

Obscured Inequality and Feasible Equity:

**An Exploratory Study of Life History,
Consciousness and Practices of Social
Class in Contemporary Sweden**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy 2015**

I Alpesh Maisuria confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Permission has been obtained to submit up to 100,000 words (exclusive of appendices, and bibliography), my word count is 91,264.

Abstract

For Marxist's, when people are conscious of class relations, as existent and experienced as part of everyday life, the condition is created for the possibility for active engagement in class struggle. Consciousness and practices of class constitutes the problematic of this research.

The research was carried out in Sweden, which is at present experiencing a crisis of social democratic dominant hegemony with accelerated neoliberalisation and populist Right-wing nationalism. This moment of transition frames Sweden as a critical case and a significant research context in relation to exploring the Marxist problematic.

The study provides descriptive analysis of fifteen students accounts of their own life histories and perspectives of the empirical reality of class in Sweden drawing upon critical realism to develop explanatory critique of their accounts in the spirit of the Marxist problematic. This gave rise to identifying the dominant *mechanisms* in modern Swedish society that could be attributed to generating the dominant conditions for socio-cultural *tendencies*. Such tendencies are important in shaping consciousness and practices in everyday life.

Focussing on exploring empirical reality and experiences, this study brings together analysis of i) the Marxist problematic concerned with class consciousness for social transformation ii) with the Swedish social democratic crisis. This exploratory study primarily contributes insights into lived class struggle in contemporary Swedish society, which finds that particular socio-cultural forms obscure inequality in Sweden. This *obscuring* is explained as a suppressive mechanism critically important for the practical function of the perception of *feasible equity*. Importantly for the Marxist research problematic, the study also finds that complete *consent* to the status quo is never fully secured and ambiguities prevail. The critical nuances to the dominant *common sense* of social democratic egalitarianism offers opportunities for theory building about the possibility of class consciousness for struggle in contemporary Sweden, and beyond.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Tony Green for his diligent support, advice and supervision. He was critical and inspirational at moments when I needed it most. His catchphrases “what’s at stake here”, “be pedantic” and “is this clear and unambiguous” are maxims to treasure. Tony, in his own words, kept my “feet at the fire” and helped me to produce a thesis that I am proud to have completed.

I am grateful to Stephen Ball for his useful and encouraging feedback as the pre-submission reader. I also appreciate the insightful thoroughness with which Dennis Beach, Simon Marginson and Vincent Carpentier examined the form and content of the thesis and the critical feedback and compliments they provided.

In addition to the participants who gave their time and responses freely and made the study possible, many people have helped in various ways in the production of this thesis. I would particularly like to acknowledge: the late Roy Bhaskar, Donald Broady, Grant Banfield, Spyros Themelis, Göran Therborn, Alex Moore, Martin Harling, Par Engholm, Andreas Ottemo, Elias le-Grand, Mike Cole, Emil Bertilsson, Peter Mayo, Dave Hill, Ayo Mansaray, John Preston and Eva Gamarnikow.

There were many more comrades and friends, especially in Göteborg, Stockholm, Uppsala and London, with whom I shared conversation over coffee, beer, curry, and pickled herring with – thank you.

I would like to also express my solidarity with comrades everywhere who believe in struggle for a socialist world.

Finally closer to home, to my partner, Jo, whose love and support has been my rock, especially when my spirits have flagged – thank you so much for your patience and fortitude in my struggle to complete this journey. I dedicate this work to our son, Archie Hugo Maisuria, whose arrival just at the right time forced me to abandon perpetual finalisation and just submit the thesis.

Once you begin to look more closely at the Nordic societies and their people, once you go beyond the Western media's current Scandinavian tropes – the Sunday supplement features on Swedish summer-houses peopled by blonde women in floral print dresses carrying baskets of wild garlic and surrounded by children with artfully mussed hair – a complex, often more darker, occasionally quite troubling picture begins to emerge. This encompasses everything from the relatively benign downsides to living among such comfortable, homogenous, egalitarian societies as these ... to the more serious fissures in Nordic society: the racism and Islamophobia, [and] the slow decline of social equality.

(M. Booth, 2014)

PART ONE: THE HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMING OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Thesis

The materialist doctrine that men [sic] are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets, that it is men that change circumstances.

(K. Marx, 1969 [1845])

Consciousness conceptualised as an inalienable feature of human species-being was a feature of every major work by Marx. Consciousness is defined as “comprised of thoughts, ideas and concepts” (Allman, 1999, p.33). According to Marx, in capitalism, the prevailing conditions negate consciousness of the relationship between the classes, and it was these conditions that make humans un-free and alienated. Nevertheless, humans also have the capacity to become *class conscious* and break free from the conditions that prevent human flourishing (Marx and Engels, 1848).

Taking this cue, class consciousness is necessary among the working class for the possibility of alternative revolutionary Left social transformation. Theoretically, being conscious of class relations creates the possibility for class struggle and

class formation with the goal of building the impetus for social transformation (Marx, 1844; Slaughter, 1975; Westergaard and Resler, 1975). The Bolsheviks and other Marxist's, had conceived of history evolving as positivistic science, which entailed radical social change unfolding sequentially and led by a revolutionary vanguard, but post-WW1 revolution did not materialise in this way and showed history to be more nuanced and complex. Antonio Gramsci took this crisis moment for Marxist theory of revolution and developed it to be sensitive to, and working with, the empirical reality of the moment that people were living (Gramsci *et al*, 1977). He contended that class hegemony is continuously struggled over by human agents at the socio-cultural level in developed societies, and class war was not simply promulgated by a revolutionary vanguard with history on its side. In this way, social transformational strategies, if they are to be successful, needed to grasp the material conditions of empirical reality of individuals, cultural forms and consciousness as socio-historical materiality in collective entities. This Gramscian theoretical and methodological background is the Marxist inspiration for the focus on class struggle as continuous, multilevel and complex and the seeds of social transformation are incorporated within the dominant hegemony – this is the research problematic that underpins this study.

This thesis comprises an exploration and reporting on consciousness and practices providing an understanding of accounts of the empirical reality of social class in contemporary Sweden. Historically, in relation to social class, Sweden has had a longstanding reputation for egalitarianism, which meant low levels of *inequality* - as represented by a relatively narrow class structure and shallow class

hierarchy; and also *equity*¹ - as represented by continuous attention to fairness in the distribution of chances and opportunities for people to flourish. The *Swedish Model* of social democracy has been for many years celebrated as exemplification par excellence for social equality and opportunities for the many to flourish (see for example: Berman, 1998, 2005, 2012; Wiborg, 2009). However, since the mid-1970s, when neoliberalisation was first introduced, the original model of social democracy has become destabilised and is now in a state of apparent *crisis*, which is augmented with the rise of Far-right popular nationalism.

The theoretical framework draws from Marxist historical materialism, which is problematised in the context of the crisis for revolutionary theory, and complemented by critical realism explained as a useful meta-theory to philosophically frame Marxism. The basic corrective to *positivistic* pre-WW1 conceptions of historical materialism I propose is that Marxism needs to be a *dialectical* science to be efficacious as a revolutionary strategy. The move from a *positivistic* to *dialectical* historical materialism is necessitated by the fact that the social world is at constant conjunctures of change. The totality of these changes constitutes history and the contemporary socio-cultural mechanisms that create the conditions of existence. I posit the idea that the future is not a science that follows philosophical and positivistic determination, and taking this presupposing, history is dialectical, which does not evolve in a readily predictable way. The unpredictability of history means the radical Left transitional conjectures are always an open possibility within the interstices of the status quo (Marx and Engels, 1848;

¹ Appendix A is a glossary of terms to have quick reference to definitions in which they are deployed in the main text.

Mayo, 2015). Inspired by this Marxist theoretical framework, there is a Gramscian derived emphasis in this thesis that individuals and groups of individuals are active beings. Humans have the agential capacity to facilitate class struggle, often in subtle and nuanced ways in their empirical reality, thus the possibility for change is always immanent. History, with this agentic orientation, is always constituted in degrees of openness to different ideas and practices to become emergently transformed.

Within the context of this history of Sweden and the Marxist theoretical framework, the aim of the study has been to explore social class testimonies from 15 higher education students. The research questions were focussed on reporting perspectives about class as part of empirical reality across two dimensions:

- i) Subjectively: class reported as recognised in their own everyday lived life; and also,
- ii) Objectively: class reported to be part of the Swedish socio-cultural formations in their perspective.

The design of the study involved fieldwork and subsequent reporting and analysis to recognise the authorial voice of the interviewee by deploying life history interviews to account for their consciousness and practices of class. The data collection was to enable intense descriptive qualitative analysis throwing some light on human beings perspectives on their own and others' lived lives. This type of study facilitates an attempt to heuristically get a sense of the conditions for class struggle contextualised in complex socio-cultural historical materiality at a

conjunction of rapid reconfiguring of social democracy. Unlike Marxist qualitative research on class consciousness and struggle that focuses primarily on the social structure, such as the role of economy and the State, this study produces analysis and scholarship that explores perceptions of how class is played out in cultural forms for analytical description and explanation in relation to the research problematic and the agential action for praxis of the subjects in focus.

Within the context of the crisis of Swedish social democratic hegemony described above, the design of the study provides an innovative approach to the exploring class in Marxist mode in cultural forms by utilizing materials derived from life-history interviews. As well as combining Marxism and life history approaches to explore class in social democratic Sweden, the research design was set-up to deliver richness through analysis of a diversity of participants' perspectives. The recruitment strategy was purposeful insofar as it was designed to enable articulation between class, culture and 'race' in empirical reality by including three groups of informants enrolled in Swedish higher education: Swedes, Non-Swedish Scandinavians² and Global South Immigrants. Critically exploring, reporting on, and explaining perspectives of people from diverse backgrounds in contemporary Sweden make for the possibility of depicting class consciousness animated in its particular political and socio-cultural complexity. In particular, the analysis offers some insights about socio-cultural forms of struggle at the level of individual

² The term "Scandinavian" in this study includes Finland. "Scandinavia" has historically been in reference to the Viking lands – Sweden, Denmark, Norway, but in contemporary parlance *Nordic* and *Scandinavia* is used interchangeably, thus including Finland as part of the Scandinavian region. It is deployed in this collective way in the study, though it is recognised that this terminology is potentially ambiguous because of Swedish colonialism, along with differences in socio-cultural, and ethno-racial histories.

experiences and perspectives in contemporary Sweden and opens the possibility for understanding how these struggles address the problematic of class consciousness.

