, you put out fire with water, not with more fire. Let's avoid conflict in the group.' Ebba appreciated this stance, complimenting Fahim on his graceful way of expressing himself and engaging with the situation.

After a long period of silence, Silvia appeared in the chat, writing, 'It was me who posted that comment, and I stand by everything I've posted because I have good reasons for it. And I know I'm not the only one who thinks this way, because I've talked to several others in our class who agree with me.'

[67] Throughout the dissertation, I use single quotation marks to denote dialogue reconstructed from detailed fieldnotes taken in real time in Swedish, while double quotation marks capture audio-recorded, transcribed direct quotes.

Mira responded, ‘I thought we were better than this, but if there are any more “hidden racists” (*smygrasister*), then come forward now.’ She responded directly to Fahim, ‘I’m sorry, but I can’t look the other way, even if you can.’

Leilah, uncharacteristically quiet, didn’t write anything. At some point she quietly exited the conversation - we saw only an arrow icon and the text, “Leilah has left the chat group.”

After another pause, Silvia wrote that she had gone for a walk and talked out the situation with Kaspar, a slight, softspoken and kind classmate who struggled with depression. She realized in talking with Kaspar that although she hadn’t meant offense to anyone in our class, what she had posted sounded offensive, and as she respected everyone in our class, she should never have posted it. She wrote that she had really appreciated talking to Fahim about his religion and that he had expanded her perspective on Islam. The reason she had posted that hateful comment to begin with, she added, was that a Muslim man had sexually assaulted her sister, and she was very upset and jumped to stereotypes in her anger and sadness. ‘I’ve been a hateful, narrow-minded person, and expressed myself stupidly,’ she wrote.

Fahim responded, ‘Look, we all have stereotypes about each other’s views and religions, but that’s exactly why we’re here, together in the same class, to get to know one another better and get rid of the prejudices and have better understanding for one another. So there’s no danger in not agreeing with each other. The important thing is to respect one another and not generalize or trash each other.’ Then he added, ‘I’m sorry about what happened to your sister, and my religion actually encourages me to sacrifice my own life to save others from abuse.’

Silvia responded, ‘I’m sorry Fahim, I’m sorry Leilah, I’m sorry Mira and everyone who felt attacked. I truly regret that I wrote what I did. I’m not evil, but I’m uneducated and confused and lost, someone who only sees things in black and white.’

Ebba said, ‘Why should you say you’re uneducated? Don’t devalue yourself like that, Silvia! I hope everyone can accept your apology, which was very strong of you to do.’ She added,

'I also have to say that you're a wonderful person, Fahim, and the way you express yourself is moving.'

Nina said, 'Let's continue this conversation in person in class rather than on Facebook.' At that point, Silvia called the class teachers and decided together with them that we should invite the school counselor, Ulla, to our next class meeting and continue discussing this as a group face-to-face.

The group chat ended with warm statements from everyone still present (see figure 15). Multiple participants including Ebba, Julia, and Fahim expressed sentiments to Silvia such as, 'Don't be too hard on yourself'; 'It's important that you are reflecting on this'; 'You won't be an outcast'; and 'There is plenty of love to go around.' Mira, who had pushed back most strongly against the content of Silvia's post, sent a heart emoji and said to Silvia, 'We'll keep talking about this when we see each other in person. There's no one who hates you, everyone was probably just a bit confused and shocked. Hug.'

Figure 15 Heart offering – Julia's closing contribution to the discussion thread

The next day, the participants sat at long tables arranged in our usual circular formation seeming somber and uncomfortable, while our teachers Erik and Hans and the school counselor, Ulla, stood at the front of the classroom. Silvia sat in her typical corner spot, looking upset but determined; quite a few people were absent from class, including Fahim, who was usually present. Many of the participants who were present seemed unsure of what would happen in such a situation, and if or how they should contribute. Erik broke the ice by asking us to recount

what had happened for the counselor, Ulla, a white Swedish woman in her forties who had long brown hair, kind eyes, and a patient demeanor.

Mira reiterated her view that Silvia's post was really upsetting and offensive, and that although she personally was not Muslim, we had Muslim students in the class and making the sort of comment that Silvia had posted was simply not okay.

Ebba, with her usual confidence, said that 'people' - turning toward Mira - had said mean and hateful things toward Silvia in the Facebook thread and that *that* was not okay. 'We can't tolerate bullying,' she said, 'and we have to be adults about this.'

Ebba's close friend Olivia, also from northern Sweden, agreed, chiming in to echo Ebba's statement that a lot of people had been mean to Silvia in the Facebook chat.

Mira, feeling that this was directed at her, asked with confused exasperation, 'But what did I say that was mean?'

Ebba responded, 'Well, for example you called people out for being "hidden racists" (*smygrasister*)'.

Mira persisted, 'Why is that "mean"?'

Ebba elaborated, 'You called people out and asked if there were any more "hidden racists" in the class. Racism is a strong accusation! Besides, what does that even mean? What is a hidden racist? It might make me sound dumb, but I don't care. I googled it, and I couldn't find an explanation.'

Putting a hand to her pink-streaked hair, Julia jumped in to explain for Ebba that the term "hidden racist" refers to someone who says "I'm not racist, but..." and then says racist things. Then, turning to Silvia, Julia asked, 'So maybe part of what people are wondering here today is if you still have those views you posted about or if you've changed your views? Can you tell us about that?'

Silvia answered, 'Well, I really am so sorry and so upset, and I want everyone's forgiveness. I've thought a lot about it since talking with Fahim and Kaspar and Cari, and you

can even ask her, we talked that night and she saw how upset I was!' From this point, Silvia took a more central speaking role in the conversation, taking responsibility for her Facebook post rather than dismissing it. She told the class that she thought she'd had different Facebook privacy settings in place and hadn't meant for any of us to see her post. But given that we had, she elaborated more about why she had posted it, in relation to what her sister had experienced, saying that she realized she shouldn't have reacted in that way or that venue. She concluded, 'It was wrong, and I beg for your forgiveness.'

After a pause, Leilah, who had exited the group conversation on Facebook without saying anything, finally spoke up. Usually relaxed and unruffled, she was very emotional and on the edge of crying as she explained her experience of the previous night's online chat to the class, saying, 'It seemed like if I said anything in the group chat, based on what Ebba and others were saying about how we should accept Silvia and her opinion and not bully her, then just me expressing my opinion in the group – which was offended and upset - would be seen as bullying Silvia. So I just left and waited to talk about it in person. Silvia's post doesn't need to affect me personally, but think about it guys, this was a statement that contained hate against an entire group of people (*folkgrupp*), and think about how you might have reacted differently if this statement was about LGBT persons instead of Muslims, everyone would have cared much more and been much more upset about the actual content of what was said.' Implicitly, Leilah communicated that she felt more upset by the group's reaction to Silvia's post than by the content of the post itself.

Sofia, an outspoken, intuitive participant in her mid-twenties with bright red hair, who shifted easily between playful joking and serious reflection, built on Leilah's comment about the dynamics of the group conversations online and in the classroom, reacting to Ebba's attempts to quiet Mira's opposition by casting her as being "mean" or bullying Silvia. Sofia said, 'I'm really upset! It's not cool that some people, like Silvia in this case, are allowed to express their opinion and be accepted by the group, while when others, like Leilah and Mira, express their opinion in

reaction to how what Silvia said affected them, then they get shut down. Everyone should be equally allowed to express their opinion without being shut down!'

Julia, wanting to put distance between herself and the content of Silvia's Facebook post, while still imploring the class not to turn on her, said, 'I do *not* find racist views acceptable. But I've experienced bullying myself, and it's horrible, and I don't want anyone else to experience that. I really hope rumors of this won't spread around the whole school, which could make Silvia a target for that.' Further developing a psychological identification with Silvia, she added, 'I also want to express that because I have ADHD, I find it hard to have impulse control and a lot of times I say stuff I regret, which is stressful and difficult (*jobbigt*) for me, so I can understand how something like what Silvia has been describing could happen, that you say something you regret. Anyway,' she continued, 'we should remember Silvia's intention – her comment wasn't supposed to be posted in our class's group chat, just on Silvia's own page.'

Max said, 'Yeah, but if you post something on Facebook, though, you can't really expect it to be private!'

Silvia said, 'Well, I thought I had special privacy settings so that classmates can't see a lot of my posts. Like we talked about in our class unit on free speech (*yttrandefrihet*), people can have their own opinions but not necessarily say or show them all to everyone.'

Nina, who was politically farther left-leaning than many in the class but not often outspoken on this topic, followed on this. Pivoting away from Julia's focus on Silvia's psychic state and back toward the idea Silvia had expressed in her original Facebook comment, she asked the class, 'Aren't we kind of minimizing the content of Silvia's post? Like there are so few Muslim students in our class that maybe we're just kind of going with the dominant feeling that most of us can't relate to feeling personally offended by it or seeing how it's personally offensive, but I think it's really problematic. And I think that just because there aren't that many Muslims in our class doesn't mean we don't need to discuss the impacts of that kind of statement seriously.'

