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Strangers everywhere? Home and unhomeliness in newly arrived pupils' narratives on exile

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ABSTRACT

This article scrutinises the ways in which pupils who have experienced transnational migration construct 'home' and the unmaking of 'home'. Researchers have argued that migrants' perspectives on belonging are seldom granted scholarly attention. Here, we seek to redress this oversight by inquiring about the ways in which newly arrived migrants define their (un)homeliness in Sweden in the context of a state-sponsored introductory language programme. The focus is on how these pupils themselves define the notion of home, their sense of belonging, and what they envision as necessary to achieve in order to become part of the national community. What emerges in these stories is a constant negotiation to fill the idea of 'home' with content. These negotiations take place in the present, but always in relation to both the past and an imagined future – in which homeliness appears in different ways, with different meanings.

KEYWORDS

Homeliness; unhomeliness; language learning; people's home; refugees

I write to you from a distant country ...

– Gunnar Ekelöf

A man does not have roots, he has feet.

– Salman Rushdie

Migration is increasingly being recognised as a defining experience in people's lives (Sheller and Urry 2006), which at the same time challenges our understanding of the emotionally loaded idea of 'home'. According to Laurel Ryan (2008), home is more the process than the product; it lies in the pursuits for itself. Such pursuits, especially for those carrying the experience of migration, entails multiple relocations and dislocations as well as various homings and unhomings. These homings and unhomings are both temporal and mutually interdependent (Ryan 2008). Each homing carries within itself a desire for a sense of belonging, locatedness and security, whereas each unhoming implies losing that sense of belonging and recognising the strangeness of what at first seemed familiar. Regardless of whether 'home' is predominately defined as a geographical space, a historical space, or an emotional, sensory space, the notion of 'home', according to

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Edward Said (2001), comes into being most powerfully as a consequence of the migrant experience of uprootedness; in other words, when it is gone and left behind, but – at the same time – desired and imagined (Friedman 2004).

While recent scholarship has illustrated that forced migration is often a quite shocking and disruptive experience for the individuals involved, requiring a re-creation of a sense of home (e.g., Hoellerer 2017; Turton 2003), other studies add that this holds particularly true for young people. Several studies on the emotional experiences of migrant children emphasise that a sense of belonging, of feeling at home, is an important socio-psychological aspect in the inclusion of migrants and refugees in a recipient society (e.g., den Basten 2010; Liu 2014; Moskal 2015). This includes having to learn to exist in, and interact with, their new environment in resettlement. Furthermore, this also implies that resettlement is not the end of liminality. Rather, their negotiation, adaption, and transformation is a lifelong process that may never result in a sense of belonging (Hoellerer 2017).

In this article, we make the construction of ‘home’ – as well as the unmaking of ‘home’ – our central concern, based on interviews with pupils experiencing voluntarily or forced exile due to transnational migration. Academic commentators have argued that migrants’ perspectives on belonging and homeliness are seldom granted scholarly attention, but often rely on assumptions and claims from afar (e.g., Leitner and Ehrkamp 2006; Baubock 2003; Miller 2000). In short, they are spoken *about*, not spoken *with*. In this article, we seek to redress this oversight by inquiring about the ways in which newly arrived migrants define their (un)homeliness in Sweden in the context of a state-sponsored introductory language program. The decision to offer introductory language programmes to all asylum seekers aged 16–20 is one of the policies implemented by the Swedish government in the wake of the large number of refugees seeking protection and shelter in Europe from autumn 2015 onwards (Fejes and Dahlstedt 2020). Resources are allocated to these programs in order to ensure that all asylum seekers in a similar age range have a meaningful everyday life and, together with others in a similar situation, enhance their knowledge and skills for personal development and feelings of inclusion in society (SNAE 2016).

In particular, the focus of this article is on the ways in which newly arrived pupils enrolled in introductory language programs themselves construe and define the notion of home, their sense of belonging, and what they envision as necessary to achieve in order to become part of the national community. As an analytical itinerary, we make use of Homi Bhabha’s (1994) theorisations of the ‘unhomely’; a concept that has recently become central to scholarly debates concerning the politics of belonging and inclusion within the framework of national communities (e.g., Aman 2012; Daiya 2008; Roy 1995).