The main contribution of this thesis is reporting accounts that explored consciousness and practices of social class. The knowledge gained from the treatment of the accounts of empirical reality addresses the research problematic – what is the possibility, and how can, critical class consciousness for struggle emerge in a place like social democratic Sweden? This critical treatment represents an explanatory critique that goes *beyond* merely reporting what is observable about social class, thus to attain analytical sophistication (Sharp, Green, and Lewis, 1975, p.25). Inspired by critical realism, a particular focus is on understanding socio-cultural mechanisms at work that create the conditions for what can be observed about class in empirical reality. Mechanisms in this context are deep unobservable causal structures, reasons or belief systems that have the power to generate tendencies for qualitative changes to consciousness with implications for action in the lived world. An example of a mechanism in a society based on socialist principles is one where there is a culture of solidarity, which conditions social relations and promotes selfless rather than selfish actions amongst its peoples. Explanatory critique entails particular interest in elucidating: i) the socio-cultural *mechanisms* that create the conditions of lived existence through generating dominant *tendencies* for particular consciousness forms to emerge and be reinforced and reproduced; ii) and, here focusing upon when reports of empirical reality that include *critical nuances* that go against the grain of the *commons sense* perceptions of Swedish egalitarianism, to indicate pivotal moments for struggle in and against the dominant hegemony. In relation to the

Gramscian idea of class struggle in cultural forms, focus on the lived world in Sweden in this conjuncture of social democratic crisis is significant as a contribution to Marxist theory building for social transformation at this important moment in Swedish history.

Organisation and Overview of the Chapters

Having introduced the main themes of the thesis, I now move on to providing an overview of what is covered in this thesis and how this is organised.

Like most other qualitative studies, the research practice was not linear. However, I have organised the presentation so that the narrative builds the story of the study and subsequent thesis, from the most abstract and general level, gradually narrowing down to the specifics and operational design. To foster a logical presentation, I have divided the thesis into four distinct and sequential parts with nine chapters. The first part is devoted to the historical and theoretical framing of thesis. In this part, chapter 2 is the first of the preamble chapters; it lays out the historical setting of this study. The focus of the chapter is to provide a brief history of social democracy in Sweden from 1917-1990s, foregrounding Sweden's extraordinary reputation for egalitarianism, tracing the Swedish social democratic *Golden Years* to the current conjuncture of hegemonic *crisis*. I specify this crisis in terms of neoliberalisation and the emergence of mainstream far-Right political and social tendencies; all of which makes Sweden a compelling research site. This current moment is important in the context of the research problematic, which is to

understand the possibility of class struggle in social democratic Sweden where class struggle manifests at the level of the social, cultural and personal world of individuals, rather than in the form of an authoritarian and oppressive bourgeois State. This chapter sets the scene to understand the historical antecedents emerging as part of the reporting from the fieldwork in contemporary Sweden. For example, social democratic traditions living on, in the practices of informants, and the consciousness of how feasible they consider the return to traditional social democratic principles and/or generate perhaps more progressive socialist possibilities in relation to class struggles.

In chapter 3, I set the broad theoretical and methodological of the research where I discuss the post-WW1 crisis for Marxist revolutionary theory. This has been expressed as part of the learning experience of past Marxist's who made the mistake of calculating history to evolve inevitably to far-Left social transformation for the dictatorship of the proletariat and eventual international socialism. However, post-WW1 revolution did not materialise in this way and showed history to be more nuanced and complex in Sweden, and particularly also in Germany and Russia. I use this context to raise important questions about positivistic conceptions of historical materialism, economic determinism, and leadership, which I discuss, drawing inspiration from a critical realist philosophy of social science methodologically to position the thesis. These discussions provide the context for focusing on Gramsci and the importance of the class struggle in cultural forms and the creation of the conditions for problematics of hegemony. The final section of chapter 3 provides an extended discussion of the theoretical framework, which is the connective tissue drawing together the preceding historical (chapter 2) and

theoretical (chapter 3) discussions to detail the research problematic. It is here that contemporary Sweden is illuminated as a compelling and critical case to explore consciousness and practices of class, providing the materials to establish an explanatory critique for the purpose of tentative heuristic theory building for contributing to revolutionary strategy scholarship.

Having detailed the historical and theoretical framework, and established Sweden as an ideal critical case to explore class struggle in cultural forms, I move on to Part two – the designing of the fieldwork. I begin in chapter 4 by detailing the specific research questions in relation to the broad research problematic, I then move on to explaining the details of the recruitment design, data collection research strategy in relation to life history interviews and ethnography. The final chapter (5) of this Part of the thesis discusses and reflects on the implementation of the research design as planned and discussed previously in chapter 4. This includes addressing challenges that arose during the recruitment of informants phase; how the ethnographic aspect involved my becoming more reflexively socialised with Swedish dominant hegemony; a reflection on my interview method being significant for the study. Engaging in this reflective way was itself an exercise in understanding that theory and methodology is mediated by the context in which it is applied, thus I lived my dialectical historical materialist Marxism as part of this study.

The main contribution of this work is from the study of consciousness and practices of social class in Part three, which has two chapters providing analysis and explanation emergent from the fieldwork. Chapter 6 delivers analysis of each

informant's account subsequently taking the descriptive analysis from the level of the *individual* to a level of description analysis exploring consciousness and practices at the level of each of the three *groups*. The aim is to provide a descriptive analysis of their *collective* sense of their *group-level* everyday lived and experienced world, and of their *group-level* perception of the objective Swedish social structure as the basis for an emergent potential analytic typology. Through reporting in this way, a framework outlining their common understanding of class and empirical reality can emerge across each group. Within this framework of analytically constructed commonality, the subtle variations that constitute nuances at the individual level are interesting because they subsequently generated insights into struggle and class formation, which provides the basis for critical explanation of the mechanisms at play in the construction of their consciousness and practices. Finally in this Part of the thesis, chapter 7 builds upon the findings of the previous two chapters by synthesizing the descriptive analyses from the level of the individual, and group-level reporting by comparing and contrasting materials across all three groups to produce a tentative heuristic typological abstraction in relation to class consciousness, Sweden and Swedishness, the latter defined as the dominant constructions of Sweden and its socio-cultural forms.

In Part four, the descriptive analysis of the reported findings in Part three is subjected to speculative abstraction to develop explanatory critique relating to the research problematic and consciousness creating mechanisms and the critical nuances that represent the potential for progressive struggle. The move in this chapter 8 is from reporting descriptive analysis of empirical reality to development of an explanatory critique in relation to the fieldwork findings relating to class

consciousness, Sweden and Swedishness. The focus here is one that tentatively speculates on both, the *actual* level of reality where tendencies are created for socio-cultural conditions; and also, the *real* level generative mechanisms that create the tendencies for the empirical reality. The knowledge gained from the treatment of the accounts in this way addresses the research problematic more extensively than descriptive analysis of what is observable by heuristically speculating on strategies of class struggle manifest in a place like Sweden in this moment of crisis.

In the final chapter (9) of the thesis, I reflect on the theoretical framework deployed in the study and the subsequent thesis, and how this could be developed. I consider the implications of the analysis, findings and thesis being argued, and their implications for emergent class struggle in the context of the Swedish social democratic crisis, neoliberalisation and Far-right popular nationalism. The implications of critical nuances in cultural forms in the reported findings, and the wider societal discontent, point to a pivotal moment for struggle as intertwined in a nexus of class, ethno-‘race’ and culture in contemporary Swedish history, which is then developed and speculated on in this final chapter of the thesis. I conclude by returning to some of the limitations and scope of the thesis discussed throughout such as the profile of participants, and opportunities presented by findings related to the possibility of critical consciousness for class struggle, which lays the ground to consider the possible directions for a future research programme.

Chapter 2: History of Social Democracy

A spectre is haunting ... All that is solid melts into air.

(K. Marx and F. Engels, 1848)

This chapter provides an overview of social democratic governance in Sweden from its foundations in 1917 to the current conjunctural crisis and far-Right political shifts. The purpose is to highlight the development of Sweden's extraordinary reputation and image of egalitarianism. Significant transitions have taken place in the education and political systems, as well as shifts at the level of ethno-racial relations, politics and culture. The chapter sets the scene to understand historical antecedents and contextualisation for the eventual analytical reporting of the fieldwork and development of explanatory critique, focussing on complexities of social democratic traditions in the lives and practices of informants in contemporary Sweden.

The chapter sets the scene to understand historical antecedents and contextualisation for the eventual analytical reporting of the fieldwork and argument, focusing on complexities of social democratic traditions in the lives and practices of informants in contemporary Sweden.

It must be noted that social democracy has a long history in all the Scandinavian countries³, but the social democratic model is best known as developed in Sweden (Berman, 1998, 2006; Sejersted, 2011). Social democracy is a contested term but in a Swedish context it can be defined as the ideological vision to:

Redistribute income from the 'rich' to [the] 'poor' and from men to women. ... [To] equalise income distribution across an individual's lifespan by taxing and reducing income levels in middle age balanced with then paying social benefits to increase income during childhood and old age (Gordon, 2009, p.93).