Ulla, the counselor, sought to moderate among the conflicting perspectives that had emerged in the class, attempting to address Nina's concerns while returning to the approach adopted by Julia, Ebba, and others that centered Silvia's perspective and vulnerability. 'We shouldn't minimize the content,' Ulla said, 'I don't agree with it, and I don't find it acceptable, and I don't want to give the impression that I think it's just one opinion among other opinions, because this is a very strong or extreme opinion to have. But the main point here today is to work on trying to separate people from their opinions, because we all meet opinions from others that we don't agree with or that we find uncomfortable or unacceptable – and we still need to engage in dialogue with people, which can be interesting and challenging in a positive way when there is a basis of mutual respect. Mutual respect and talking eye-to-eye and face-to-face with people - these things are so important. And it's crucial to practice impulse control, to be very careful with what you post on social media. Remember that just like with texting, misunderstandings can amplify really quickly with Facebook, because it's hard to interpret what other people mean when you can't read their body language and aren't confronted with their fleshiness, which helps you remember they're a person just like you.'

At this point, with the tension in the room still quite high, the teachers said, 'Let's break for our mid-morning coffee (*fika*).'

Glad for the break, participants broke off into small groups to walk to the cafeteria, and I fell into step with Ebba and Olivia. Over our rolls and coffee, Ebba vented frustratedly that no one in the class was behaving like adults, that they were all just kids, and it was hopeless to have a dialogue with them. She cared very deeply about bullying, she said, because she knew how it felt from being bullied when she was younger. That had happened for no reason at all, she explained, not based on anything she did, just for having thick glasses. Olivia heartily agreed, and Ebba was comforted by her show of support, though still upset at others in the class.

After *fika*, the participants filed back into the classroom, unhappy and emotional in different ways. The conversation felt unfinished, and yet when Ulla asked if people wanted to say

anything more, participants indicated that they didn't. In closing, the teachers Hans and Erik echoed Ulla's point about separating persons from their views, and how doing this didn't mean that we had to agree with people nor think that their behavior was right.

Later that day, I sat in on the teachers' meeting for our class, where Hans and Erik were joined by the third teacher for "Being Human," Elsa, to reflect on the discussion that morning. In processing what had happened, they dwelled further on Silvia's perspective, extending the class discussion's focus on her, while pausing briefly to note that, in terms of other participants' perspectives, it seemed like Ebba had still had unresolved feelings when the class discussion concluded after *fika*. Erik commented that the whole incident revealed that Silvia was dealing with some serious psychological issues and experiencing emotional instability. Hans said he thought that Silvia seemed genuinely sorry and as though she sincerely wanted to apologize for having offended people.

In addition to their comments in this meeting, Erik's and Hans' decision to bring in the school counselor to moderate a discussion about feelings that came up in relation to the post being shared - rather than focusing the conversation on the content of the post - reflected the more widely shared view among staff that expressions of hate were actually symptoms of psychic vulnerability and perceived exclusion, and thus demanded gestures of recognition and inclusion in response. The teachers' perception of Silvia as both one of the most vulnerable students in the class as well as one of the students with the most potential to harm her peers seemed to draw their attention toward her as someone with whom caring intervention might be able to bring about the most positive change for the most people.

Whose recognition?: Care's unintended consequences and participants' divergent experiences of care

This class discussion and the conversations surrounding it, including small-group reactions at *fika* and teachers' interpretations in their staff meeting, illustrate some of the complexities of implementing care as a means to address far-right sentiment in practice. These

data show how care, inclusion, and solidarity, like empathy (Hollan 2008), can only materialize, if at all, through imaginative work at the nexus between individual life histories and collective relational space. Tracking the complex social and emotional dynamics at play in this situation illustrates that the questions of how to define and enact care are not settled by the folk school's theoretical framework, as articulated above by Ulrika and other staff members in reflective moments, but rather remain open for debate in practice, constantly being contested through interaction in the socio-cultural scaffolding of the school environment. Further, as we also saw in the preceding chapter, the extreme tension in the conversation underscored "how classroom-based engagement…with…[perspectives on social] difference can run awry when the emotional potency of these issues is not adequately taken into account" (Willen 2013: 253).

Insofar as care practices at school depend on dialogue between persons with differently situated perspectives, they do not follow a simple linear process. Throughout the discussion above, participants' different social positionalities, as well as issues from their personal histories that became foregrounded in their psychic and social experience, influenced how they interpreted the events that occurred and directed the flow of the conversation. Underlying social and cultural frameworks "pulled" participants' attention, concern, and compassion toward - or away from - certain of their classmates, influencing how they sought to enact the school's "pedagogy of recognition" (Paldanius 2014). The conflicting points of view that arose in the class discussion raise questions about what it means to "care for and against the far right" in practice. What kinds of care are best applied when, by whom, and for whom? What, exactly, is the aim of this care? Below, I examine the underlying frameworks that guided staff and students in constructing the approach to care that prevailed in the class discussion, and how this 'dominant' mode of care unintentionally affected Silvia and Leilah in opposite ways. Then, I examine a competing interpretation of care that emerged in the conversation, in protest of the effects of 'dominant' care, and explore how it might have potentiated alternative individual and social

impacts if it had gained more interactional traction. Throughout, I illuminate how these divergent models of care rest on different routes to imagining solidarity.

Dominant care: Imagining solidarity through likeness in a "white world"

Following Ahmed's (2007) theorization of the "phenomenology of whiteness," I suggest that the approach to care that became 'dominant' in directing the conversation, driven by Ebba, Julia, and those who affirmed them, was guided by an underlying framework of 'dominant' processes of racialization, invisibly privileging whiteness, which routed their attention toward Silvia and away from Leilah. In their efforts to imagine solidarity and empathy in this situation, and thus enact the school's "pedagogy of care," Ebba and Julia summoned a sense of shared humanity with Silvia that was based on a notion of "likeness" (Ahmed 2007) tied to whiteness. As discussed in chapter four, this reflects a Scandinavian cultural history in which welfare equality, social care, solidarity have been constructed through "imagining sameness," where whiteness is an implicit marker of sameness and belonging (Arbouz 2017, Gullestad 2002).

Given that these racialized dynamics were not conscious or intentional, Ebba and Julia would have not perceived identifying with Silvia on this basis, but rather based on a sense of shared experience. In the class discussion, Julia imagined solidarity with Silvia by drawing on her own lived history to understand Silvia's perspective, saying: 'I've experienced bullying myself, and it's horrible, and I don't want…Silvia [to become] a target for that…[Also] a lot of times I say stuff I regret, which is stressful and difficult for me, so I can understand how…Silvia…could…say something [she] regret[s].' Similarly, as Ebba had explained at *fika* during the class discussion session, her protective stance toward Silvia was grounded in the fact that she cared very deeply about bullying, because she knew how it felt from being bullied when she was younger. Yet it is noteworthy that Julia and Ebba identified Silvia as a fellow target of bullying, who was vulnerable and in need of protective care, rather than identifying her as an aggressor. While Ebba recounted at *fika* that she had been bullied 'for no reason at all, not based on anything [I] did, just for having thick glasses,' this would not have applied to Silvia's

situation, had Silvia become a target for negative feedback. Ebba and Julia could have equally well imagined Silvia as a bully and therefore disidentified with her, while seeing Leilah as the target of bullying and identified with her. Yet, in imagining Silvia not as a bully, but as a potential victim of bullying, they constructed a common experience with her, so that Silvia became a mirror of the 'self,' and as such, was cast as emotionally central in the situation. Leilah, in turn, was constructed as a more distant 'other' whose experience was backgrounded as it was not felt to be immediately connected to the self.

Ebba and Julia's seemingly contradictory identification with Silvia rather than Leilah, which led them to privilege Silvia's perspective and funnel care toward her, makes more sense when we regard the class discussion as being underpinned by whiteness as an un-thematized category of experience and a lens to perceive the world. Where Silvia was perceived by her classmates as white, and Leilah was perceived as non-white, Ahmed might say that, recognizing itself as valuable, whiteness oriented Ebba and Julia toward Silvia as "family," or even more basically, as someone "available to perceive and to do 'things' with" (Ahmed 2007: 154), putting her and not Leilah "in [their] reach" (Ahmed 2007: 152). Because "whiteness [is] a category of experience that disappears as a category through experience" (Ahmed 2007: 150), this would happen without any conscious intent or knowledge, but rather in a taken-for-granted, backgrounded way.

A lens onto culturally- and historically-specific processes of racialization is also helpful for understanding why, at the same time that she framed Silvia as a target of bullying rather than a bully, Ebba also, perhaps counterintuitively, labeled people who reacted against the content of Silvia's post as bullies, which justified excluding them from the sphere of care. For example, by making it clear that any reaction to Silvia that was not explicitly and wholly supportive would be interpreted as "jumping on her," she prevented Leilah from sharing how the post had affected her. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Swedish turn toward antiracism in the 1970s implicitly preserved the valuation of whiteness while removing the

vocabulary to talk about race and racism, making public discourse "colorblind." In this context, explicit discussion of racial dynamics has been perceived to "threaten…[the nation] as a homogenous, tolerant, anti-racist, peace-loving society" (Gullestad 2002: 59). In the framework of hegemonic white antiracism, people labeled "racist" are symbolically cast out from the imagined (white) Swedish moral community. The threat of rejection and symbolic exclusion sheds light on why Ebba interpreted Mira's comment that there might be "hidden racists" in the class as an "accusation" and even an instance of bullying, as well as her indication both in the chat group online and in person in the classroom that Mira's assertion that Silvia's post was "not okay" was "childish" and "mean." By implying that calling people or content "racist" was the worst insult that could emerge in the conversation - more injurious, even, than Silvia's original post degrading Muslims - Ebba de-legitimized Mira's perspective as undeserving of consideration.