Migration and a changing ‘people’s home’

The recent migration movement to Europe in general, and to Sweden in particular, is not a new phenomenon. Like many other countries, Sweden has a long history of migration (Svanberg and Tydén 1992) and, over time, patterns and policies of migration have changed quite substantially. These changes, in turn, are related to wider policy changes in Sweden.

The project of building the Swedish welfare model, later widely known as the ‘people’s home’ (*folkhemmet*), was launched during the 1930s and ‘40s. In line with the wider reformist ambitions of the Social Democratic Party at this time, the dream was to build

a societal community based on the principles of equality and democracy – a home for the Swedish people (Esping-Andersen 1990; Åmark 2005). The metaphor for building such a community was the home. This particular notion of home, as imagined by the governing Social Democratic Party, was characterised by consensus and harmony, rather than conflict. By means of a wide range of socio-political reforms, the underpinning idea was that the welfare state, in all its strength, would be able to counter the hierarchies, inequalities, and social tensions caused by unregulated market forces (Thullberg and Östberg 1994). In the project of building the ‘people’s home’, democracy and social solidarity, rather than race and ethno-cultural background, became the main principles for belonging to the national community – being part of the people (Ehn, Frykman, and Löfgren 1993). Ideally, the community of the ‘people’s home’ would be inclusive. However, as several researchers have meticulously uncovered (e.g., Molina 1998; Pred 2000; Dahlstedt and Lindberg 2002), the community of the ‘people’s home’ was inclusive as well as exclusive. According to academic commentators (Hosseini-Kaladjahis 2009; Sernhede 2016), it may have been inclusive in terms of reducing hierarchies and generating forms of solidarity across the lines of gender and class, but it remained exclusive for other people living within the national territory, not least migrants and ethnic minorities.

At the same time, the Swedish welfare model – in relation to migration and the reception of migrants – has long been described as a pioneer in terms of its ambitions of inclusion. In international research, the ‘people’s home’ has been used as a symbol of the welfare model characterised by Castles (1995) as multicultural, based on inclusion (i.e., making it relatively easy for migrants to obtain citizenship and thus become a member of the societal community), and recognition (i.e., guaranteeing migrants certain group rights as minorities). However, the Swedish version of multiculturalism has been described as quite paradoxical (Ålund and Schierup 1991) in terms of tensions between citizenship rights and belonging in the formal sense, compared to citizenship rights and belonging in the substantial sense (Dahlstedt and Hertzberg 2007). In terms of substantial rights and living conditions, the formally inclusive ‘people’s home’ is still quite exclusive when it comes to the belonging of migrants within the Swedish national community. This applies to civil, political, and social rights (cf. Schclarek Mulinari 2020; Dahlstedt 2005; Scarpa and Schierup 2018).

In the last decade, there have been quite dramatic policy changes in Sweden, not least since the European refugee situation in 2015, when descriptions of ‘Swedish exceptionalism’ in terms of the inclusion of migrants have gradually been replaced by other descriptions – in Sweden as well as abroad (Schierup and Ålund 2011; Ålund et al. 2017). In the wake of the ‘refugee crisis’, there have been great electoral successes for right-wing populist parties and a shift in political debate, where migration and the presence of migrants has gradually been described more in terms of a threat to the order and security of the national community (Dahlstedt and Eliassi 2018). Here, a dominant narrative in political debate has been the alleged failures of multiculturalism and integration and – in response to this failure – the need to protect the borders and values of the community – defined in terms of ‘Swedish values’ (Krzyzanowsky 2018).