The social democratic ideological vision had three aims: first, to reduce wealth and income inequality; second, to reduce sex inequality; and finally, to have a system whereby taxation is highest during working age to pay for old age and pre-work years in support of general social provisions of health care and education. Sweden has arguably been the strongest of the social democratic countries since World War I and has been celebrated throughout the world for its perceived low inequality and prevailing fairness as compared with international levels, which can be viewed as an expression of the height of civilisation and social progress. During these *Golden Years* of Swedish Social Democracy (detailed below), such was the success of the *Swedish Model* and life inside it, that it has been described with superlatives, such as a "realistic utopia" (Rosenblum, 1980, p.267), the "prototype

³ The relevant aspects of this history, and radical Left-wing alternatives to it, at the time, are also covered from a theoretical perspective in chapter 3.

of contemporary society” (Tomasson, 1970), and “the most successful society the world has ever known” (Toynbee, 2005, p.1) and this has been attributed to the “the extraordinary success of the Swedish Social Democrats” (Tomasson, 1969). Those interested in pursuing social justice agendas and comparing social structures of societies (see Wright, 1997) have hailed Sweden as *par excellence* in terms of egalitarianism. These claims of a social “idyll” (Sejersted (2011, p.334) have been reinforced by global indices, such as the co-gini index, and this has often been attributed to the Swedish commitment to making social democracy work; such has been the political hegemony and order of things since the 1930s⁴.

Swedish social democratic cultural forms are a distinctive characteristic of the country and to understand social class and its empirical reality, it is important to frame the Sweden of today in the *history* of social democracy charting its development to the *present*. Therefore, I will now outline a brief post WW1 history of three time-specific phases of social democracy in Sweden; for the purpose of providing context for both, the location of the data gathering, and also the antecedents of this history that are lived in contemporary Sweden. These phases are the *Golden Years* of progress from 1917 up to the 1970s, when social democracy had an almost *unchallenged dominant political hegemony*; and second, the *instability* of it during the beginning of the 1970s, which, in the third phase, has come to be described as a *crisis* of social democracy from the 1990s. In this next section I also provide an overview of the socio-cultural and political changes afoot

⁴ In this thesis chapter 3 provides a theoretical discussion of how dominant hegemony is established, maintained, and struggled for, at the level of ideas and culture. For a fuller discussion of the varieties of social democratic regimes see Normann, Ronning and Norgaard, 2009; and, Sejersted, 2011.

in contemporary Sweden, all of which provides for a compelling place to study social class in the context of the research problematic.

1917- 1970s Establishing Swedish Social Democracy – *The Golden Years*

For much of the twentieth century, social democracy has been almost synonymous with Sweden's international political identity. The Social Democratic Party (*Social Demokraterna*), after its inception in 1889, has enjoyed almost continuous parliamentary success since its first electoral victory in 1917 (Berman, 2005). The development and protection of the welfare state and progressive policies⁵ based on establishing equality through legal entitlement to education and health, and a right to vote⁶, have been the *raison d'être* of the social democratic movement. This has been the case since the 1930s, at which point social democracy was firmly cementing itself into the fabric of Swedish social, political and cultural life (Berman, 2012).

The Swedish Social Democratic Party from this time has been credited with establishing the high levels of prosperity and equality in terms of social class differentials (Wiborg, 2009, p.1; Olsen, 1980; Rosenblum, 1980). Prior to the Party

⁵ This reference to the political spectrum needs to be interpreted in context. In Sweden, political positions are shifted to the Left when compared to the UK. For example, a Swedish politically Right-wing leaning Party may be seen as being more socially liberal than a similar Party in the UK. Though it is germane to note that these political positions are not fixed in any country, for example, the history of Swedish Social Democratic Party outlined here suggests that they are moving further to the political Right.

⁶ Other prominent examples include full employment, pensions, maternity rights, sickness protection, and accident insurance.

first winning power, Swedes were divided by a stark class structure in a sharply stratified society. Elmer (in Tomasson, 1970, p. 202) notes:

...[p]overty, overcrowding, starvation, and sickness were common in Sweden around the turn of the century. And in contrast to this there were an upper class (överklass), which in magnificence and wealth stood far above the great mass of people.

It was against this backdrop of inequality that social democratic politics and culture emerged⁷ and would be the dominant status quo for almost a century (Berman, 2005; 2012).

An explicit manifesto pledge for the Social Democratic Party in Sweden was closing the social class gap and providing opposition to the bourgeoisie that inflicted years of hardship, who ruled via a succession of monarchs from a small dynasty of families (Blomqvist, 1989, p.3; Gordon, 2009). The social democrats strongly pursued their pledged goals with radical redistributive policies when they were in power between the 1920s to the 1970s (Childs, 1980; Olsen, 1980). The first Swedish Social Democratic government (in coalition with the Liberal Party) was elected in 1917 (Social Demokraterna, 2006), led by one of the first members of the Social Democratic Party at its inception Karl Hjalmar Branting. Branting favoured the machinery of politics rather than violent revolution for social transformation. He therefore positioned himself as a democrat and a socialist

⁷ The theoretical discussion between revisionists and revolutionaries in Sweden is laid out in chapter 3. It also details the theoretical aspects of the social democratic movement and its inception: i) against the alternative of Marxist Leninism of the time, ii) and the formation of the Party, and iii) the key proponents of it in Sweden during the late 1800s up to 1917.

unlike other movements and uprisings in Europe, especially in Russia with the Bolsheviks, who also had a small group of supporters in Sweden at the time and wanted social change by non-democratic means (Tilton, 1990). His radical ideology was aimed at reforming politics to provide human rights and political representation particularly for the poor and women (Childs, 1980; Tilton 1990). Branting's vision was to be implemented through a culture of consensus by the vehicle of parliamentary democracy rather than insurrection. This reformist socialist strategy would be true to the founding doctrine of the Party where it was stated that "the efforts to organise the Swedish working class for conquest of the political power [would] ... no means be *violent* revolution" (Childs, 1980, p.10, my emphasis)⁸. The proposal was clear, that the class war would be waged by creating a *culture* where the workers would fight for a better condition of existence through parliamentary means. Class consciousness to "organise" as specifically a "*working class*" would be pivotal to this endeavour.

More widely, the global economic depression of 1929 eventually reached Sweden and the impact of economic downturn affected the poor the hardest. Up to half of the working age population became unemployed and an absence of social security provided the appetite for a workers political organisation, based on human rights and social protection. The emergence of this appetite emboldened the first (non-Coalition constituted) social democratic government, elected in 1920, to present themselves as a *Workers Party* (Sejersted, 2011; Tilton, 1990). Under the leadership of Per Albin Hansson and Ernst Wigforss, the Party set about

⁸ The issue of organisation and class formation through *consent* was a tenet of the Marxism that Antonio Gramsci developed as being central to gain and then struggle to maintain power, see chapter 3.

establishing a series of measures to appeal directly to the working class - the segment population of whom had been expanding due the development of industrialism and the capitalist mode of production.

Herbert Tingsten, writing in his classic work: *Den Svenska Social Demokratins Ideutveckling* [The Ideological Development of the Swedish Social Democrats] in 1941 claimed that the Party within the first decade of getting power had remarkable success by combining the aims of social and political emancipation and economic development (Tingsten, 1973 [1941]). In relation to the former, during 1930-32, the Party's politics shifted from poor relief to a programme of social benefits and citizen rights; in other words the State would provide a safety net against poverty for its citizens (Childs, 1980; Normann, Ronning and Norgaard, 2009; Sejersted, 2011). With these welfare based foundations, the Social Democratic Party became the political home of the working class voter and this was illustrated by their 1936 election poster [Figure 1], which translates to “work and security for all – workers party’:

Figure 1: *Social Democratic Party 1936 Election Poster*



The theme of inclusivity and communality were culturally prominent political slogans for the Party. Per Albin Hansson, during a speech at the Swedish Parliament (*Sveriges Riksdag*) in 1928, declared the “community and togetherness” that was promoted by social democracy would “break down the barriers ... [that] separate citizens” (Berman, 2005, p.14). Hansson’s message was clear, that Swedish social democracy would be about creating a culture of unity and solidarity, specifically for the poor, including women. His co-architect of the Party’s policies, Ernst Wigforss, in 1940 explained how these objectives were at the heart of their political ideology that focussed on the connection between social policies, economic redistribution and building a culture of inclusivity amongst the marginalised:

One hears so much talk of the unity that characterises the Swedish people ... one should not neglect to note that this is connected with the fact that the economic situation for the broad masses of our citizens has improved. It is also connected with the overall political programme that [we have] driven over the past year that has aimed at creating work, improving housing and lightening the burden of society’s worst-off. It is not least these measures which have created the foundations of the national solidarity that we are currently so pleased about (Berman, 2012, p.249).

The connection of socio-cultural structural development and the improvement in lived lives is explicit in this speech. The political strategy combining social, economic and cultural development for 40 years up to the 1970s was the Social

Democratic Party's explicit political approach to maintaining hegemony (Tomasson, 1970). Social Democracy gathered pace after the 1930s, and it was an evolving project, which by 1946 had a political programme of reform based on equalising equity and chances for working class flourishing:

The goal of social democracy is to reformulate the economic organisation of bourgeois society so that the right to determine production is placed in the hands of the citizens; so that the majority is freed from its dependence on a minority of capitalists; and so that a social order built on economic classes gives way to a community of free and equal citizens (Childs, 1980, p.44).

The rhetoric of the social democratic movement was explicitly aimed at garnering the support of workers by establishing a culture of demanding fairness protected by the State. The promise of empowerment of "citizens" to "determine production" so that they can be "freer" and be "equal" was indicative of how the social democrats were establishing the political, moral and socio-cultural ground, and securing this leadership through parliamentary democracy as opposed to via violent revolution, which at that time had degenerated into totalitarianism under Stalinism in Russia (Childs, 1980, p.44)⁹. Throughout the 1930s/1940s, there was no feasible alternative to the emergent social democratic status quo and the Party had free reign via overwhelming public support to continue with their reforms of reversing inequality (Childs, 1980, p.18).

⁹ The degeneration of the communist revolutions in Europe between 1917-19 and the subsequent strengthening of social democracy are issues discussed in chapter 3.