Further, Ebba's and others' move to exclude Mira and Leilah as deserving interlocutors in the conversation by casting them as "mean" and potential "bullies" also illustrates critical race theorist Cheryl Harris' argument that beyond simply encouraging an orientation *toward* those who inhabit whiteness, hegemonic whiteness actively orients attention *away from* those who lie outside of the socially constructed bounds of whiteness. Indeed, "The right to exclude [has been] the central principle…of whiteness as identity, for mainly whiteness has been characterized…by the exclusion of others deemed to be 'not white'" (Harris 1993: 1736).

While this 'dominant' model of care, spearheaded by Ebba and Julia, was not the only approach to care put forward in the conversation, it prevailed in the classroom, leaving Silvia feeling recognized and included and Leilah feeling overlooked and excluded, as the interviews below illustrate in greater detail.

Experiencing dominant care: "If you sum it up, it's been much better, actually" -Silvia

For Silvia, being cast as a central figure in the folk school's project of caring "for and against" the far-right had deep positive impacts. Ethnographic material from October 2017, one

month after the class discussion, as well as Silvia's reflections in an interview three months later, in December 2017, shows that this treatment affected Silvia in ways that aligned with the folk high school's theory of care as a tool against hate, producing its intended effects. In her own view, the caring environment of face-to-face encounter at Oak Bay helped her become more emotionally open to difference, or in Ulrika's words, made it "easier to see that you maybe should or will invite others in. And not be so scared." Around the incident of her Facebook post and the ensuing class discussion, Silvia experienced a concentration of care, concern, and recognition directed toward herself by both students - especially those who implored the class to consider Silvia's perspective and not bully or exclude her - and from the counselor and teachers. Experiencing this kind of inclusion at the folk high school stood out as noticeably different from how she felt she had been treated earlier in her life.

In mid-October, when we reached the halfway point of the first semester at school, our third class teacher, Elsa, who always wore bright, colorful sweaters, asked everyone to reflect on how our experiences at the folk high school so far differed from our earlier experiences in formal schooling, which for many participants had been negative. Elsa spread out a big pile of black and white postcard pictures on the classroom floor, telling us each to pick one that captured how our feelings about school had changed since coming to Oak Bay (see Figure 16). Silvia chose a picture of two people standing right in front of a wall and facing it. She told the group that this represented how, before coming to Oak Bay, she used to turn away whenever a conflict arose. The folk high school was different, she said, as she'd been practicing facing conflict through dialogue in our class, and she was starting to feel that was safe.

Figure 16 Elsa's postcards

In a later interview in our dorm kitchen, where we'd often sat and watched TV or had tea and sweets, Silvia elaborated further about the folk high school's role in catalyzing these personal changes. She said, "Everyone in the class is very tolerant. People are very open and kind and respect each other – despite the fact that I've been at the center of everything 'bad' – but they've still understood and taken it upon themselves to give me a chance. There's no one on the outside in the classroom, I don't think. Before, when I started to fight with someone, I had a hard time saying it was me who'd caused it. But now I lay more of the blame on myself. I can see it from another perspective, from the other person's perspective. I put a lot of importance on talking, which I didn't do before when I went around just feeling sour." She continued, "My self-confidence has taken a whipping now and then, but that was good, that was needed from certain points of view. But if you sum it up, it's been much better, actually. And that's thanks to the people I've hung out with – and the context – belonging to a context. And this whole idea [from class] that you have more influence on your surroundings than you think - that was also important, and how you can use this [influence] for good or for bad."

Throughout the fall semester in the caring environment of the folk high school, with the discussion surrounding this incident as an example of social care directed toward her, Silvia began to feel more accepted by others, gained more awareness of herself and the impacts of her

actions for others, and began to reorient to habitual ways of approaching difference. Where Silvia had turned to the rapidly expanding sphere of online hate groups in search of belonging in the face of a painful personal history of social exclusion, the folk high school, with its caring "pedagogy of recognition" (Paldanius 2014) based in face-to-face exchange, potentiated different ways of understanding and acting on her situation. Online hate groups, claiming to explain and vindicate Silvia's and other white youth's suffering, fueled a sense that national identity based in racial sameness was safe and social difference was threatening; yet in do doing, they constructed forms of inclusion and exclusion that reduced Silvia's individuality into her imagined racial-national identity in much the same way that it flattened the "Others" it constructed. Oak Bay's framework of care, instead, identified root causes of and treatments for Silvia's pain that were tied to her individual circumstances and capacities for growth, while facilitating the possibility of testing out alternative ways to pursue inclusion and belonging across lines of social difference.

The class discussion about her Facebook post gave Silvia a social surrounding in which to experiment with self-work, which made both critical self-reflection and an outward, dialogical mode of engagement feel easier. The generous and patient acceptance with which Silvia was met in the immediate aftermath of her xenophobic Facebook post by everyone in the class – who, regardless of their positionality and personal views, had all ended the Facebook group chat by sending her hearts and hugs – stood in stark contrast to her previous experiences of, as she said in our first interview, "get[ting] a lot of hate mail" in response to her views online. In class, teachers, counselor, and many classmates including Ebba and Julia had responded positively to Silvia taking the face-to-face discussion as an opportunity to test out looking people in the eye who she had offended and saying she was sorry. In recognizing Silvia's humanity and acknowledging that she perhaps wanted to, in Ulrika's words, "blame others" because "[she] can't quite manage [her] own [stuff], and [she] do[es]n't feel well," classmates instead gave Silvia "the opportunity to feel some kind of human warmth and community," which she said she hadn't really felt before in her life. The connection Silvia drew between increasingly feeling that

she “belong[ed] to a context” and her realization that she could “influence [her surroundings] for good,” indicate that these sorts of interactions had given her new “tools to manage [her] life” and a taste of what Ulrika called “positive power,” or being able to use her own agency to positively impact her social milieu. For Silvia, these overtures were deeply meaningful, as they allowed her to see that being socially present to discuss conflict didn’t mean that she would be rejected, but on the contrary could contribute to her feeling received, recognized, and integrated as a member of the group. Feeling accepted and even rewarded for practicing taking responsibility for her social contributions in face-to-face interaction, Silvia’s automatic reflex for blaming others was diminished, and in its place, a greater willingness to receive criticism and a budding curiosity and openness toward others’ perspectives appeared.

In the counselor Ulla’s phrasing, living and learning at Oak Bay gave Silvia the chance to orient to and connect with diverse peers in all ‘their fleshiness, which helps you remember they’re a person just like you.’ For Silvia, engagement in the school’s “fleshy” sociality over time, during the class discussion and beyond, helped to blur formerly rigid “us” and “them” categories, which were dialed up in xenophobic online “echo chambers.” For example, Silvia said that meeting and building deeper personal relationships with Muslim peers face-to-face in the classroom and the dorm, including Fahim, had expanded her perspective on Islam. This relationship gave Silvia something concrete to grasp onto as she retrospectively challenged her own turn to Islamophobic stereotypes and considered the human impacts of such rhetoric during the class conversation about her Facebook post; and as she consequently reached out to form a new friendship with Abdul, a Muslim peer from Syria in another high-school completion course. These friendships illustrated the possibility of forging mutually supportive connections across differently socially marginal positions, framing experiences of vulnerability, for Silvia, as reason to relate rather than divide.

More generally, Silvia’s feeling that she had moved toward a sense of overall “social emplacement” (Vigh 2015) in a shared relational context, through several months of hanging out

with peers who cared about her well-being in class and in the dorms, may have reduced the necessity or the appeal of finding social contact and a sense of belonging online. Collectively, these impacts attest to the at least partial effectiveness of the folk high school's approach to mitigating growing investment in far-right sentiment with care rooted in social democratic values that recognized Silvia's vulnerability and need for inclusion.

Experiencing dominant care: "Then you feel like…they just want to brush it aside" -Leilah

While Silvia had experienced classmates' and teachers' gestures of care as healing and inclusive, catalyzing an increased desire to orient in an inclusionary way toward her peers, Leilah experienced these same moves to focus care on Silvia as gestures of non-care or even active dis-care for herself, seemingly dismissing Leilah's perspective and personhood and fueling social rupture. These divergent outcomes suggest that the recognition that Silvia received, and its impact in opening her up to difference, came at a high social cost for other participants.

In November 2017, two months after the class discussion about Silvia's Facebook comment, I sat across from Leilah in the same small room in the library where Silvia had opened up to me in early September about her painful personal history of exclusion and intense feelings of isolation, as well as her investment in far-right online hate groups. Leilah's reflections in this interview fleshed out the negative emotional toll that Silvia's xenophobic Facebook post and the ensuing class discussion had had for her. Her commentary underscores how some students' and teachers' efforts to direct care and concern toward Silvia unintentionally funneled care away from Leilah, so that Silvia's perspective and well-being was centered while Leilah's was left out of the picture.

Leilah told me that encountering discrimination was far from a new experience, as she had often been made the target of comments such as "go back to your country!" or, "you're not at home now, you can take that thing [hijab] off," when she was out and about in the city or on her commute to Oak Bay. She explained how draining it was to respond to these encounters, saying,

"If I've woken up and I feel good and I'm happy (*jag mår bra och är glad*), and then someone says something, then sometimes you just don't have the energy (*orkar inte*). So you just, like, lay it down/put it aside (*lägga ner det*)."