At the same time, extensive efforts have been made for the inclusion of refugees who have entered Sweden – not least by means of resources directed towards introductory language programs in upper secondary schools as well as folk high schools. These

programs target newly arrived students age 16–19, with the aim of teaching them the Swedish language in order to enable them to enter a regular upper secondary program (Högberg, Gruber, and Nyström 2020). The language introduction programs are regulated by the State, with the municipalities having the main responsibility for providing as well as financing the education. However, the government has also allowed municipalities in one county (Östergötland) to try outsourcing the provision of language introduction to folk high schools (Fejes et al. 2018a). Folk high schools normally only provide education for people who are 18 or older. Folk high schools deliver a range of courses – a basic course that helps students to become eligible to enter higher education as well as various vocational and cultural courses. Traditionally, these schools (with a history going back to 1868) have mainly been funded by the State, but are at the same time free to decide which courses to organise and deliver (Fejes et al. 2018b).

Unhomeliness

In his essay ‘The World and the Home’, Bhabha (1994) borrows Sigmund Freud’s concepts of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* which he translates as ‘homely’ and ‘unhomely’. In Bhabha’s work, these notions are used in the reading of postcolonial fiction in order to theorise experiences of migration. For Bhabha (1994, 15), the unhomely means ‘the estranging sense of relocation of the home and the world’, i.e., a place where borders between the home and the world are blurred, and where an amalgamation of private and public leads to ‘a vision that is divided as it is disorienting’. What Bhabha suggests here is that people who have migrated are more or less forced to re-negotiate their meaning and understanding of home. In other words, they have to make a home, or create homeliness in unfamiliar spaces where the concept of home may be different. Importantly, Bhabha (1994, 13) does not equate unhomeliness with homelessness, the lack of a home; rather, is spaces where ‘the border between home and world become confused; and the private and the public become part of each other’. The most salient features of the unhomely moment are instability and a lack of clarity about where one belongs and what one should be doing. As Bhabha explains, this is due to the lack of a spatial category or reference for ‘home’. Seen this way, there is no real and stable home; rather, home is a liquid concept tied to an equally fluid idea of the ‘past’. Or, to use Bhabha’s (1994, 19) own words: ‘Home may not be where the heart is, nor even the hearth. [...] Home may be a mode of living made into a metaphor of survival’. In other words, part of its unstableness, then, is the constant risk that ‘home’ will cease to be a readily and physically identifiable place (Ryan 2008). Similarly, writer Rushdie (1991, 10) suggests that speaking about home, or writing about one’s homeland, implies imaging it, producing ‘a version, and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions’. What Rushdie’s statement illustrates is not only that home resists a concrete definition, it also highlights the paradox that resides within the homely. The familiarity of a home, or a homeland, also encompass that strangeness of its familiarity to another; the unhomely resides in the homely (Ryan 2008). Yet, the flexibility of Bhabha’s unhomeliness means that anything that is, or has become, unfamiliar can, with time and effort, become familiar again. In the search for home and rootedness, the unhomely is essential.

This study focuses on further exploring the ways in which a group of newly arrived migrants articulate their senses of both homeliness and unhomeliness in Sweden. For this study, we conducted interviews with 62 pupils, enrolled in the introductory language program at two upper secondary schools and two folk high schools, located in two neighbouring, mid-sized Swedish cities. In the interviews, we wished to ensure a wide representation of pupil backgrounds, in terms of gender, country of origin, and previous educational attainment. However, many of the pupils interviewed had fled from Afghanistan and Syria, and quite a few had very little experience of previous schooling. At the time of the interviews, about half of them had already received a residence permit, and half were still waiting for a decision. All the interviews were conducted individually in order to provide space for the pupils to elaborate further on their meaning-making regarding their current situation, background, and ideas about the future. All interviews were conducted on site, at each school. A few pupils did not wish to be recorded, and in these cases, notes were taken instead. An interpreter was only used in a couple of interviews. Rather, pupils generally wished to be interviewed in Swedish, as a way to practice their Swedish but also to demonstrate their language abilities. The research has undergone appropriate ethical vetting, approved by the regional ethical committee (Ref. no. 2017/280-31).