The project of creating a social democratic society, at the social-cultural level and social structures, based on redistributive principles was facilitated by the creation of an expansive welfare provision. A key aspect of this welfare reform was to make health care and education free of charge, to make them equitably accessible for all citizens of the Swedish State¹⁰. It is noteworthy that the Party has never committed to working outside of the emergent capitalist mode of production, and the project of equalisation and universalism (Hvinden, 2010) was based on correcting inaccessibility to basic human rights and entitlements and establishing these as part of political and social Swedishness. They maintained a commitment to the capitalist economic system and it was their social idealism that having more workers economically active would allow for more production, thus the “concept of welfare had a strong link to the concept of [economic] efficiency” and accumulation of capital (Andersson, 2006, p.6). Gunnar Myrdal, one of the labour economists of the social democratic movement, reasoned that a *generellvälfärds politik* (welfare policy) was an investment for economic growth (Andersson, 2006, p.1). Put another way, the notion of a classless society was not on their agenda. Reducing relative inequality by way of increasing the chances and welfare of people, especially the old, young and economically inactive was about political stability and economic growth. They wanted more equitable chances for the working class, not a classless society by the elimination of the capitalist relations of production, and so mechanisms of capitalism that pre-1920s created inequality were incorporated within a fairer social structure characterised by a distribution of chances to enable

¹⁰ Whilst this study specifies the Swedish social democrats and their emphasis on social class, their mandate to deliver egalitarianism also had a central focus on sex equality.

working class flourishing. On these terms, it was a reformist and socialist rather than communist programme that was advanced by the Social Democratic Party.

Another important aspect of the emergence of the Social Democratic Party was the “co-operation” it had with the Trade Union Confederation (*Landsorganisationen i Sverige*)¹¹ known as LO (LO, 2013, p.12). This relationship was built on mutual ground – to represent the interests of “wage-earners”¹², the Social Democrats presented themselves as the “champions of ‘little people’” (Berman, 2005, p.14) and focussed their policies on the improvement of lived lives. They promoted mass and compulsory unionisation, which did two things: first, it built a strong working class identity and culture that was synonymous with the Party. For example, the LO created a line of retail shops called *Coop Konsum*, translating to *consuming with cooperation*. The point here is that these shops socialised social democracy as part of everyday *lived experience*, establishing a dominant cultural hegemony in consciousness and practice. Second, unionisation “guaranteed” a voice through the Party (Social Demokraterna, 2006, p.7) for workers as a collective to negotiate key aspects of employment conditions, rights and entitlements (Sejersted, 2011). In this arrangement, the social democratic movement was the voice of the working people and sided with wage earners and their needs. This was a mutually

¹¹ Fourteen affiliated trade unions make up the Confederation (LO, 2013). Since its foundation in 1898 the LO has had strong links to the Social Democratic Party, for example, the president of LO is traditionally a member of the Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Party (ibid.). The LO continues to be a powerful organisation, and during the second half of the 20th century the Swedish trade union movement became one of the strongest and reached the highest rate of unionisation in the world (ibid), though this is now significantly reduced.

¹² A term commonly used in Swedish parlance to mean blue-collar workers, service sector workers or more generally, the working class.

productive relationship between the LO and Party during the middle of the 20th century.

Up to the 1940s, the Swedish working class began to establish a distinctive 'working class culture'¹³ (Sejersted, 2011). This was cultivated by various formations, including: sports organisations, unionism, the labour press, educational associations, literature and poetry of everyday struggle written by workers, popular newspapers – *folkviljan* and *folkbladet* [Peoples Will and Peoples Paper], meeting places called *folketshus* (house of working people) and even designated outdoor spaces where specifically workers could enjoy their identity as *workers* (folkets park) (Berman, 2005, 2012; Sejersted, 2011; Widfeldt, 2007)¹⁴. As part of this cultural focus, the social democratic government funded educational programmes beyond formal institutions of schools and colleges. These programmes were to be a key role in the struggle for working class justice as part of the social democratic project of equalising opportunity, this meant that equity was at the core of their existence. The social democratic movement was facilitated by the close relationship between the Party and the trade unions, and also the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) (*Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund*) (ABF) who in combination directed educational initiatives, such as workers' academies, evening schools, and folk colleges (Sejersted, 2011), which during the 1930s-1970s were designed to develop working class consciousness through social activity, political organising and championing labour causes. At the heart of the

¹³ I have placed this in inverted commas here to denote that this is a problematic phrase, culture is not fixed for any group of people, it is socially constituted and materially conditioned, and it is dialectically conceived with time and space – in historical materiality.

¹⁴ It could be said that these were attempts at creating working class *organic intellectuals*, this is discussed in the context for class struggle in the next chapter with reference to Gramsci.

educational endeavour was a focus on establishing a culture of solidarity, understanding, and progressively re-imagining society:

Culture inspires us and lets us think along new, creative lines, which helps us to interpret the surrounding world and ourselves in new ways. This is why the ABF embraces culture ... Solidarity knows no borders (ABF, 2014).

The social democratic movement used education as a political, cultural and social site where workers could become literate and also acquire a sense-of-self as working class (Gordon, 2009; Sejersted, 2011). Therefore, institutions had an essential educative role to develop working class consciousness, in which they would organise themselves as a class formation, a term meaning to be solidaristic with people like themselves in a stratified class social structure, ready to struggle for equity to flourish¹⁵. It is interesting in the context of struggle for hegemony¹⁶ to note the Swedish WEA has maintained its roots to this day, which are expressed on the first line of the front page of its website (ABF, 2014):

Our focus on social class is no less important today than it was when the association was started in 1912.

With the gaining of labour rights and establishing of social and cultural identity, the Swedish workers were gaining consciousness of their identity in the system of capitalist production, and by the 1940s had begun to be actively interested in

¹⁵ This meaning of *class formation* will be deployed through this thesis.

¹⁶ *Hegemony* is used with a Gramscian inflection to explain the process by which a dominant discourse is established and maintained through socio-cultural, as well as structural, leadership. This is discussed in detail in chapter 3.

protecting the rights and entitlements that they had won through the Social Democratic Party's reorganisation of social structure and labour relations (Sejersted, 2011, p.124). This class formation moment in Sweden's history was summed up by labour historian Øyvind Bjørnson who wrote:

From a raw and uncivilised mass the labour movement had created a well-disciplined and sound army of orderly well-bred workers who systematically worked towards their long-term goals (Sejersted, 2011, p.124).

The "long-term goal" for the movement was equity, meaning to redistribute chances so individuals had a fairer opportunity to flourish in the competitively unequal system. Whilst there were some internal tensions between the different sorts of workers in the social democratic movement, for instance between: the farmers and the urban workers, traditionalists and progressives, the Lutherans and the secularists; a cornerstone of the Social Democratic Party was unity and solidarity. In practice, this meant that all workers would be in brother/sister-hood against a common adversary – the prospect of a return to bourgeois rule in which the common good of welfare, access to education and power were not feasibly obtainable for the individuals of the masses (Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle, 2009). The essence of this model of commitment to the common and public good was captured in the Party newspaper in 1932, the *Social-Demokraten*:

Humanity carries its destiny in its own hands ... Where the bourgeoisies preach laxity and submission to ... fate, we appeal to peoples desires for

creativity ... conscious that we both can and will succeed in shaping a social system in which the fruits of labor will go to the benefit of those who are willing to ... participate in the common task (Berman, 2005, p.13).

The message was of hope and optimism in fairness prevailing by social democratic means. Marquis Childs succinctly summed up the faith in the social democratic future by Swedish workers in 1980:

The deeply held Swedish belief... is that the ills of society can be cured, that injustice is intolerable... This is the root of what happened in Sweden since 1930 (Childs, 1980, p.23).

The focusing of workers' minds on demanding more equity by the early Social Democrats, including Branting, Hansson and Wigforss, had paid parliamentary political dividends and the Party secured its largest share of the votes in the 1932 election (Berman, 2012). From there on, they won consecutive and successive elections and by the end of the 1960s, the Party and social democracy was as popular as it had ever been (Zetterberg, 1995). Remaining neutral during World War II and therefore relatively unscathed, the Social Democratic Party's social welfare programme for the working class was being realised and it was appealing, given that Sweden comparatively was markedly fairer in terms of wealth and income distribution, and it had high levels of protection that benefitted those most in need (Rosenblum, 1980; Svallfors, 2004). The Social Democratic Party employed interventionist policies and invested large sums of financial capital into the welfare, even during the economic crisis after the late 1920s when other

countries were looking to free market solutions. Social infrastructural investment had been working well as a political strategy since the 1930s (Berg and Erlingsson, 2009, p.72) and Therborn (1996) described this as a “unique” moment in the development of Western¹⁷ liberal democratic history. But by the 1970s, global economic changes began to emerge that affected the popularity and the feasibility of the social democratic movement. The historical foundations of Swedish Social Democracy built on socialist and redistributive Left-wing political ideology of an interventionist ‘big State’ investing heavily in welfare programmes started to unravel.

Mid-1970s to 1990s: The Emerging Crisis of Swedish Social Democracy

The Social Democrats hegemony became destabilised with the emergence of ideological alternatives in the context of stark global economic challenges from the mid-1970s, and these conditions eventually engendered “growing societal tensions, frustration and alienation” with the social democratic status quo (Berman, 2012, p.242). The social structure of Sweden was also changing and several drivers, including post-industrialisation and a changing class structure (Therborn, 1976) with a greater number of middle class white-collar workers (Hancock, 1972, p.265), were reasons for substantial political transformations in Sweden. Arguably the key driver for the emergence of change was the 1970s global economic recession, which had hit Sweden’s export industry hard and meant that questions

¹⁷ The terms *West* and *Western* are references to European democracies, with a developed/developing capitalist mode of production.

about the sustainability of the country's expensive welfare programme were being asked by conservative and neoliberal reformers who claimed that Sweden could be more economically productive with a smaller welfare provision (Furniss and Tilton, 1977, p.144). The conservatives argued that the implementation of the social democratic programme for previous 40 years, which consisted of overly generous benefits and high levels of social security, came at too high a financial cost, which could no longer be maintained in the same way.