I asked whether, other than Silvia's Facebook post, Leilah had encountered Islamophobic attitudes at the folk high school. Laughing, she said, "I don't think anyone would dare to do anything. What I'm shocked about is that she [Silvia] dared, because I don't think many dare - I think many are quiet about that."

As Leilah points out, as Sweden Democratic opinions have become more mainstream, such sentiments are more prevalent, even at the folk high school, but many people still do not "dare" to share Islamophobic views publicly, feeling socially pressured to keep them hidden and express them only among those who share their views, often online. Folk high school staff attempted to thwart this pattern by providing physical spaces for mutual encounter among diverse participants, where, in the counselor Ulla's words, people are confronted with each other's "fleshiness" and thus more likely to remember their shared humanity. Yet where this face-to-face dynamic served to humanize Silvia for many of her classmates, and thus lay at the heart of what Silvia found healing at school, the effects were quite different for non-white-marked participants. In bringing Islamophobic views out into the open, this dialogue came at a heavy cost for Leilah, as in general, actively engaging racism and discrimination required a lot of energy and challenged her possibilities for well-being, replacing 'feeling good and happy' with feeling drained and upset.

Referring to the Facebook chat and the class discussion the next day, she said, "I, of course, left the group immediately, because I couldn't read that. What [Silvia] said, what happened, is of course awful, but one also wants to know what people think, so that you know what you have in them. I don't like when people are false. Sometimes people can be very nice to you, and then they think something completely strange. Then I feel a bit like- uff, should I show myself (*ska jag visa mig själv*)? I'd maybe have behaved differently if I knew that you didn't like

me because of my religion...I [wouldn't] come forward to you or ask something. And in a way I still don't want to know [what she really thinks], because I've felt like, I don't have the energy to deal with that (*jag orkar inte*)...But certain people, you need to say things to."

While Leilah felt that Silvia's hate speech demanded a response, within the specific structure of the whole-group discussion as it was arranged in the classroom, Leilah felt trapped in a role overdetermined by outspoken white classmates who narrowly interpreted the meanings of her potential responses in advance, limiting her participation. "When people say things, and they notice that they've gotten a lot of eyes on them and they apologize right away, then the idea comes out that you can't say anything to her because then she'll feel bullied. That's what I'm irritated about. But people don't think about the fact that what she said from the beginning was against a whole people (*emot ett helt folk*). [When] I read the conversation [on Facebook] and people said 'Don't jump on her (*hoppa inte på henne*), don't say anything to her,' then I felt like...no matter what I might say, it would feel like I was jumping on her. Even though she said something more- do you get it? It's strange! So that makes me irritated at people, in that way. And...one shouldn't jump on anyone, whatsoever (*överhuvudtaget*) - but you have to be able to say to someone, 'What you're saying is wrong.' Adding injury to the original insult of Silvia's Facebook post, then, Leilah felt disappointed by the majority of other students' responses, which relegated her own perspective to the periphery. They seemed ready to construe anything she might say as evidence that she was a bully, so that in addition to feeling pressure to stay silent during the conversation, she also felt pressure the day after the discussion to act as if nothing had happened – in her words, to "let it go...just to prove to people that, even if you believe something about me, it isn't me." Leilah's lament over being framed by her peers as a "bully," tied to an image of "something about me, [that] isn't me," highlights the pain of being seen through the lens of typifying racial and cultural stereotypes, rather than as a full, individual person, as Fahim, Aisha, and other migrant and Muslim students also described in the previous chapter. In contrast to this lens, which flattened and shrunk Leilah's capacity to contribute to

the dialogue, the white students who aligned with Silvia's perspective, particularly Ebba and Julia, seemed to have much more free reign to express what they thought. In setting the dominant tone of the conversation for the class, these latter students occupied the social center.

Leilah's sense that the teachers chose to affirm rather than challenge the stance taken by these dominant students, collaborating to foreground Silvia's emotional fragility (rather than her own) as a potent object of imagination and attention, felt like a further and perhaps larger betrayal. In her words, "I think a lot of what irritated me that day- I think what irritated me was that the teachers didn't say anything. I think that irritated me. I think that irritated me more, too, I think it irritated me that they got the counselor, and they [the teachers themselves] didn't say anything, like, 'This was wrong,' something like that. Then, you feel like they just want to brush it aside...Okay, I'm Muslim, imagine if it was someone gay, you know what I mean? I don't think you would just let someone say that and be totally okay with that, you know what I mean? I think people make certain things acceptable (*man gör vissa grejer acceptabel*). So I feel like if they would have said something, then I would maybe respect them a little more." The teachers' implicit alignment with the most outspoken students and seeming indifference to her own perspective and emotional reaction further deteriorated the sense of safety and support that might have bolstered her energy on a day where she had no choice but to deal with the taxing affront of responding to hate speech. Further, Leilah felt that through focusing more on Silvia's feelings than on the content of her post and the feelings it evoked for her, teachers and the loudest participants inadvertently reinforced the normalization of racism and hate speech, making anti-Muslim hate speech seem "acceptable," even "totally okay."

The protest that Leilah voiced in the discussion as well as in our interview later, that 'if [Silvia's] statement was about LGBT persons instead of Muslims, everyone would have cared much more and been much more upset about the actual content of what was said,' revealed her attunement to the buried racialized dynamics that steered enactments of dominant care. The contrast Leilah draws between 'LGBT persons' and 'Muslims,' echoed in her provocation, "okay,

I'm Muslim, imagine if it was someone gay…I don't think you would just let someone say that and be totally okay with that," is significant in that these categories are differently racialized in the hegemonic "white world" of Swedish "hegemonic whiteness" (Hübinette & Lundström 2014), and are thus differently "available to perceive and to do 'things' with" (Ahmed 2007: 154). While both are marginalized social categories, a world structured around whiteness makes it possible to imagine 'LGBT persons' as white, and in that regard, part of "us" white Swedes, while 'Muslims' are constructed as non-white and thus "not-us." Leilah's insistence that the class would have 'cared much more' if Silvia's comment had been directed toward LGBT persons reveals her implicit understanding that Ebba's, Lina's, and other outspoken class members' efforts to care for Silvia rested on framing Silvia as "one of us," identifying with her in racialized terms. Leilah identifies how within this logic of whiteness, many participants' attention and concern was pulled toward potential threats to a (white) self experienced as vulnerable, which in this situation was symbolized by Silvia. At the same time, Leilah implicitly claims that because Muslims, as a racialized category, were not so easily imagined by the class as part of "us" but rather remained "Other," participants could construct Silvia's anti-Muslim rhetoric as acceptable and even "totally okay," manifesting in a lack of care and concern for Leilah's perspective and potential vulnerability.

Approaching care based on implicitly racialized forms of identification, "likeness" (Ahmed 2007) and "sameness" (Gullestad 2002) framed students who had normalized Islamophobic and xenophobic rhetoric as the main recipients of care, and cast those who corroborated in 'making this rhetoric acceptable' as the main agents of care. As a non-white-marked person in a "white world," Leilah was prevented from inhabiting this world in the same seamless way as white-marked participants. This position made her vulnerable, so that she became someone who needed care and at the same time someone whose needs for care remained unrecognized. Ahmed argues that if "The corporeal schema is of a 'body-at-home'…we could say that 'the corporeal schema' is already racialized; [that] race…structures its mode of

operation" (2007: 153, order rearranged). In other words, "If the world is made white, then the body-at-home is one that can inhabit whiteness" (Ahmed 2007: 153), whereas non-white bodies are made to feel not-at-home. Seeing that she was "out of reach" of Ebba and Julia, in being overlooked by them, underscored a sense for Leilah that the world constructed in the classroom was not a home for her, or in Ahmed's phrase, not "ready" for her. Leilah's experience sheds light on how students who were "othered" by far-right rhetoric remained on the "outside" of care and even experienced compounded trauma through the enactment of care for far-right aligned students, despite these care practices "against the far-right" ostensibly being deployed in their interest. Her account of the disappointment and depletion she felt after the class discussion in our later interview underscored how projects of care can unintentionally reflect and reinforce unequal structural relationships and uneven burdens of unwellness, even as they are being deployed to mitigate discriminatory attitudes.

Beyond having her own potential needs for care overlooked and her well-being challenged by a dominant approach to care invisibly oriented by hegemonic whiteness, Leilah as well as other Muslim and non-white-marked participants were made to bear disproportionate burdens of caring, as they were also expected to actively participate in enacting care for Silvia – the very person whose hate speech had made them targets. For example, Ebba's and others' claims that Leilah should "not jump on" Silvia required Leilah to engage in care for Silvia in the form of emotional work for Silvia's benefit, suppressing or hiding her own feelings so that Silvia's emotions would remain at the center of class's attention. Further, Ebba's negative sanctioning of Mira for condemning the content of Silvia's original Facebook post, can be read as Ebba scolding Mira for not caring for Silvia. In contrast, Ebba's positive reinforcement of Fahim's stance of care and concern toward Silvia, via his move to pardon Silvia from any sense of wrongdoing with his comment in the Facebook chat online that, "Silvia's post wasn't that big of a deal, everyone says things they regret sometimes," garnered positive sanctioning from Ebba, who praised his approach as "graceful." In our interview, Leilah expressed a sense of injustice in

the face of this distorted duty to care - shaped by an insidious demand to prioritize white participants' injuries - saying: "I felt like…no matter what I might say, it would feel like I was jumping on her. *Even though she said something more*- do you get it? It's strange!" (emphasis added).