Prior to the interviews, the project was introduced and explained to potential participants in the study. At the beginning of each interview, participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time without any questions being asked. They were also informed that they were guaranteed anonymity and only had to respond to questions they felt like answering. The project made use of written consent forms that guaranteed confidentiality. For those who wished, these forms were translated from Swedish to their mother tongue. The interviews varied between 10 and 60 minutes in length, and were tape-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. As in any qualitative interview process, and especially when dealing with young people in a precarious situation, we acknowledge the power relations involved in the interview, where the interviewer, to a certain degree, is part of a joint production of knowledge, together with the respondent (Kvale 2007). Consequently, the transcribed interviews are a product of the social dynamic between a researcher, who is a Swedish resident, and a newly arrived pupil, who is (or has recently been) in the asylum process. The precariousness of the pupils was recurrently expressed verbally through a stated anxiety about their legal status and what was going to happen to them in the future. This is a theme that will be explored in further detail in the analysis presented in the article. Inspired by Bhabha's notions of homeliness and unhomeliness, we have read the transcripts with a focus on identifying those moments when homeliness *vis-à-vis* unhomeliness appear in the material. The analysis is divided into four themes revolving around how the pupils ended up in Sweden, how they try to make Sweden a new home, the role of school in creating homeliness, and, finally, negative feelings of being stuck in quarantine.

Roads to Sweden

Europe's heavily mediated 'refugee crisis' that reached its peak in late 2015 is a disaster caused partly by European border policies, rather than simply the movement of refugees

towards Europe – at least according to Daniel Trilling (2018), who in his *Lights in the Distance* critiques both the term ‘migrant’ and the myriad people attached to it. Migrants, not even ‘immigrants’ or ‘emigrants’ to denote histories and futures, are stuck in an endless present: they move and cross borders, nothing else. At the same time, the term clouds the reasons why people attempt to cross the EU’s external borders in order to find shelter and welcome within Europe (Trilling 2018). Hardt and Negri (2009) are just two of the scholars who have tried to provide a possible answer to the many reasons why people are often more or less forced to migrate. They see migration as an inevitable consequence of social structures that prohibit people from living as free subjects, regardless of whether these are due to political upheaval, persecution, war, or economic debacles. When economic and political conditions turn oppressive, Hardt and Negri (2009) write, people tend to go on strike or even revolt. Before a revolution, however, most people – especially those from the lower classes – pursue other options, with migration to fairer conditions being a prominent option.

Our material gives flesh to Hardt and Negri’s theory on the push-and-pull factors that make people willing to leave and possibly lose whatever sense of home they had. Among the interviewees participating in this study, the predominant factors accounted for were far from the economic incitements prevalent in hostile right-wing rhetoric (e.g., Jonsson 2020). Rather, what the pupils describe as reasons for leaving their homes are a question of survival due to ongoing violence and instability in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Somalia, to mention just a few national contexts. ‘It was impossible to stay in our country’, one interviewee explains, ‘as people are fighting each other’. One pupil explained how he moved to a neighbouring country, but was forced to move once more, in order to avoid being sent back to a war zone: ‘When my father died we moved to Iran [from Afghanistan] because my uncle was there, but after a couple of years I had a major problem . . . I was going to be sent back to Syria to fight’. What the interviewee describes, in Bhabha’s (1994) view, relates to how several relocations prevent feelings of homeliness, which also manifests itself through the lack of clarity about one’s place of belonging in the world. When he risked being drawn into a military conflict again, the interviewee planned to move to Norway, where a friend had lived for six years before being expelled to Afghanistan. However, he eventually ended up in Sweden. This randomness of not having had Sweden as his originally planned destination, but rather ending up there as a consequence of events along the way, is far from unusual in the interviews. Another interviewee describes how he made friends in Germany with someone in a similar situation and decided to join them on their way to Sweden. While such accounts imply a certain degree of choice in their resettlement, other pupils described how smugglers dropped them off in a parking lot in southern Sweden, completely left in the dark regarding where in the world they had ended up. Others told us that their only focus was to leave their countries of residence alive, and that they had only heard about Sweden after having reached the shores of Europe. Regardless of travels and transportation, one thing that these accounts of border crossings have in common is a desire for a safe place to call home.