The conservative critics did eventually win the ideological battle, and to fully understand why the Social Democratic Party and its social welfare programme was derailed has to be contextualised with an elaboration of the economic turbulence of the time. During the first few years of the 1970s, the OPEC [Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries] oil price hikes triggered a chain reaction of events that culminated in a global economic crisis by 1972 (for a detailed exegesis see Glyn, 2006; Harvey, 2007). As Bergh & Erlingsson (2009) noted, the result was that national economies, including Sweden's, stagnated and the circulation of capital slowed due to decreased growth and inflation leading to stagflation. These global structural shifts hit Sweden hard due to 40 years of expensive, in terms of the total GDP expenditure, public spending on welfare reform. To compound the economic crisis, Sweden had historically been a nation of manufacturing and exports and this output (with very high levels of taxation) offset the costs of social welfare. When the global economy took a downturn, demand for the products of Sweden's major industries (including: processing, shipbuilding, steel, and mining) were substantially reduced (Sejersted, 2011). By the mid-1970s, the Social Democratic Party was forced to make important policy decisions to withstand the

impact of the oil crisis on the national economy, which had for 40 years relied on continuous income from exporting goods to service the cost of social welfare. Sejersted (2011, p.334) described this conjunctural moment in profound terms: “the idyll of Social Democracy’s golden era had now been violated, and Social Democrats had to adapt to a new reality”.

It was at this point in the development of the social democratic movement that the Right-wing of the Party, who could be described more accurately as liberal, in economic terms than socialist, began to become effective (Hvinden, 2010). With the emergence of changing conditions, characterised by a resurgence of the political Right within and outside of the Party, the critics of social democracy, who had been silenced by the social progress and the popular support during 1917-1970s, had an opportunity to express dissent. In addition to the dissenters within the Party, outside of it the critics on the political far-Left argued that the Social Democrats maintained the capitalist-worker relationship by managing exploitation rather than abolishing it, which could practically manifest as an obscuring the relations of production (Brah, 1995). Equally oppositional were those who claimed that the social democratic project was a “pattern for economic failure” with its high costs and dis-incentivisation of production (Rydenfelt, 1984), in other words equity was too high a price to pay. These tensions were brought to the fore in the turbulent 1970s in the face of a faltering economy (Rydenfelt, 1984). The interventionist social policy that had for 40 years been argued in emergent neoliberal terms as an investment for growth was now being seen as an expensive experiment that was bankrupting Sweden (Rydenfelt, 1984). With the threat of economic depression and falling living standards, popularity for the Social Democratic Party was

severely dented (Rosenblum, 1980), and the election in 1976 became symbolic because the Social Democratic Party, under the premiership of Olof Palme, had failed to convince the electorate that he nor the Social Democratic Party were capable of lifting Sweden from its slump with social democratic policies (Andersson, 2006; Sejersted, 2011)¹⁸. This failure in leadership cost the Social Democratic Party who had governed Sweden for 40 years up to the 1976 General Election, and they were defeated by a Right-wing coalition comprising of the *Centre Party*, *Peoples Party* and the Swedish Conservative Party called the *Moderates*. Historical Swedish social democracy, characterised by socialism and redistributive policies, had significantly arrived at its first defeat.

Geo-politically, this was a time of enormous change and turbulence with fuel prices at an all-time high and industrialisation of large parts of the less-developed world creating competition for production (Glyn, 2006; Hvinden, 2010; Ryner, 1999). Sweden's economy was then (and still is now) vulnerable to convulsions in the international market because of its reliance on exports, and consequently in the late 70s when trade was slowed by the fiscal crisis, the Swedish Krona became dramatically devalued and sparked a rise in unemployment, reaching 9%, a rate that was a historical high for Sweden (Childs, 1980; Glyn, 2006; Hvinden, 2010; Ryner, 1999). The social democrats pledge from the 1930s of unbridled full

¹⁸ There is an adjacent story that unfolded during this period. For the first time the once steadfast and durable relations between the LO and Party became severely strained. The basis for this tension stemmed from the disagreement between the Party and a prominent economist within the LO, Rudolf Meidner and his proposed policy of wage-earner funds, which eventually ended with Palme rejecting the plan and subsequently losing the election in 1976. However, the Social Democrats were re-elected with Palme in 1982 and the Meidner plan was implemented, albeit in a weaker form and ill fated because the social democratic decay had set-in (for a detailed account see Erixon, 2008; Quirico, 2012; Viktorov, 2006).

employment had not materialised and the socialist programme itself was becoming unfeasible.

The challenge for the new Right-wing Coalition government in 1976 was to stabilise the economy, which they failed to do and by the late 1970s Sweden was heading towards economic meltdown (Childs, 1980; Ryner, 1999) and it was a situation that allowed the first elements of neoliberalisation to encroach into Swedish politics (Bergh and Erlingsson, 2009). Global pressures to reform the Social Democratic Party with a new politics espousing choice, competition and markets was emerging, as well as mass discontent with high levels of unemployment and economic instability. Not only was there mounting pressure from the electorate to protect Sweden from financial downturn, Bergh and Erlingsson (2009, p73) claim that the “ideological fuel to force” welfare retrenchment came from a new generation of economists who had taken inspiration from Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan who were at the time implementing and globalising neoliberal policies. Bergh and Erlingsson (2009) suggested that with Sweden’s economic meltdown, the moment was ideal for the Right-wing ‘modernisers’ to instil a new set of political policies. Bergh and Erlingsson (2009) also document that the appetite for this change was given weight by influential Right-wing think-tanks that provided the evidential justification for such a shift in ideology and policy.

The Social Democratic Party shifted from the political ground that it had occupied for the previous 50 years and began to pursue market-based solutions to the economic problems. The foundational Swedish social democratic policies characterised by socialism and redistributive policies were being replaced by

gradually more Right-wing neoliberalism (Hvinden, 2010). The economists, led by Ingvar Carlsson who would later become a Right-wing Prime Minister, advocated reforms to find financial contraction through capitalisation of State provision (Blyth, 2002; Childs, 1980; Glyn, 1999, Sejersted, 2011). The 1980s was a time of significant adjustment, not only in terms of social and economic policy, and also at the ideological level bringing into being a “redefinition of Swedish social democracy” (Ryner, 1999, p.40; Oskarson, 2005) marking a new politics, one that was shifting culture from an emphasis on solidarity, inclusiveness and common good, to one that was emergently stakeholder-led, individualised and privatised, for example in education (Beach and Dovemark, 2007).

Furthermore, the world’s major economies were becoming more interconnected and finance was becoming internationalised after World War II. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank were institutions with a global remit responsible for facilitating the flow of capital through opening up borders, market liberalisation, and imposition of deregulation and pegging exchange rates (Glyn, 2006). Initially, Sweden had rejected this new international monetary system, to maintain its neutrality and independence (Sejersted, 2011); however, the hangover of the social expenditure from the decades of social democratic governance, historically high unemployment, combined with the global economic downturn, meant that by 1985 the pressure to implement neoliberalisation was too great. Echoing Margaret Thatcher’s economic (neo)liberalisation in Britain, in 1985 the Swedish money markets were first formally deregulated (Ryner, 1999, p.62) paving the way for further reform in 1991. At this time the budget statement forcefully proposed a version of the *Swedish Model* that was not based on social democratic

principles of universal equitability, rather it explicitly prioritised economic stability at the expense of welfare. The budget statement asserted that:

[I]n the long run it is not possible to safeguard employment in an economy which has a higher inflation rate than the surrounding world. In order to protect employment and prosperity economic policies in the next few years... will have to aim at a permanent reduction in inflation. This task must take priority over all other aims and ambitions (Notermans, 1993, p.133).

The premise of this budget statement was to control inflation by even deeper cuts to spending on, and commodifying, social security with the aim of stabilising the economy and driving growth by accelerating the agenda for neoliberalisation introduced in the 1980s. These measures were introduced despite the already retrenched financing during the early 1980s, which had not led to economic stability and resulted in the unemployment rate reaching 9%, and the economy precariously on the verge of collapse by 1991 (Ryner, 1999, p.64). Continuing the 1980s implementation of neoliberal policies and austerity measures, the Social Democratic Party, now back in government led by new ideologues, encouraged and deepened the marketisation of State provision and reduced taxation further to cutback welfare in the 1990s (Ryner, 1999, p.64). The *Swedish Model* that was once celebrated for its social welfare was now prioritising the economy over everything else and the Social Democratic Party were beginning to look like they were no longer the workers' Party.

1990s-2000s A Deepening Crisis for Swedish Social Democracy

The instability of the Swedish social democratic order had by the 1990s become to be described by some commentators as a *crisis* (Ankarloo, 2008; Devine, 2006; Ryner, 1999) of social democracy as conceived during the *Golden Years*. Since the introduction of neoliberalism in Sweden during the 1980s, what can be seen three decades on is an acceleration of marketisation that was bringing a more aggressive form of capitalism to everyday lives and entrenching class stratification (Glyn, 2006, p.168). The 1980s set in motion a radical retraction of welfarism, which by the 1990s had “been hallowed out to facilitate self-regulating markets” (Ryner, 1999, p.39) in provisions such as transport, health and education; all of which created the perception that there is a “crises of Swedish Social Democracy” (Ankarloo, 2008), or even the onset of post-welfarism¹⁹. Not only was this a reconstruction of political hegemony, culturally the move was antithetical to solidarity which had been the mechanism for social stability for so many years.

Towards the end of the 1990s, the crisis of social democracy emerged as part of the ideological transition of the Party and the waning electorate support, both of which was moving away from a commitment to State welfare provision and solidarity. Between 1917 and the 1970s there was a maintained Swedish commitment to fairness, reducing social class inequality, and solidarity with the oppressed people. This was successfully achieved by investment in public services; nevertheless, these commitments were gradually being undermined by

¹⁹See Therborn (2008a, pp.161-164) for a detailed theorisation of post-welfarism.

an emergent culture and politics of individualism and private possessivism (Oskarson, 2005). The shift to a neoliberal form of social democracy, one that was characterised by relatively weaker regulation of capitalism and reforming State intervention committed to reducing inequality had become the new hegemony (Espen-Andersen, 1990; 1999; Normann, Ronning and Norgaard, 2009)²⁰. Furthermore, the *consent*²¹ to the libertarian shift in the *Swedish Model* replacing socialism grew stronger amongst the new generations of Swedes who elected a Right-wing coalition government in the 2006 General Election.