Subaltern care and a counter-politics of recognition: Imagining solidarity through human alterity

While the logic of whiteness that underpinned the 'dominant' approach to care described above is pervasive and powerful, Ahmed argues that it is not determinative in structuring social relations. White 'likeness,' she explains, reproduces itself through the corporeal schema so that "we inherit…orientations" (Ahmed 2007: 155) that relate to whiteness; Yet "this is an inheritance that can be refused, and which does not fully determine a course of action" (Ahmed 2007: 155). I suggest that it is this sort of refusal - a rejection of the seamlessness of inhabiting a "white world" in ways that value and reproduce whiteness - that Mira, who was marked as non-white, and Nina and Sofia, as white-marked participants, embodied to protest the exclusionary impacts of the dominant approach to care, instead taking up what I call a counter-politics of recognition. Whereas Ebba and Julia's attention was oriented by a cultural emphasis on whiteness as 'likeness,' which centered care on Silvia by pulling her experience to the forefront of their awareness as a purportedly shared and hence meaningful experience, and excluded Leilah from the sphere of care by pushing her experience to the background; Nina, Sofia, and Mira's attention, in contrast, and their corresponding ways of attempting to enact care, were directed by an underlying framework emphasizing the irreducible alterity between all persons – rather than implicitly racialized forms of "likeness" (Ahmed 2007) or "imagined sameness" (Gullestad 2002) – as a condition of shared humanity. Imagining solidarity and inclusion on this broader basis directed their concern toward, rather than away from, the perspectives of Leilah and others in minoritized racially- religiously- or culturally-marked positions, regardless of whether these social positions were shared across the caring relation.

In order to understand Nina, Sofia, and Mira's focus on Leilah as well as their efforts to redirect the class's collective attention and care toward her, I turn to Throop's (2010) discussion of a Levinasian ethics of suffering and compassion. With his concept of the "face," Levinas captures human beings' ethical obligation to encounter one another as selves, recognizing each other as co-equal experiencing beings; at the same time, such recognition must respect the incommensurability between unique self-beings, which entails that attempting to assimilate or fully grasp any other person's experience is not only impossible but undesirable. Where, for Ebba and Julia, hegemonic whiteness made other white-marked participants appear as other 'selves,' who need and deserve my care because they suffer as I do, Nina, Sofia, and Mira's attention was directed by another framework, akin to Levinas' ethics, which heightens concern for the human suffering of the other precisely in understanding her as a "me" who is *not* me - an "other me whose alterity, whose exteriority" is central to my perception of her (Levinas 1998: 93, cited in Throop 2010: 274), and whose alterity is precisely what calls forth my "'non-in-difference' to the other's pain" (Levinas 1980: 1987, cited in Throop 2010: 275). While these participants did not share Leilah's religion, and in Nina's and Sofia's cases, also did not share her position as a non-white-marked participant, a Levinasian focus on the "face," in which "the being of the other…'*exceed[s] the idea of the other in me*'" (Levinas 1980: 50, cited in Throop 2010, 271, emphasis in original), directed them to imagine solidarity with and thus direct care toward Leilah in spite of - or even because of - a lack of identification rooted in shared experience.

Nina articulated this philosophy of care clearly in the discussion when she said, 'there are so few Muslim students in our class that maybe we're just kind of going with the dominant feeling that most of us can't relate to feeling personally offended by it or seeing how it's personally offensive, but I think…that just because there aren't that many Muslims in our class doesn't mean we don't need to discuss the impacts of that kind of statement seriously.' Here, Nina simultaneously thematized and challenged other students' moves to mobilize care and

concern primarily on the basis of perceived threats to the 'self,' which rested on racialized demarcations of 'sameness,' 'self,' and 'other,' shaped by a phenomenology of whiteness. To counteract these dynamics, she proposed an alternative frame in which the impacts of group members' discourse would be considered from all people's perspectives and responded to with concern and solidarity, regardless of whether participants could 'relate to feeling personally offended by it or seeing how it's personally offensive.' Sofia's comment in class reflected a similar vision of care that sought to interrupt hegemonic whiteness, by disturbing the circuit in which white bodies oriented "naturally" and comfortably primarily toward one another. Instead, she hoped to open more space to attend to a wider array of perspectives. In her words: 'it's not cool that some people, like Silvia in this case, are allowed to express their opinion and be accepted by the group, while when others, like Leilah and Mira, express their opinion in reaction to how what Silvia said affected them, then they get shut down. Everyone should be equally allowed to express their opinion without being shut down.' This stance challenged Ebba and others to be reflexive about the effects of their move to focus care primarily on Silvia, claiming that in excluding certain participants' voices, these most outspoken participants were working against care; In turn, for Sofia, including marginalized students' perspectives was necessary for a fuller enactment of care.

Anthropological scholarship showing how alternative frameworks of care can avoid reinscribing harmful forms of social differentiation (Giordano 2014, Stevenson 2014), is helpful for examining how and why participants' divergent interpretations of care matter. This subaltern approach to care echoes what Cristiana Giordano (2014) termed "acknowledgment" in her examination of alternative forms of culturally-attuned mental health care - or 'ethnopsychiatry' - for migrant women in Italy. Giordano argues that in contrast to state-based care through "recognition" that flattens the complexity of women's experiences into recognizable cultural "categories," ethnopsychiatric practices of "acknowledgment" are more effective in providing healing because they respect and make space for the expansive unknowability of

individual and cultural difference among women and between women and their therapists. Nina, Sofia, and Mira's attempts to care also mirror Lisa Stevenson's (2014) pursuit of care for her Inuit interlocutors, which defied Candian state-based attempts to care by categorizing and instead took up an open stance of listening and looking for what they had to say. In being positioned against dominant forms of care, these forms of care are also forms of political protest that reject how dominant forms of care reinforce unequal social relationships. In turn, this work suggests that alternative approaches to care and recognition can serve as tools for equalizing social participation.

The stakes of students' contrasting modes of attending and responding to others' vulnerabilities in the class discussion of Silvia's Facebook post extend beyond the classroom, as they play a role in reinscribing or challenging hegemonic racialized ways of imagining national inclusion in the broader context of political polarization in Sweden. Given that the two approaches to care directed attention toward certain participants as (more) worthy of inclusion and potentially also served to exclude others, contestations over care were simultaneously political debates over how to construct social belonging. Where the valuation of whiteness is part of both far-right and center-left ideology, a 'dominant' approach to care that draws on the latter inadvertently reproduce racialized exclusion while promoting inclusion for those assumed to be a "natural" part of the national community. In contrast, in challenging Ebba's, Julia's, and others' 'dominant' focus on Silvia's perspective, Nina, Sofia, Mira, and Leilah repudiated a larger Swedish historical legacy of constructing solidarity based on "sameness," implicitly defined as whiteness. In turn, in directing attention toward Leilah's perspective and social experience, these students' proposed mode of enacting care doubled as a means for expanding imaginaries of who belonged in the class group, and by extension, in the imagined nation. Nancy Fraser's (2000) discussion of the "status model of recognition" is generative for understanding Nina's and others' comments as arguments for how care and recognition could be enacted in discussion at school in more encompassingly inclusionary ways. Fraser explains that

> To view recognition as a matter of status means examining institutionalized patterns of cultural value for their effects on the relative standing of social actors. If and when such patterns constitute actors...as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible—in other words, as less than full partners in social interaction—then we can speak of misrecognition....[I]n the 'status model' [redressing misrecognition]...means a politics aimed at overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on par with the rest (2000: 113, sentence order rearranged).

In light of Fraser's model of status recognition, we can understand Nina's and Sofia's comments protesting Leilah's and Mira's exclusion as claims that hegemonic social dynamics were fueled through the folk high school's "pedagogy of recognition" (Paldanius 2014), which set the tone for the dominant way of enacting care in the classroom, so that participants coded as 'the same' routinely became more visible and hence "seen," while those coded as 'different' were constituted as invisible. In response, Nina's and Sofia's attempts at enacting care through a Levinasian ethics can be thought of as attempts to remedy this harm with what I call a "counter-politics of recognition." In positing that group members had a right to occupy different positions and experiences - to be distant from what the 'self' could, in Nina's words, 'relate to feeling personally offended by' - and still receive recognition and care as full peers, they sought to grant all class members equal belonging and agency in the group.

The framework guiding Nina, Sofia, and Mira's attempts to care, in contrast to Julia and Ebba, clearly oriented them toward constructing solidarity based on a sense of shared humanity grounded in fundamental alterity and difference, rather than likeness. Yet, their approach resisted conceptualizing difference in ways that would construct other subjects as lesser beings or even objects. Rather, this stance valued variation, "particularity,...and irreducibility...in the space of the interhuman realm" (Throop 2010: 271), opening space for a "properly human ethics...that respects and acknowledges the plenitude and uniqueness of the other being" (Throop 2010: 271, order rearranged). Through a "pattern of cultural value" (Fraser 2000: 113) that directs "compassion [toward] that which I can never assimilate to my self-experience or

fully understand, [toward] that which outstrips the limits of my own particularity…the integrity of the other being is revealed" (Throop 2010: 275, order rearranged). This, in turn, works to "constitute [all] actors as…full partner[s] in social interaction" (Fraser 2000: 113). This orientation expands the parameters for suffering, relating, caring, and being solidary, by making room for different ways of experiencing human life without demanding conformity or sameness.