Conversely, on several occasions, the interviewees described Sweden as part of their itinerary from the very outset. It is particularly salient in these cases that Sweden is put forward as a ‘dreamland’ representing both democracy and freedom. This reasoning is far from unique to this study, tapping into a self-image of Sweden as a radical utopia for

equality and equity by virtue of its welfare politics and its democratic and egalitarian principles (Habel 2012). According to Hübner and Lundström (2011), this idealistic image of Sweden, as part of a master signifier of Swedishness, is not only upheld by people who identify and pass as Swedes; it is also reproduced by refugees and migrants living in contemporary Sweden. Not limited to Sweden, a similar pattern has been detected in interviews with asylum seekers in other northern European countries. In the context of the UK, for instance, Nicole Hoellerer (2017) identifies an idealised image of their host country in her informants' accounts. More specifically, the informants express pride at now residing in Britain and contrast life there with life in their previous home countries. This includes descriptions of Britain as 'advanced', 'democratic', and 'civilised', which implies that the countries the informants had left represent the opposite (Hoellerer 2017). Such statements can also be read as a way for asylum seekers to distance themselves from their previous home. According to Ryan (2008), the desires of homing and unhoming always travel in tandem, where it is necessary to destroy home in order to create home. Put differently, a stern critique of *one* home may be seen as necessary in order to enhance a sense of belonging in *another* one.

Giving back

If expectations of life in Sweden were generally high among the pupils, this held particularly true when it came to education. As one of them put it: 'You can have a good life [in Sweden], you can go to school without having to pay. And I thought that if I could go to school and read, that is study, then it's good for me and I can have a good future.' For many of the pupils, the Swedish educational system represented most of the positive traits they associated with Sweden as a whole, where the opportunity to study in Sweden almost presented itself as reason enough to migrate. Furthermore, expectations of the Swedish educational system as a gateway to a different life were often filtered through experiences from other countries. 'When I was in Iran, I knew that the Swedish educational system is very famous', one pupil said, 'that all countries know about', before arguing that education in Sweden offers possibilities that did not exist in Iran. Moreover, introductory language studies were repeatedly described as a passage towards belonging in Sweden, not least by making continuing education possible, which in turn may lead to getting a job. This echoed results from previous studies. In his work on newly arrived pupils from Iraq enrolled in an introductory program in Sweden, Hassan Sharif (2017) identifies among them – despite their individual differences, backgrounds, and resources – a common trait of wanting to succeed educationally in order to prove themselves respectable in the eyes of Swedish society.

Although it remains unclear whether the connection between respectability and work is fuelled by a desire to break away from the negative stereotypes in populist rhetoric that often cast migrants as passive and dependent on welfare, for many of the pupils, having a job and paying taxes did not seem to be enough; they wanted to do more. Consequently, this pursuit of respectability also manifested itself through a stated desire of wanting to 'give back'. Academic commentators have made the case that the desire for respectability is interlinked with a constant effort of 'self-identification or identification by others' (e.g., Yuval-Davis 2006, 199; Motahane and Makombe 2020). From this perspective, belonging does not entail locations and sentiments, but is based on how the migrant is

‘valued’ and ‘judged’ in the eyes of the new homeland. ‘If I make it at school, I would like to work’, one pupil emphasised, further stressing, that ‘first you need to pay. I’d like to make it on my own and help other people.’ In this account, the pupil sees education as a pathway to an improved life which, in their view, would make them acceptable and included in Swedish society. Before then, however, the pupil emphasises the need to offer something in return. Although these pupils intentions may merely be to express a form of gratitude towards the national space where they have re-settled, academic commentators have also suggested that the idea of wanting to ‘give back’ often reveals the unequal hierarchy instilled in citizenship and national belonging (e.g., Azar 2006; Motturi 2007). What these scholars target is the ways in which such tokens of gratitude are symptomatic of the ways in which citizenship has been a legal right that nation states in the Global North bestow on others from the Global South; i.e., like a gift that essentially does not belong to them even though they have become citizens. In short, certain bodies do not fully belong to the national community on the same conditions as others seem to. For a migrant, homeliness seemingly requires an act of reciprocity. If you get, you have to give.