In 2006, a centre-Right coalition of four parties led by Fredrik Reinfeldt defeated the Social Democratic Party²². Reinfeldt's mandate was based on reversing "mad... socialist... welfare politics" (Reinfeldt, 2008) and implementation of what he called "The *New Swedish Model*" [my emphasis]. The "new" model was about promoting a new culture of self-interested individualism, where people believed in making their own way without State intervention. Reinfeldt was also explicit that reform would include accelerating the expansion of neoliberal policies of competitiveness in schooling, health and transport. In 2010 he and his *new Swedish Model* was re-elected by the Swedish electorate.

The 2006 and 2010 elections had historical significance because the Social Democratic Party had governed Sweden for 12 consecutive years, and all but 10 years of the previous 89. The defeat by the political Right-wing presented for the

²⁰ This change in the model of social democracy has been extensively researched, see for example: Bergh and Erlingsson, 2009; Rothstein and Lindbom, 2004; Bergqvist and Lindbom, 2004.

²¹ *Consent* and *consenting* is italicised to denote its deployment with a Gramscian inflection, which is discussed in chapter 3 as being in relation to an on-going class struggle.

²² See Appendix B to historically contextualise and map this change from Social Democratic Party rule.

Social Democratic Party a statement from the Swedish electorate who had chosen an alternative to welfarism, even in its diluted form (Ankarloo, 2008). The Social Democratic Party as the home of the working class had now seemingly become outmoded, with traditional social democracy no longer appealing to the masses who had embraced the new culture of individualism over politics of class solidarity. This new culture was also accompanied by the drop in membership to the LO, which in turn contributed to the decline of the strength of the Social Democratic Party. Since the 1970s to the turn of the century, membership dropped significantly, and this trend is set to continue with the change from compulsory to voluntary membership in many sectors, for example higher education (Visser, 2006).

Some political analysts, such as Berman, 2013; and Korpi and Palme, 2003, suggested that the instability and then the crisis for social democracy was instigated, partly, by a reconfiguration of the class structure in contemporary Sweden. As Swedish post-industrialism emerged, workers became engaged in service sector and tertiary employment rather than traditional manual work, and as a result, working class consciousness and practices were gradually degenerating. This analysis of class consciousness has been buttressed by the observation that public services in Sweden have been increasingly quasi-privatised from the 1980s without significant mass resistance. This lack of resistance could mark an ideological, political and cultural evolution from pro-worker socialist politics, culture and practices to libertarian individualisation (Bergh and Erlingsson, 2009; Judt, 2010).

A deepening crisis for social democracy has seemingly spread throughout all aspects of contemporary Swedish society, including the education system, which has historically been one of the foremost tools for creating the socio-cultural conditions for establishing *consent* to the social democratic hegemony. It was noted earlier in this chapter 2 that education became a central concern for the social democratic movement during its formation to establish a more worker-led society and progressive socio-cultural politics (Gordon, 2009; Sejersted, 2011). In relation to the latter, Sweden is experiencing new dynamics in political and ethno-racial formation, and along with education, these are important mechanisms for cultural production in contemporary Sweden as part of the neoliberal shift in social democracy. Documenting these will serve as background contextualisation in this study for the articulation of class consciousness and moments of struggle in hegemony.

I now briefly describe the transitions in education, and ethno-racial, and political landscape. These terrains are significant in terms of shaping cultural formation, and it is where consciousness is conditioned, and the on-going transitions makes *contemporary* Sweden an interesting case to explore class consciousness, practices and struggle. This discussion also is preamble to the theoretical development of Gramscianism with respect to class struggle in cultural forms in the next chapter (3).

Sweden and the Education System

The pattern of changes to the Swedish political and economic structure has also been reflected in the changes to schools and universities. During the 1940-70s successive social democratic governments had expanded access to education and since 1962, 6-7 year old Swedes experienced 9 formal years of non-selective common State schooling (Dovemark and Beach, 2014, p.584). This model was heralded as the antidote to social inequality, thus to the point of universalising access from childcare to PhD study and beyond. It was an ideologically driven restructuring of a once elitist education model to provide access to working class people. The success of this endeavour established a significant popularity for political project of social democracy, and through the socio-cultural production of class formation in consciousness *within* educational institutions, the liberal progressive mentality prevailed, which epitomised the social democratic movement during its *Golden Years*.

From the 1980s the changes to the education system were claimed by the neoliberal Right-wingers to be putting an end to “inflexibility, inefficiency and falling standards” (Beach, Gordon and Lahelma, 2003, p.3; see also Ball and Larsson, 1988). Education at this time was being explicitly used ideologically and the flashpoint came between 1992-94, when Sweden’s economic problems deepened (Linblad, Lundahl, Lindgren, and Zackary, 2002). As part of the education reforms, neoliberalisation spread to the public education system, which was purposefully being opened-up through a process of deregulation and marketisation (Beach, 2010; Lindensjö and Lundgren, 2000). This took the form of a choice agenda, mainly facilitated by a school vouchers programme inspired by the Reagan neoliberal free market model. Furthermore, this period was also marked with the

radical introduction of some schools that were being administered by private sector profit making-companies and funded by the State through taxpayer monies. Broadly based on the American Charter schools, these were called *Free Schools (friskolor)*²³ and they were being championed as the panacea for the purported Social Democratic Party failings in education (Wiborg, 2010). The universalist and comprehensivised education system created by the Social Democrats during the 1930/40s-70s was becoming rapidly undone with shifts towards a fragmented, selective and marketised schooling system (Linblad, Lundahl, Lindgren, and Zackary, 2002). Such was the pace of these reforms, that Sweden went from being a highly regulated welfarist social democratic education system, to one which was “one of the most decentralized in the OECD” within 10 years (Linblad, Lundahl, Lindgren, and Zackary, 2002, p.285). The 1990s was a time for profound reshaping of Sweden, and the social democratic hegemony had become displaced to a larger extent. Education in Sweden had been reconfigured from a central component in the formation of the social democratic movement, in which it could plausibly have been characterised as being at the forefront of the class struggle, to being an engine of neoliberalising social democracy.

Another important change during the 1990s was the exponential increase in immigration numbers. It was at this time that racialised social divisions began to noticeably emerge in education and society at-large (Pred, 2000).

²³ At the time of writing, the Charter schools are still the minority of the total provision of Swedish schools (Sweden.SE, 2015). After Sweden’s decline in global education league tables, these Charter schools are deeply unpopular with the working class and Left-progressive politicians, to compound this seeming failure of neoliberalism the largest for-profit chain and pioneer of Free Schools, John Bauer Education, in 2013 withdrew sponsorship due to business failings, all of which has raised doubts about the sustainability of the programme.

Ethno-‘Race’²⁴, Socio-Cultural, and Political Transitions in Contemporary Sweden

While in the General Election in 2014 the Social Democratic Party returned to power, the hegemony of the Party has been significantly weakened²⁵. Whilst Stefan Löfvén, the leader of Social Democratic Party and Prime Minister, has won power back after an 8-year absence, the Party he leads in government is a minority. This is after large sections of the electorate swung from the Right-wing coalition led by Reinfeldt, and instead of voting for the Social Democrats (many of whom would have been returning to the Party), voted for the popular nationalism of the far Right-wing Sweden Democrats Party (*Sverige demokraterna*), who have instigated a debate on immigration and ‘race’, and Swedish identity.

Immigration has contributed to the profound changes to Sweden’s social structure, cutting through *classed* stratification and differentiation with ethno-racial dynamics. Before the 1990s Sweden had not experienced significant population changes through immigration. However, after the 1990s Sweden’s population changed from homogenous white European (Kent, 2008) to one that was much more culturally and ethno-racially diverse, and changing at a rate more rapidly than ever before in

²⁴ While it is not a matter of immediate concern in this study, for clarity it is worth noting that inverted commas are deployed (i.e. ‘race’) to denote that racial distinctions are social constructions and not absolute biological categories. The term has little biological referent and is therefore a politically motivated pseudo-science. Whilst ‘race’ does have experiential implications (i.e. racially motivated discrimination), there is little substantive in claims of *natural* racial categorization. *Class* is deployed without inverted commas in this thesis to denote that it has analytically separate *objective* and *subjective* dimensions in the study, see Part two chapter 4 for a fuller discussion of the deployment of *objective* and *subjective* in this study.

²⁵ See Appendix B for a statistical representation of this.

its history. In this situation, which is continuing in 2015, new political and social formations are emerging.

Whilst it has been noted that the exponential increase and speed of demographic change is unprecedented, immigration into Sweden is not a new phenomenon. Scandinavians, Germans, and Walloons have moved across national borders throughout the Northern region of Europe for hundreds of years (Hahn, 2013, p.5), but crucially it was only from the 1970s that people from outside of Scandinavia and northern Europe began to come to Sweden. This manifestation has significantly increased and expanded to include a new wave of immigrants from the Global South since the 1990s (Sejersted, 2011) adding a new and different ethno-racialised inflection to the social structure.

A significant part of this diversification in demographic structure has come about because of displaced peoples from the developing and underdeveloped countries of the Global South because of the fall-out from the recent wars in Iran, Iraq, Chile, Argentina, Peru, Somalia, Kurdistan, Libya, Eritrea and most recently Syria; who have found resettlement in Sweden (Jederland and Kayfetz, 1999; Migrationsverket, 2011; 2014). Still in line with its progressive, cosmopolitan, liberal and social democratic tradition, Sweden by 2007 accepted amongst the highest proportion of refugees and asylum seekers by international comparisons, and the highest number compared to the other Nordic countries, from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Migrationsverket, 2014; United Nations Refugee Agency, 2007). The war in Syria at the beginning of the millennium has also added to this trend of political refugees from the Global South arriving in Sweden, and the

Swedish authorities predicts this to continue. The total number of immigrants in Sweden by 2014 was at an all-time statistical high point from 1960, reaching 1.5 million and the continued increase in levels of immigration was significant for the population profile for a country with a population of 9.4 million, which, as mentioned earlier, has only had a history of significant immigration since the 1970s (Migrationsverket, 2011; 2014).