In mobilizing this ethical framework to claim space for various modes of difference within the group, and thus to imagine solidarity and enact care without imagining likeness in racial terms, Nina, Sofia, and Mira not only pushed back against the growing influence of far-right rhetoric in challenging their classmates to attend to Leilah's perspective, but also contested prevailing social-democratic cultural pressures for "imagining sameness" discussed above (Gullestad 2002), which are a source of misrecognition - or stereotyping forms of "recognition" (Giordano 2014) - for racialized participants. This stance rejected the interactional dynamics through which non-white participants' individuality is put in constant risk of erasure, either through being coded reductively as "different" or conversely, through being imaginatively flattened into "sameness."

In the conversation as it unfolded, however, hegemonic racial dynamics served to marginalize these participants' attempts to reorient the trajectory of the conversation, so that they ultimately did not gather enough momentum to shift the collective focus from caring for Silvia toward caring for Leilah. The prevailing ethos pushed Nina, Sofia, Mira, and Leilah's comments in the conversation above in various ways to the side, constraining all of their abilities to lesser and greater extents to take part in the conversation as full participants while serving to center Silvia as well as students who oriented primarily toward her, like Ebba and Julia, thus preventing the realization of more broadly mutual care based on "reciprocal recognition" (Fraser 2000: 113).

Conclusion

One of the folk high school's driving motivations for providing care is the belief that when people feel "well" in relational contexts, they will be able to collectively sustain participatory democracy and solidarity in the face of social change. In this way, the "health" of relationships that people have with themselves and with immediate others takes on political importance in the folk high school setting. Reflecting on her personal development throughout the term, she said, "That's not something that I can just take away or forget, but rather it's starting to stick in my way of being toward others and myself." Perhaps these subtle changes were also seeds for future shifts in broader sociopolitical orientations, for thinking about people who occupy other social categories as people, who might be approached from a place of curiosity rather than threat. Silvia's reflections on pivoting away from fear- and hate-based sociality, precisely as she started to feel more "well" in the social and relational terms in which it is defined at school, seem to affirm this theory, pointing to the at least partial efficacy of Oak Bay's approach to combating the growth of far-right racist, xenophobic, and Islamophobic rhetoric at a broader societal scale through providing care at a more immediate relational and pscyhological level.

Analyzing the impacts on Silvia and Leilah of folk high school attempts to care "for and against the far right" also helps us to examine solidarity and inclusion as complex relational processes which are envisioned and collectively enacted - or contested - by differently positioned members of a group. In understanding solidarity as something whose meaning as well as practice must be continually negotiated through mutual interaction, I draw on Hollan's (2008: 480-81) analysis of empathy "as an intersubjective process that involves imaginative work and ongoing dialog," specifically, "the imaginative work involved in allowing or imagining oneself to be understood." In this analytical framework, attempts at inclusion and solidarity-building can be seen to require mutual participation from those who would reach out to connect, such as Julia, Ebba, and Fahim in this case, *as well as* those who must open themselves to being connected-with. Scaffolding my argument onto Hollan's, who writes about feeling understood, I

suggest that "One cannot feel [included or solidary] unless someone offers real gestures or words of [affinity], but the gestures themselves, no matter how accurate from some third-person point of view, do not assure [inclusion and solidarity]. Rather, those gestures must be met or received by someone who can let them "in" and imagine being [included and solidary]" (Hollan 2008: 483, words that indicate my argument substituted in brackets).

Participants such as Silvia, situated on "the flip side of what we normally think of as empathy" (Hollan 2008: 481), or in this case, inclusion and solidarity, must be able to imagine themselves as a part of – rather than apart from – the social context in which they find themselves. And as Hollan points out, cultural contexts significantly shape persons' abilities to engage in this imaginative work. The folk high school environment provided a starkly contrasting environment for building social ties in comparison to other arenas for doing so that Silvia had previously been part of, including online hate groups. With its combined emphasis on meeting vulnerability with care and fostering face-to-face encounters across lines of social difference, the folk school offered opportunities for Silvia to begin reconceptualizing and changing both what she was contributing to and receiving from social interaction. The folk school provided cultural scaffolding, then, that encouraged Silvia to test out being more open to others' gestures of solidarity-building, as much as to reach out to others in this spirit herself. Institutional attention to these parallel processes was critical in allowing Silvia to make subtle internal adjustments toward replacing rejection- and hate-based reactions to suffering with acceptance- and inclusion-based reactions.

Yet while school projects of care and recognition can be seen as having succeeded in mitigating far-right investments in their impacts on Silvia, the efficacy of this care for addressing growing Islamophobia and xenophobia is thrown into question by this result unintentionally coming at the expense of granting the same forms of concern to Leilah and others who both bore the brunt of far-right discrimination and felt doubly excluded, dis-cared for, and unwell in the wake of the class's enactment of care for Silvia. Whereas, following on

Hollan (2008), Silvia needed to learn to *accept* gestures of solidarity in order to experience an inclusive relation, Leilah was open to solidarity-building gestures, but not enough were *extended* to her for her to feel fully included and safe in the collective. Only by ensuring that all participants are able to experience both sides of this coin – giving *and* receiving gestures of solidarity – can more encompassing forms of group solidarity emerge.

Of course, my focus on Leilah as a central figure in this chapter is not meant to imply that she reacted as all students who were targeted by Silvia's Islamophobic rhetoric did or would, which would only serve to reinforce flattening stereotypes. As the data makes clear, these students had their own individual responses, tied to their unique life histories and personalities. However, the external constraints that shaped Leilah's experience by virtue of her structural position also applied to other students placed in that position, giving a shared dimension to their experience despite the lack of any essential, inherent similarity. For example, Mira's immediate, direct pushback on the content of Silvia's Facebook post was quite different from Leilah's more hesitant approach, though both were ultimately framed in the invisible racialized parameters of the discussion as potential "bullies." Fahim's actively conciliatory and reassuring stance toward Silvia in the Facebook chat, grounded in his mantra that, as he said to Mira in the Facebook thread, "It's better to fight fire with water than with fire," offered an even more striking contrast from Leilah's response. Regardless of one's weapon, however, engaging in the "fight" against racist rhetoric demands more energy from racialized minority participants than their white peers, perhaps especially in a face-to-face setting; despite being one of the most vocal members of the online conversation, Fahim had told me afterward that he saw prolonging engagement with the issue as unnecessary and stressful, and preferred to leave it behind. Though I do not know for certain, I wonder if part of what might have made this interaction stressful for him is tied to the fact that, as Fahim and Aisha discussed in the previous chapter, as well as Leilah touched on, above, many students with migrant and/or Muslim backgrounds felt a great deal of pressure to represent migrants and/or Muslims in a "good" way that would garner

acceptance from Swedish peers. This made potential judgment by white peers as "bad," which would in turn reinforce white students' negative stereotypes of them, a constant threat to be avoided and often did not leave room for fully sharing their individual perspectives in a genuine way. The positive sanctioning that Fahim's comments received from Ebba in the online discussion may have reinforced the pressure to perform this role, which might have proven more taxing in person. Fahim's "water" came from a genuine understanding of Silvia's perspective, as he told me that he sensed her turn to hate speech had come from a place of feeling emotionally unstable and vulnerable, and that he might have lashed out in the same way if he had been in her circumstances. At the same time, there was "fire" to draw on as well, which a class discussion would simultaneously call forth and also demand that he keep buried. In this incident, the particular constructions of care that facilitated inclusion and openness for those aligned with the far-right produced forms of exclusion for those marked as racially and culturally "Other," regardless of their individual stances. While no one involved would have wanted this outcome, attempts to direct Silvia away from the far-right inadvertently involved mobilizing students of color in service of speaking toward her and other white students, rather than being met on their own, individual terms.

Together with Ahmed's (2007) phenomenology, Hollan's (2008: 477) provocation to explore how social and cultural contexts shape how people imaginatively collaborate to realize empathy - or by extension, care, solidarity, or inclusion – draws attention to how this unfolded unintentionally in the space of the folk high school. For Ahmed, whiteness, as part of the social and cultural fabric, serves to orient bodies as well as "Spaces [that]...take shape by being orientated around some bodies, more than others[, so that] We can also consider 'institutions' as orientation devices" (2007: 157). Ebba's and Julia's moves to imagine solidarity with and enact care for Silvia, which emerged in part from their personal histories, were implicitly affirmed by those in dominant institutional positions, while non-dominant participants' comments imploring the class to consider the content of what was said ended up falling flat because they

were not affirmed, as others in the interaction repeatedly drew Silvia's perspective to the forefront. Dwelling on how certain participants' contributions gained traction, while others' failed to take root, "helps us to notice institutional habits" (Ahmed 2007*:* 165). In other words, this sort of analysis "brings what is behind, what does not get seen as the background to social action" - in this case, an institutional "habit" of not thematizing or challenging widespread implicit assumptions that link whiteness, belonging, and care in everyday interaction - "to the surface" (Ahmed 2007*:* 165).