For several pupils, this commitment to wanting to ‘give back’ and help others equally manifested itself in their envisioned future occupations. The fields may vary, but there was a repeated emphasis on occupations where it is possible to help other people, not least in the service sector. ‘I’d like to work as a nurse,’ one pupil said, ‘to be able to help people’, expressing his gratitude for the opportunities offered in Sweden, compared to those available in his previous home countries: ‘We didn’t have a good life in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but now, there is a road for us. Sweden helps us a lot, to be able to study, to have a good life.’ For many informants, however, the opportunities to live this ‘good life’ were dependent on whether or not they would be granted permanent residency. For these pupils, life in Sweden was characterised by difference, insecurity, and frustration due to a constant fear of being expelled.

No homelands

If an idealised image of Sweden emerges within motivations why several interviewees seek a new home in Sweden, a recurrently described obstacle to homeliness was feelings of uncertainty combined with frustration regarding legal status. This was especially true in instances where there was no homeland – or better yet, homelands – to return to. ‘If I go back to Afghanistan, I’ll get murdered. If I return to Pakistan, I’ll be murdered too,’ one of the pupils explained before continuing: ‘If they [the Swedish authorities] send me to Iran, then they’ll treat us real poorly. Still, they claim that: ‘Your homeland is safe’. In relation to such dual forms of unhomeliness, Étienne Balibar (2002) poses the rhetorical question of what it would mean to be a border. What he refers to is a life caught between the border controls of various nation states. You are not let in and you cannot turn back. As seen in this quotation, the interviewee emphasised that ideas concerning the migrant as a resident of a fixed point of origin carry little weight when it comes to characterising their belonging in the world. For a variety of socio-political reasons, without specifying them in further detail, a return home is impossible. Not least because there is no such place as a fixed ‘home’ in the pupil’s statement. Although the geographical location still exists, their home does not. In this account, Pakistan and Afghanistan are described as

equally poor options with fatal consequences. What emerges is a rift, a feeling of unhomeliness, between the individual's present and past while, at the same time, the interactions with the Swedish authorities seem to prevent a sense of belonging in Sweden. In other words, these pupils experience what Bhabha (1994) refers to as 'a sense of disorientation'. Although they may regard Sweden as a space where they wish to continue living, the unhomely moment manifests itself through legal hostility.

Anxiety regarding legal status confirms recent scholarship illustrating the relationship between a lack of a residence permit and feelings of insecurity among newly arrived migrants (Herz and Lalander 2017). This also reveals the legal conditioning as part of the social construction of 'home'. 'Social constructions of home, place and belonging depend not just on ethnicity and ties to an imagined homeland', as Moreton-Robinson (2015, 9) argues: 'They are conditional upon a legal and social status'. The pupils, echoing Bhabha's (1994) understanding of the unhomely as an experience of estrangement, described their present state as more or less a question of life and death, acknowledging that they came to Europe to survive, but leaving them in a state of ambiguity and helplessness. Without knowing whether or not they would be allowed to stay permanently in Sweden, life was often described as being in limbo where it was hard, not to say impossible, to even think about the future. 'I don't have a future because I don't have a residence permit,' one pupil said, 'and I must return very soon and I don't [know] what future is.' One pupil rhetorically asked how she was going to plan her future when she did not even know if she still would be allowed to stay here tomorrow. 'When I have it [the residence permit], then I'll start planning [my future].' The precariousness of their situation, of having one's life put on hold as one interviewee eloquently put it, stood in contrast to the happiness and security felt on arriving in Sweden.

Interviewer: When you came to Sweden, how was it then?

Respondent: One felt safe then and one feels that ... now I'm in a free country.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: And now I can start my life here, and plan my future.