These profound population changes have had significant social impacts on Sweden, particularly bringing a cultural, religious and linguistic variety to Sweden, especially to the larger urban cities. Despite the very brief and temporary popularity of the nationalistic New Democracy Party (*Ny Demokrati*) between 1991 and 1994 during the economic crash discussed earlier, Swedish people have often been labelled *too nice* and *too tolerant to entertain the idea of racism* (Pred, 2000; Widfeldt, 2001; 2007). But this presumption of immunity to xenophobia and racism is contrary to emergent evidence that suggests that the demographic changes in Sweden have been accompanied by an increase in tensions framed by subtle cultural racism, as well as more overt, direct and violent displays of racist nationalism (Bideke and Bideke, 2007; European Commission's Euro Barometer 2006; European Network Against Racism, 2006, 2009; Gauci, 2009; Pred 2000). For example, along with homes that have been advertised to sell to people of "Swedish origin" only, there have been well-publicised claims of discrimination in the jobs markets, specifically applicants with 'immigrant' sounding names not being interviewed (The Local, 2013a; The Local, 2013b). The derogatory term *Svartskallar*, approximately translated as 'nigger', is more in common parlance to describe non-White Swedes, particularly among working class populations

situated in the suburbs (Hahn, 2013), and this is in line with the emerging ethno-racialised socio-cultural dynamics in Sweden being played out as part of everyday lived life. This is reconfiguring the class cultural politics and formation established during the development of the social democratic hegemony.

Many commentators have expressed concern that far-Right tendencies have entrenched the political system more deeply than ever before²⁶, and this is being felt on the streets where immigrants are becoming more demonised. The rapid increase in popularity of the far-Right populist Sweden Democrats in recent elections is significant for the experiences of people in a country that has for so long been committed to a culture of fairness and tolerance as part of social democratic egalitarianism. It went from featuring on the political map with a minuscule 2.9% of the total votes in 2006 and no seats, to 12.9% with 49 seats in 2014²⁷. The Sweden Democrats cannot be any longer considered to be a protest vote as they might have been, like the *Ny Demokrati* during the economically turbulent 1990s for the normally social democratic Swedes. Even with its publicised roots in Nazism that should compromise its image of the tolerance generally assumed to characterise Swedishness, the Sweden Democrats have been successful in rebranding and toning down its ethno-racial nationalism and policies of enforced assimilation (Widfeldt, 2007)²⁸ and closed border immigration

²⁶ See Appendix C for an explanation of the rise far-Right in Swedish politics.

²⁷ See Appendix B to statistically contextualise the exponential rising popularity of this Party.

²⁸ A side issue that is appropriate to note here is that Sweden has an interesting history of social engineering. In the celebration of social egalitarianism during the *Golden Years* of social democracy, what is often missed is that Sweden practiced eugenics until 1975, when it was made illegal. *Eugenic socialism*, as it was termed, was part of the social democratic project in which economically inactive members of society had access to welfare but were sterilised so that their right to procreate was denied. This was not a eugenics programme that embarked on ethnic cleansing but rather it was an economically motivated policy to ensure efficiency, productivity and by coercive means, national unity through equal contribution to society. For a fuller discussion see Spektorowski and Mizrachi, 2004.

policies. The nationalistic and anti-immigrant platform of promoting Swedish cultural values and needs of native, white and working class Swedes; all with the veneer of democratic respectability, has gained them sustained electoral success, with a pivotal role in government and influence in cultural formation.

Implications of the History of Swedish Democracy

This chapter (2) has provided an overview of the history of Swedish social democracy and its hegemonic development from the *Golden Years*, which established Sweden as the nation representing the height of social, cultural and political progress – to the point of being regarded as the most celebrated for egalitarianism; to its contemporary conjuncture where there is a *crisis* in Swedish social democracy. This crisis has established itself as part of neoliberalisation and various transitions in ethno-racial, socio-cultural and political transitions.

This chapter (2) has also identified significant themes that the study was designed to explore within the problematic of class consciousness and socio-cultural forms of struggle in hegemony. The destabilisation and crisis that Sweden is described to be going through (Ankarloo, 2008; Glyn, 2006; Ryner, 1999; Therborn, 2008b) creates an excellent temporal and spatial opportunity to elaborate significant themes related to the problematic of class struggle, and locate this within educational and ethno-racial dynamics (see chapter 4 where I discuss the recruitment of participants as related to this). Particularly interesting for class struggle is exploring the way that class inequality is being reported as being lived

as part of the new *Swedish Model*, specifically in neoliberal times and the rise of far-Right politics related to immigration. Within this line of enquiry about inequality and its intersections, it is interesting to explore the mechanisms that maintain the socio-cultural hegemony of social democratic principles. Principles of social fairness and liberal progressivism that the movement was founded may *still* be prevalent in consciousness in contemporary Sweden despite the current decline of the Party and racialised widening class inequality. Furthermore, it was once the case that education served to create the socio-cultural conditions for establishing social democracy, but it has been significantly reconfigured in neoliberal times, and no longer functions as the mechanism of class conscious cultural formation.

Integral to these points about significant transitions in Sweden is the issue of perceptions of possibilities and alternatives that are feasible. For instance, *how feasible is social democracy in the contemporary neoliberal moment when its traditional principles seem to have degenerated? And how does this articulate with class consciousness?* Earlier it was noted that social democracy had sought to reform capitalism rather than transgress and radically reconstitute it, meaning that the exploitative relations of production were still intact, and with neoliberalisation, now appear to have manifested in significant inequality. For the exploration of class consciousness, it is particularly interesting when people begin to report their criticism of the status quo, which gives the heuristic opportunity to theorise the potential impetus of cultural formation for class consciousness and struggle.

Pursuing these socio-cultural explorations at the level of the individual at this deepening and therefore compelling crisis moment in Sweden's social democratic

history is necessary for the research problematic, which is to understand the possibility of class struggle, manifesting in complex ways in historical materiality. This problematic is drawn from the Marxist theoretical orientation guided by Antonio Gramsci's intervention on the terrain of historical materialism, which focused on the importance of class struggle through cultural forms as part of everyday experiences. To appreciate this theoretical development, it is necessary to have an understanding of how Gramsci arrived at this point as a result of witnessing the failure of various communist revolutions, which engendered a crisis for the prevailing positivistic Marxist theory of the time. It is the task of the next chapter (3) to outline this failure of the theory for revolution, particularly in the context of the development of social democracy in Sweden from the late 19th century.

Chapter 3: Theoretical and Philosophical Marxism as a Social Science

In fact, the internal obstacles seem almost greater than external difficulties. For even though the question "where from?" presents no problems, the question "where to?" is a rich source of confusion. Not only has universal anarchy broken out among the reformers, but also every individual must admit to himself that he has no precise idea about what ought to happen. However, this very defect turns to the advantage of the new movement, for it means that we do not anticipate the world with our dogmas but instead attempt to discover the new world through the critique of the old. Hitherto philosophers have left the keys to all riddles in their desks, and the stupid, uninitiated world had only to wait around for the roasted pigeons of absolute science to fly into its open mouth.

(K. Marx, 1843)

This chapter provides the broad theoretical and conceptual underpinning for the handling of the descriptive analysis and subsequent development of an explanatory critique. The fieldwork for this study will be explained specifically by situating it within the context of the Marxist research problematic, focussing on exploring, reporting and critically explaining what is going on in respect to class consciousness in contemporary Sweden, and the possibility of class formation for class struggle for transcending the status quo.

The first section of the chapter begins with discussing the 19th and early 20th century development of both, Marxism as scientific theory, and social democracy in Sweden. It is pertinent to note that this thesis is concerned with the development of social democracy particularly in the context of a communist revolution *not* materialising in Sweden (and not becoming long-term in Russia), and the ways in which this history manifested in cultural forms of class struggle, culminating in a crisis for Marxist theory. This crisis, post-WW1, for Marxist theory is articulated with historical materialism, which is part of the broader Marxist background within which this thesis is situated. In this thesis, the historical materialist commitment is conceived as history being open-ended and that class struggle is multi-levelled, multi-faceted and on-going. Second, the idea of constant class struggle is elaborated and specifically developed with Antonio Gramsci's approaches to class struggle in *culture* and *hegemony*. While this study is not a direct *application* of Gramscianism, his scholarship provides theoretical inspiration to contextualise the complexity of class struggle in contemporary Sweden in socio-cultural forms in lived experiences. After discussing Gramsci, the final section is the connective tissue that brings together the key themes of this chapter (3) to detail the research problematic and Sweden as the research site.

19th and Early 20th Century Crisis of Marxist Theory for Revolution

Sweden has been described as a peaceful and harmonious national social formation, especially in relation to the First and Second World Wars where Sweden did not actively take part and remained neutral. However, Håkan Blomqvist notes

that this description is only plausible from the 1930s, as throughout the 19th century Swedish history has many uprisings. These have been attributed to the struggle for improved working conditions and rights²⁹. These concluded, to a large extent, with the 1938 *Saltsjöbaden*³⁰ *Pact*, which essentially enshrined labour entitlement in Sweden and created a system in which there was empowerment, rights and protection for workers in a capitalist mode of production. Sometimes called the *middle way* [between socialism and capitalism], it laid down the rules on collective bargaining, industrial action and disputes – the aim was to establish a compromise agreement between labour and capital (for a fuller discussion see Childs, 1980; Serjersted, 2011).

The early uprisings were also republican revolutionary attempts to overthrow the monarchy (Blomqvist, 1989, p.3). The very first Swedish rebellions were minor and could be linked to the journeymen who came back from Germany and England, and especially France, bringing revolutionary ideas (Clyne, Alfredsson and Höijer, 2005). In the case of the latter country, utopian socialists, such as Henri de Saint Simon and Charles Fourier fighting for republicanism, equality and labour rights, were particularly inspirational for the Swedish political Left, which was still numerically very small but had gained momentum from the beginning of the 19th century (Clyne, Alfredsson, and Höijer, 2005; Therborn, 1984). In an attempt to organise an uprising from Stockholm, a small minority of journeymen organised together with Swedish intellectuals in a secret society formation, led by Olof Renhut and Sven Trägårdh, called *The Red Room* in 1845 to propagate the ideas of

²⁹ The history of struggle for labour rights and social security is documented in the section entitled *The Golden Years* in chapter 2.