As emphasized in the previous chapter, these painful outcomes emerge in spite of teachers' and many students' earnest, good faith intentions to enact egalitarian forms of inclusion that combat racial, religious, and other forms of discrimination. Ubiquitous conversations and interactions made apparent that staff truly want to meet everyone on an individual basis and that they want *every* person in the folk high school to have equal opportunities for feeling recognized, included, and well. Many also expressed concern about forms of social inequality in Sweden in the present and the past, especially racial inequality and xenophobia. Sarah Willen's (2013) insightful commentary on her study of a clinical psychiatry course on cultural competence is helpful here, again, in illuminating my own goal in shedding light on these disappointing unintended consequences of care. She writes (2013: 256) that the course in her study, precisely because of its unintended, painful outcomes, was

> especially worthy of careful and critical examination—neither to castigate the… instructors, nor to lambaste the…students, but rather as an opportunity to understand how and why pedagogical efforts…can prove emotionally fraught, even explosive.

Critiques that emerge from analyzing such circumstances, however, have constructive and instructive potential. She explains that

> any…engagement with another human being inevitably will be shaped by unspoken and unconscious influences…[which, i]f left unacknowledged…have the capacity to torpedo the interaction; if subjected to critical reflection, however, they can yield insights of great interpretive value and practical significance (Willen 2013: 254, order rearranged).

Rather than seeking to place blame, I hope that bringing Leilah's and other backgrounded participants' experiences of this incident and its aftermath to the forefront after the fact will help make the "unspoken and unconscious influences" about race and belonging that underpin antiracist care available for critical examination. In practical terms, this analysis cannot point to the way toward a simple solution for a problem fraught with complex dilemmas. For example, given the reality that white people have disproportionate power in a social system based on "hegemonic whiteness" (Hübinette & Lundström 2014), it *is* necessary to attend to white persons to help them understand and hopefully let go of a sense of the right to inhabit power over and above others (Freire 1970); yet to avoid positioning racially minoritized participants as actors in a project primarily directed toward white peers, what alternatives exist for these students in to become fuller subjects in their own right? My hope is that the multiple voices in this analysis might offer food for thought about different possible approaches to structuring complex caring interactions, in ways that more explicitly reject "hegemonic whiteness" while remaining true to staff's aim of considering all students' experiences of vulnerability and centering all students' needs for care and recognition.

In the broader context of the increasing normalization of Islamophobic rhetoric with the rapid rise of the far-right in Sweden, everyday contestations in the Swedish folk high school over what care means and whom care is for ultimately reveal larger truths about how local constructions of care can just as well challenge hegemonic understandings of Swedish social membership as reinforce them. Divergent cultural models for constructing care, and well-being, based respectively in 'sameness' or 'alterity,' serve as tools for pursuing different visions of inclusion and solidarity. As some students explicitly and implicitly attempted to claim in the discussion reviewed above, collective efforts at school to explicitly acknowledge disavowed power hierarchies in Sweden within a critical structural framework might open the way for enacting forms of care that "acknowledge" (Giordano 2014) all participants' shared humanity despite different experiences, pushing back against exclusionary, racist and xenophobic pulls

from the far-right without using antiracist modes of recognition, which can flatten difference into sameness in pursuit of equality. Using a “counter-politics of recognition” to expand the lens of concern so that more attention is directed toward voices seeking to critically question the dominant structures in society might help make care a vehicle for more radically expanding imagined group as well as national inclusion.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: "Epidemics of well-being"

Connecting welfare and well-being

At a historical moment when well-being is high on the international policy agenda and wellness discourse is omnipresent in the United States – even as, ironically, welfare structures across the global North and South continue to be severely weakened by neoliberal policies mandating austerity and draining investment in public systems – studies of well-being have proliferated across disciplines including international development, economics, and cultural psychology (e.g. McGillivray & Clarke 2006, Haworth & Hart 2007, Diener, Kahneman & Helliwell 2010). Yet when American researchers examine welfare and well-being in international contexts using surveys and other short-term quantitative methods, they often reproduce American understandings of well-being, which are modeled on a socially constructed image of the individual as rational, independent, and atomized (White 2016). These studies thus risk failing to capture relational dimensions of wellness or to consider the ways that social, cultural, and structural variation gives rise to potentially quite divergent understandings of what it means to be "well" in different contexts – and thus to potentially different goals and outcomes for welfare projects of social care in terms of who is included and excluded and on what terms.

I believe that studying welfare and well-being using methods from psychological and medical anthropology – that is, extended, person-centered ethnographic immersion – contains lessons for ongoing research in this area across disciplines in revealing the texture of how broader forms of social belonging and exclusion, connected to ideas of the "imagined national welfare community" (Hort 2014) are constructed in intimate everyday interactions and experiences of relational wellness (or unwellness) within welfare sites. With this dissertation, I aim to add to anthropological literature on "the good" (Robbins 2013) with a critical inflection (Ortner 2016), using granular ethnography to examine how pursuits of care and well-being in Swedish welfare structures express local articulations of both meaning and power. Throughout the dissertation, I hope to have underscored the importance of combining a focus on state-level

welfare projects with their effects in recipients' experiences. By tracing staff's and participants' perspectives and relationships through time, I have sought to demonstrate how welfare structures are not fixed, abstract entities, but rather materialize in and are transformed by the social interactions and lived experiences of diverse actors. Further, I hope to have illustrated how welfare projects do not only have quantitative impacts in terms of providing people with more opportunities for well-being, but also *qualitatively* shape people's understandings and experiences of what it means to be "well," in ways that reflect specific cultural, historic, and political contexts. In the case of the Swedish folk high school, welfare-state investments in cultivating well-being for a diverse range of participants on the social margins reflect a particular understanding of the terrain of contemporary social problems, as well as a mode of responding to these problems, which are rooted in a social democratic ethos. As the hegemony of this value system has come under increasing threat in the face of growing inequality under neoliberalism and the mainstreaming of far-right rhetoric, folk high school projects of care and well-being for structurally vulnerable adults have become a site for its defense. At the same time, historically entrenched relations of power and inequality within the Swedish social democratic framework invisibly shape predominant imaginings of what "the good" is, as well as how and for whom it should be pursued.

Political stakes of pursuing well-being through social democratic care

Anthropologists studying well-being have followed cultural theorist Sara Ahmed's (2010) examination of how social constructions of "happiness [are] used to redescribe social norms as social goods" (Ahmed 2010: 2, 17) in seeking to understand "how happiness 'works' [and] what it 'does'" (Walker and Kavedzija 2015: 5). Similarly, I have attempted to understand what frameworks for understanding and enacting care and well-being, shaped by a cultural history of social democracy, are intended to *do* in the context of contemporary social change in Sweden. Through participant observation and interviews closely tracing how students experienced and

responded to these projects in intimate, everyday interactions, I was also able to uncover some of the social effects that these projects actually have in practice.

Spending months in the folk high school environment at Oak Bay led me to reflect a great deal on the connections between the ways each of us are drawn to thinking about politics and society, on the one hand, and the past and present of our emotional and relational situations, on the other. The political realm is not separable from the psychological realm in the way we usually think of them as being separable, because our political investments *are* psychic and affective investments, tied to particular imaginaries of community and belonging. How we feel mentally and relationally, as well as how we approach politics and society, are both malleable over time based on the people and ideas we come into contact with. Folk high school staff recognize these connections, because they hold what I understand as a "psychopolitical" view of the person. What links Oak Bay's focus on care and well-being together with their work to develop inclusive democracy can thus be thought of as an overarching psychopolitical project. Staff I spent time with from the national administrative level through to the classroom level seek to intervene simultaneously on both the psychological plane, in terms of helping people on the social margins to "feel well" (*må bra*) and *through* that, on the civic plane, in terms of enhancing their motivation for and commitment to engaging with the social and political sphere. Conversely, folk high schools are tasked by the Swedish state with impacting the sociopolitical sphere – with "strengthen[and] and develop[ing] democracy" (Folkbildningsrådet 2015: 4) – and embark on this task using a psychological approach, operating on the terrain of participants' intimate relationships in hopes of sparking feelings of wellness based on inclusion. Through everyday efforts to link these projects in the folk high school, understandings of what it means to be and become "well" become entangled with ideas of being and belonging in the "imagined national welfare community."