What this exchange illustrates is the ways in which the search for a safe place to belong to became a driving force to leave home; the very act of settling elsewhere can become unhomely (cf. Ryan 2008). At the same time, several pupils saw the law as their only hope despite the negative emotions that contact with the authorities otherwise sparked. Since 'they [the Swedish authorities] don't believe what I say,' one interviewee commented, 'the only chance that I have is the new law, without which I will maybe leave Sweden'. What this particular interviewee was referring to is a new educational policy, introduced in 2016, granting unaccompanied minors residency for high school studies. However, as highlighted in previous studies, this educational opportunity has in itself put severe pressure, not only on introductory courses for migrants throughout the country, as they are the pathway to high school admission, but also on the teachers working on these courses. Their assessment of the pupils not only concerns their performance and knowledge levels, it also has a direct impact on the unaccompanied minors' legal right to stay in the country – or not (Högberg, Gruber, and Nyström 2020). In short, the teachers, implicitly or otherwise, come to act as gatekeepers. Consequently, the uncertainty

regarding one's legal status and the fragility involved in the constant risk of being expelled due to unsatisfactory study results was repeatedly described as having a strong negative impact on their well-being and preventing a sense of homeliness. 'When you don't know if you'll be allowed to stay or if they are going to send you back,' one pupil said, 'you become nervous because of that situation and then you can't think about important stuff.' Difficulties concentrating on their studies was a recurrent trope in the interviews, in combination with feelings of estrangement.

School as home

All the pupils described being in a situation characterised by insecurity and difference, and school seemingly fulfils a function that went beyond that of an educational institution. The setting was repeatedly described as an important and meaningful place in terms of social relations, a place where pupils were both seen and recognised, or put differently: school was a home. This is a familiar trope in migration literature that illustrates the ways in which the idea of home dissolves in exile. The Iranian poet Jila Mossaed (2012), who came to Sweden in 1986, contemplates in one of her poetry collections what it means to long for home, but also what home actually is. What she discovers is that the signifier 'home' has relocated; home no longer denotes what it used to. Instead of passports, citizenship, and other material and symbolic tokens of a nation state that may instil feelings of home, Mossaed projects her feelings of homeliness onto the private sphere of her residence. 'It must be my apartment', she writes in response, 'my small balcony'. If the unhomely often manifests itself through banalities, as Bhabha (1994) asserts, it seems fair to suggest that this holds equally true for homeliness. For diasporic lives, home may take a completely different form in the pursuit of homeliness in another part of the world.

Similar to the way in which an apartment can become a poet's referent for home to counter experiences of the unhomely moment of uncertain belonging, the school seemingly fulfilled the same function for the pupils. In their accounts, school was more than just a learning space. It was a place where pupils and teachers got to meet, and was described as being particularly important as it made it possible for pupils to escape from the isolation and negative thoughts that characterised everyday life outside school, not least during school breaks. 'When I'm not at school, then it's worse,' one pupil explained, 'then I'm at home, starting to think about all the negative stuff.' In short, school contributed structure and routine to a life that was otherwise characterised by insecurity and volatility, and was frequently described in terms of existential thoughts regarding hopes for the future and homeliness (e.g., Hek 2005; Hagström 2018; Wernsjö 2015).

At the same time, for certain pupils, school becomes a sort of quarantine, a place that does not seem to lead anywhere, or at least not quickly enough. Several pupils expressed a strong sense of frustration at not being able to advance, instead standing still, locked in a waiting room, due to the pace being too slow. A recurrent target for such frustration was teachers' decisions regarding the pupils' language levels. 'I practice a lot and I speak a lot, but I don't get the results,' one pupil explained, 'I think that it is other people who decide this, what level I should be at. [...] It's a problem with teachers who don't allow me to enrol in a higher class.' Without having any insight into whether the teachers have made a fair grading or not, while also acknowledging that it is not an uncommon tendency among many of us to blame others for our possible shortcomings, teachers do possess the

power to determine the pupils' level of linguistic proficiency. Nevertheless, an important starting point for teaching on the language introduction program is that it is adapted to the individual pupil's level of knowledge, recognising previous schooling in their home country or possibly previous schooling at a Swedish compulsory school (Fejes et al. 2018a). At the same time, previous studies of the introductory programs in Sweden have shown that these gradings are based not only on Swedish proficiency but also on more implicit aspects such as not being too vocal or not standing out too much (Wigg 2008). Like the interviewees here, these studies pinpoint an experience among newly arrived migrants of feeling held back by their teachers (Nilsson-Folke 2017; Sundelin 2015). Such feelings of not being able to control their own destiny, or being stuck in quarantine, were particularly strong among pupils who had studied at university level before having to migrate:

When I came here to Sweden, I studied with people who couldn't even write their own names. It was tough. I'm not cocky, but you need to get something back when you've been fighting. I've put in a lot of effort, I've studied a lot in Iraq to reach ... to get a place at university. I got it. Then I came to Sweden from the war and I had to start over. [...] When I sit at home, I look at photos of my friends in Iraq, for example. They've just started their fourth year at university. I say to myself: 'What did I do? Why did I come here? They're probably better off than me.' I feel a bit sad. You know, we were in the same place.

What the pupil expresses is a crippling feeling of time running away, which becomes apparent not least in comparison to their friends back in Iraq. While they were reaching the end of their academic studies, the interviewee was frustrated at being stuck in the same place. This interviewee was far from being alone. What emerged was a wider narrative among certain pupils describing how their previous qualifications and experiences carried little weight in the Swedish educational system; that they had to start over from scratch. This is also in line with other studies which found that it is far from unusual for pupils on introductory programs to consider the level of studies to be beneath their knowledge (e.g., Sharif 2017; Wigg 2008). As a direct consequence, these pupils risk losing both patience and motivation, thereby enhancing sentiments of unhomeliness. This is especially true when considering how the school context has been singled out as the most important arena for creating homeliness and inclusion (e.g., Cederberg 2006; Hagström 2018). These accounts, as well as standing in stark contrast to the statements expressing the high esteem in which the Swedish educational system was held, also reveal a form of nostalgia among the pupils as they compared their own situation with those of friends elsewhere. The fragility of their present situation triggered a yearning back to their previous homelands and created linkages to the social and educational circumstances of their friends who did not migrate. For Bhabha (1994), being nostalgic about their background and ambivalent about their decision to resettle elsewhere is a consequence of not being able to fully feel a sense of belonging. In his view, home comes into being most powerfully when it is left behind and lost. Seen in this way, school seems to simultaneously create homeliness and unhomeliness.

Conclusion

In this article, we have explored sentiments of homeliness in statements from newly arrived pupils about their present situation in Sweden. What emerges from these stories is a constant negotiation to fill the idea of 'home' with content. These negotiations took place in a present, but always in relation to both a past and an imagined future – in which homeliness appears in different ways, with different meanings. This became apparent not least in the ways in which being at home in Sweden was described in terms of a community where quite unequal conditions prevail, and where – to those who come from the outside (i.e., for the newly arrived pupils interviewed) – belonging means entry requirements set by those on the inside (i.e., for those already inhabiting the national home) (e.g., Azar 2006). In relation to such demands, the interviewees also express a strong desire to become part of the national community, to be at home where they now reside, by proving themselves worthy of belonging in various ways. Not least by contributing to the community through labour, which can perhaps also be seen as a way to disprove the negative expectations placed upon them. In their accounts, we have also been able to see how school emerges as a particularly important domain for creating sentiments of homeliness, a place on which the pupils project both hopes and frustration. Here, school emerges as a place that, on the one hand, can make it possible to belong, as a kind of refuge, a place where there are opportunities to imagine a future in Sweden as a home, but that, on the other hand, simultaneously contributes to frustration and experiences of unhomeliness (as the future is on pause). In this place, teachers occupy the position of both door-openers and gatekeepers to the national home (Högberg, Gruber, and Nyström 2020). Moreover, in a sense, these negotiations among the newly arrived pupils also illuminate broader debates concerning the so-called 'people's home' in Sweden at large, where we can see an increasingly strong political effort to normalise and defend presumed national core values in relation to the alleged threat of migration, and where leading political forces call for a closing of the borders and stricter demands on migrants in order to be included in the community; in short, to create a permanent state of unhomeliness for people in search of the homely moment.

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