While ostensibly operating in the space of the classroom and the campus in undertaking everyday acts of care meant to foster one another's well-being, folk school administrators,

teachers, and students simultaneously participate in broader debates about Sweden's future. Amid ongoing changes to the social and economic fabric under global late capitalism, including growing inequality, the retrenchment of social protections, and increasing labor precarity, the political left and the right, broadly speaking, provide contrasting images of what a "healthy" Swedish society looks like in the 21st century. From an increasingly popular far-right lens, Sweden should try to hold on to its imagined role as a racially and culturally homogeneous community, keeping its tightly-knit circles closed to perceived outsiders. From a social democratic lens, Sweden should try to hold on to its imagined role as a beacon of moral exceptionalism, welcoming people into relations of mutual care based on an ethos of universal inclusion and international solidarity. These overarching sociopolitical pictures are accompanied by two different psychological optics for channeling or interpreting feelings of vulnerability for those being marginalized by these processes. For example, Ulrika, an Oak Bay teacher, hypothesized that Sweden's contemporary surge in xenophobia and hate speech is connected with a lack of social support – which is needed to feel accepted, to reflect critically on oneself, and to be open to difference – as well as fueled by far-right discourse that encourages people to blame 'Others' for their sense of suffering. The folk high school model of care and wellness, in contrast, is supposed to provide an alternative approach for structurally vulnerable people to make sense of and cope with their situation, informed by a left-wing politics of building mutually supportive relationships and coalitions across difference. Folk high school staff thus take a political stance in aiming to create an emotionally safe environment for people to build self-acceptance, critical reflection, and mutual solidarity. They stake a claim that it is possible to imagine a future for Sweden that reflects its idealized past, of social democratic universal inclusion, and that it is urgent to (re)build this kind of Sweden together in the present. In so doing, they position themselves very explicitly in opposition to competing imaginaries of another kind of Sweden that are seen as a threat on the horizon from the far-right. While the folk high school approaches this project through a "pedagogy of care" intended to cultivate

wellness, I would venture that it is but one among many types of arenas in Sweden today that are working in many different sort of ways to (re)direct and shape people's understandings and experiences of society – and their place in it – at a time of social change. Swedish folk high school high-school completion courses are perhaps unique among a wide range of social sites seeking to shape people's understandings and experiences of contemporary social change in that they explicitly aim to bring together target groups of young adults across different subject positions who are socially marginalized in many different ways, hoping that one framwork of care and inclusion will open possibilities for well-being for them all.

While this synthesizing discussion has been abstract, ethnographic scenes and interviews throughout the chapters of the dissertation have offered glimpses into how folk high school staff and students actually negotiate the work of composing a left-wing optic for interpreting social suffering through face-to-face encounter, dialogue, and self-reflection in real time. The case of initially far-right aligned participant Silvia, discussed in chapter five, exemplified how folk school practices of care that provided her with a space for her reflecting on herself while feeling safe (*trygg*), recognized, and accepted by a diverse group of peers, in turn helped her begin to distance herself from Islamophobic rhetoric and build deeper forms of affinity with several peers from Syria. This showed how recognizing young people aligned with the far-right as suffering and vulnerable, and thus approaching them with care rather than retribution, can have positive effects toward building inclusive solidarity.

Yet, ethnographic material from chapters four and five also revealed that regardless of whether projects of care and well-being are politically aligned with an inclusive left and against a xenophobic right, when these projects are carried out in the context of an implicitly "white world" such as the Swedish social democratic national imaginary (Arbouz 2017), which steers everyday interactions to routinely affirm the socially constructed valuation of whiteness (Ahmed 2007), then these care and wellness projects are likely to "legitimize dominant social institutions and the forms of subordination they embody" (White 2016: 24), unintentionally reinscribing

racial hierarchies. Despite staff's sincere intentions to include participants across different social positionalities on equal terms, unconscious cultural assumptions that structured interactions inadvertently generated experiences of exclusion and subordination for students of color. The broader social democratic societal vision for which the folk high school advocates, and the manifestation of this societal vision at school in the project of helping students feel "well" enough to build solidarity, recognition, and acceptance across lines of social difference, thus share the same contours of open-armed optimism as well as the same shadow-side of racialized exclusion (Hübinette 2014). As long as this latter dimenson's structuring role in everyday interaction remains unacknowledged, it risks derailing the best of good faith efforts toward universal inclusion; bringing it into the realm of critical reflection, however, may open new prospects for genuinely collective forms of well-being (Willen 2013).

In drawing attention to the inevitable daily tensions that arise between attending to individual and collective dimensions of well-being, and illustrating ethnographically where care is most likely to be directed by default in this calculus, I aim to underscore, as other anthropologists have pointed out (e.g. Calestani 2013, Chua 2014), the need to attend to how power and inequality subtly imbue imaginaries and pursuits of "the good," leading projects of care and well-being which are ostensibly universal to result in uneven application in practice. Here I find it helpful to return yet again to the ideas voiced by the national folk education administrator Birgit, that folk high school pedagogies of care aim to trigger "epidemics of well-being." This way of conceptualizing wellness as a social cascade, in which "one participant's gain [is] always for the good of the whole collective," highlights "the *effect* of well-being" that folk high school staff aim to inspire, giving a greater social purpose to caring for participants that extends beyond cultivating individual experiences of wellness. The preceding chapters have shown how in practice, what the "effect" of well-being turns out to be may depend on whose well-being is inadvertently prioritized and how this well-being is defined. Birgit's intriguing association between the words "well-being," which is positively weighted, and "epidemic," which

has negative connotations, incidentally captures well the unintentionally ambivalent, inclusionary and exclusionary effects of enacting folk high school projects of care in a social democratic image, underpinned by pursuits of equality through "imagining sameness" (Gullestad 2002) and hegemonic white antiracism (Hübinette & Lundström 2014).

While many dimensions of social difference coexist in the space of the folk high school, whose participants are disproportionately vulnerable to structural inequalities in terms of socioeconomic class and mental health as well as migrant and refugee status, explicit discussions of diversity in the folk high school setting during my fieldwork often focused on difference across constructed racial or cultural lines. The focus on these forms of difference may reflect their heightened social 'visibility' as opposed to other forms of difference, as well as the contours of this political moment in the aftermath of the so-called "refugee crisis" in 2015 and the surge in xenophobic discourse in the era of Trump and other far-right leaders. The high-school completion class I studied at Oak Bay in 2017-18, which I call "Being Human," includes some social science content on class, race, and gender in Sweden and globally. The course teachers, Erik and Elsa, told me that in 2014, the class had a student from Rwanda was very interested in the unit on colonialism and wanted everyone to talk about race, and a white student who grew up in low-income public housing in Sweden[68] and was very interested in the unit on class in Sweden and wanted everyone to talk about that. In 2017-18, however, there wasn't anyone in the class who really wanted to talk about class issues in Sweden, while there were people who felt it was important to talk about, to some extent, discourses about race, culture, and religion in Sweden. So in a school form such as the folk high school, which builds in flexibility for students to partly direct the class, the issues that become thematized depend in

[68] This housing was built as part of the "Million program" (*Miljonprogrammet*), in which the Social Democratic Government subsidized the construction and habitation of one million public housing units at the peripheries of large cities between 1965-75. Many of these developments subsequently became stigmatized zones of social marginalization and exclusion.

part on who is in the class group in a given year. Where folk high school projects of care, wellness, and integration necessarily unfold in a space of encounter between people occupying different positions, the contours of these projects are unpredictable. Rather than stemming directly from the curriculum in a unilinear way, they emerge from and take shape in relation to the positionalities and personalities of those who are present.

The fact that defining care and well-being at school is fundamentally interactive and processual, raises questions to be wrestled with anew every year, in practice and through time – Who is responsible for providing care, and who most deserves to receive it? Does pursuing wellness for some necessarily entail backgrounding the well-being of others? Coexisting social, cultural, political, and personal frameworks across and within groups will suggest different answers to these questions. For example, as Leilah, Mira, Nina, and Sofia showed in directing care primarily toward those targeted by Silvia's hate speech, also in chapter five, alternative approaches to care and wellness, which open new possibilities for social inclusion by pointing outside of *either* a social democratic or far-right framework, might also find fertile ground in the intersubjective space of the folk high school classroom. The impossibility of pointing to a settled or unified position about what care is and who is it for underscores that what will result from using care as a political intervention cannot be predicted in advance but remains an open historical question, bound to vary through time even in one place, and in potentially even more marked ways across broader social, cultural, political and economic settings.

Considerations for the United States

Similar to the situation in Sweden, neoliberal policies in the United States have contributed to many people feeling socially and economically marginalized, and people have aligned with divergent narratives for making sense of contemporary social conditions. In broad strokes, as in Sweden, the American far-right response conceives of contemporary forms of structural vulnerability as the fault of encroaching social 'Others' and directs people to blame those marked as different, while the left-wing response conceives of the problem as rooted

elsewhere, encouraging people to be solidary to recognize one another as fellow humans in a shared struggle. The focus of this dissertation, on how people in Swedish welfare structures understand, experience, and attempt to intervene on the psychological and political causes and consequences of these two contrasting framings, might offer new ways to reflect on how late capitalist policies and experiences of mental health are connected to social and political polarization in the US.

It may also be useful to contrast the individual, biomedical model of mental health that prevails in the United States (as well as in Sweden, outside of popular education) with the civic and social model of mental health and well-being in Swedish folk high schools. In thematizing connections between the political-economic conditions of neoliberalism and deteriorating social relations and mental health, this latter model casts relationship-building as a potential catalyst for collective participation and politicization. In the US, attending to such alternative ways of conceiving of the forces shaping mental unwellness might open new avenues for intervention that could both positively affect individuals made vulnerable by contemporary structures as well as highlight possibilities for changing the larger social and political fabric in which these individuals are collectively embedded. In order for these potentials to materialize, however, greater public investments in social care infrastructures would be necessary, mirroring the welfare-state support that subsidizes Swedish folk high schools. Despite the complexities and criticisms of carrying out social democratic welfare care projects, discussed at length in this dissertation, Sweden's welfare structures are fundamentally important in keeping open possibilities there for efforts toward universal support, inclusion, and wellness that remain unthinkable in the United States with its materially eviscerated and far less idealistic structures of social provision. Through investing more in community colleges and pushing against the neoliberal restructuring of education to be increasingly instrumental, Americans might move toward pursuing the positive potential for personal, relational, and societal "health" contained in the nexus of care and education, while hopefully avoiding its dangers.

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