³⁰ This is a location name in Sweden where it was signed. The word *pact* is interchangeably used with *agreement*, *compromise*, *consensus* and *treaty*.

communism and socialism in Sweden (Nilsson, 2001; Riazanov, 1927). The meetings were clandestine as the men were afraid of reprisals; in these meetings the leader of an emerging Swedish far-Left was Par Götrek. He described his witnessing of Saint Simon's French communism as the "great experience of his life", and as the Stockholm movement eventually became more overt, he attempted to spread the message in his 1833 book *The Religion of the Future, as Revealed by Saint-Simon* (Nilsson, 2001). Götrek's book was probably the first of its kind in Swedish and the impact of it was small, though significantly it set the precedent for similar politically polemic writings. A year before the *Communist Manifesto* was published in 1848, Götrek published his most influential text: *On the Proletariat and its Liberation by True Communism* in which Götrek outlined his version of Icarian communism for Sweden³¹ based on a religious order and peaceful revolt.

Revolutionary fervour was simmering in Europe and 1848 was a turning point in Swedish history. It was marked by a month of unrest known as the *March riots* that took place in Stockholm. Whilst it is difficult to establish the full impact at least some influence could be attributed to Götrek's works and the newly formed *Scandinavian Association*, which had direct links to the *League of Truth* that was run by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in London (Sperber, 2005). To quell the uprising, the aristocracy fought back with violence to control the rioters and State

³¹ The Icarians were a small group of mostly utopian French idealists led by Etienne Cabet (1788-1856). Cabet and his followers tried to set up a communist colony in Illinois, USA, based upon the principals of peace, faith and justice as expounded in Cabet's book *Voyage in Icaria*, a novel based on Thomas More's social philosophy depicted in his book *Utopia* but the movement was short-lived (Western Illinois University, 2011).

forces killed thirty participants in Stockholm (Nilsson, 2001; Oakley, 1966; Sperber, 2005).

In December of 1848 Marx and Engels's *Manifesto of the Communist Party* was translated by Götrek into Swedish from German, it was the first translation of the work into any language (Nilsson, 2001). Although Marx and Engels were well known at this point in Sweden, especially in the revolutionary circles, the extent to which they had inspired the *March riots* has differing accounts, with Hobsbawm (1975) claiming that *The Manifesto* might not have even registered (Hobsbawm, 1975) and, conversely, Nilsson (2001) claiming that it had a pivotal role. Either way, given that Götrek had up to this point advocated a form of religious and lawful communism, the suggestion of a violent, revolutionary and secular form of communism is likely to have been the impetus of intense debate amongst the politicised journeymen and intellectuals in Stockholm and Karlskrona (Nilsson, 2001), which were the two primary locations for organic formations of radical organisation. Götrek's apparent discomfort with the *revolutionary* Marxist form of communism as outlined in *The Manifesto* was illustrated by the changes he made to the translation. For example, "proletarians of all countries unite!" was rewritten as "the voice of people is the voice of God"; and the term "violent overthrow" was altered to "a radical re-organisation" (Blomqvist, 1989). However, it could also be speculated that these changes were made to avoid rousing the attention of King Oscar I, which would have led to censorship and persecution. Despite the publication of *The Manifesto* and continued unrest of the working class, Sweden by the end of 1848 had not experienced the strength of revolutionary zeal like many countries in Europe.

Although the worker uprisings in 1848 had been quashed, the agitation and revolutionary developments in Paris had made Oscar I apprehensive; allied with this was the emergence of a politicised Swedish workers movement demanding more rights and equity (Oakley, 1966)³². In recognising the potential of revolting workers organised for an insurrection, the King adopted the strategy of cultural and social appeasement rather than political repression, through retracting some prohibitions that disallowed workers to produce politically provoking material to challenge the order of things (Oakley, 1966)³³. This would later lead to the creation of two newspapers: *The voice of the people* [Folkets Röst] and *Reform* (Nilsson, 2001) which would play a role in developing a working class culture in later years, especially as part of the establishing of social democratic hegemony, as discussed earlier. Sweden followed many other countries in Europe by instigating a series of reforms to pacify workers during the 1850-60s, including more access to representative Parliamentary democracy, though this was far from universal suffrage. These reforms may have been the first steps to workers establishing a political footing, however, full representation was still some way off as access to democracy was via the purchasing of voting rights, which was beyond the financial reach of most workers (Nilsson, 2001). The reforms during the mid-1800s were in no way a democratisation of the Swedish socio-political order (Blomqvist, 1989; Nilsson, 2001; Oakley, 1966), but it did temporarily appease the so-called *red*

³² See Oakley, 1966, chapter XVII for a fuller discussion of the rule of King Oscar I; and for the subsequent more conservative rule of Charles XV see Andersson, 1955.

³³ The strategy of appeasement adopted by the ruling class could be understood in relation to Antonio Gramsci's concept of *consent* building to undermine worker consciousness and radical action. This argument is elaborated later in this chapter.

threat with the veneer of social progress, which was used to ward off challenges to the ruling class in Sweden, seen in France, particularly Paris, at the time.

While the 1848 communist revolutions in Europe aiming to demolish the existing social order were thwarted, the masses poor living conditions and food shortages meant that the revolutionary appetite did not dissipate (Andersson, 1955; Kent, 2008). The years leading up to the 1880s in Sweden were characterised by agitation of the working class and need for improving their conditions, fighting for more rights, and equitable entitlements. In this maelstrom of hegemonic instability, the seeds of socialist organisation sown in the preceding years by Renhut, Trägårdh and Götrek began to bear fruit with the emergence of a prospective leader for workers, who called for change publically.

August Palm delivered the first of many provocative political public speeches in Sweden in 1881 (see Palm, 1881). Inspired by the developments in Germany, where he had experienced a new vista of the social insurance programme being instated by Otto Von Bismarck (Therborn, 1984), Palm's speech entitled: *What Do the Socialists Want?* outlined his socialist vision for Sweden. In this first polemic lecture seeking populist support, he explained the rationale for workers to struggle for reform:

Is it not horrifying to think that while the magazines and barns are filled with grain, there are many people suffering from hunger? And while coal places are filled, there are many who freeze? My gentlemen, do

you believe it has to be like this if society is justly organized? (Palm, 1881).

The speech was designed to raise consciousness of the gross inequality and lack of fairness in the social structure of Swedish society. Palm was laying out the programme for social transformation based on Social Democratic *parliamentary* socialist ideology, which was different from the revolutionary Marxist one. Significantly, Palm in his 1881 speech explicitly stated that private property and the institutions of marriage and religion would not be abolished under social democratic rule (Palm, 1881). This was an important distinction from some Marxists who around the same time called on revolutionaries to abolish the State and the institutions of the status quo like the church to install a dictatorship of the proletariat (Marx, 1970 [1875]). Palm's speech also advocated patriotism (Palm, 1881), which seemed to be at variance from the position that most Marxists held about advocating internationalism. He went on to say that the Swedish programme would be based on negotiation and compromise to achieve betterment for workers (ibid.). Palm's speech was to be the prefiguring of the creation of the *Swedish Social Democratic Workers Party* nine years later in 1889, based upon the "foundation of class struggle" with a social democratic flavor (Blomqvist, 1989, p.13)³⁴. Palm had redefined "class struggle" and in his conception it was based on: i) redistribution of wealth, ii) a more equitable society, iii) both of these (i and ii)

³⁴ It is beyond the scope of this study, but in the context of class struggle, it is noteworthy that the Trade Union movement did not establish until 1898 in Sweden (Therborn, 1984, pp.13-14). The Social Democratic Party was the political, social and cultural facilitator of a workers' movement, and the Trade Union and the Party became an integrated mechanism for class struggle. An example of the cooperation between the two is exhibited by the fact that all members of the Trade Union had compulsory affiliation with the Party too. As a Swedish Industrial Relations expert said to me, they were simply "just two branches of a common labour movement", see Appendix D.

were to be facilitated through a programme of welfare. Crucially, for Palm this would be achieved without a violent overthrow of the State. Palm's vision of future society at that time could be described as "welfare capitalism" (Korpi, 1980, p.3). Palm's 1881 and subsequent speeches were designed to do two things: repudiate the fears of the bourgeoisie and liberal bourgeois about expropriation of land and power; and also lay down the cultural, social and political principles of socialism for the formation of the *Social Democratic Workers Party*. This reformist rather than revolutionary strategy for social transformation was different from Marx's and Engels's theory for advancing communism as laid out in *The Manifesto* 40 years earlier, which called for workers' violent insurgency to assert communism as the dominant mode of production. Palm's vision was based on a gradual transition to socialism by working within parliamentary democracy, not a direct assault on the powerful elites and their political infrastructure.

At this point in the mid-1880s, social democracy was emerging as the ideological alternative to bourgeois rule and revolutionary Marxism in Sweden, the former was presented by Palm as unjust and the latter had not materialised as predicted by Marx and Engels in 1848. Palm's ideas had been inspired by leading radical of the time, Ferdinand Lassalle, who advocated social democracy as a feasible solution to the project of establishing a more just society based on socialist ideas. He believed that a new political system would not emerge through a workers' revolution after the inevitable collapse of capitalism led by insurrection (Kun, 1932; Sandbrook, 2007; Tudor and Tudor, 1988)³⁵. The endeavor of the social

³⁵ The doctrine of the inevitability of communism was critically examined by Engels. Published as *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels stressed that the key mistake of the Utopian Socialist, such as Saint Simon in France, was their conception of history in which socialism would be merely

democratic movement, that Lassalle began, was to represent themselves as reformers committed to the emancipation of the working class, and a more equitable society, by advocating policies that synthesized socialism and democracy (Miller and Potthoff, 1986). Lassalle's idealism was a form of socialism that departed from the works of Marx who at the time had advocated a violent overthrow of the system; alternatively, Lassalle suggested that society's transformation to communism could be brought about by a campaign of "legal and peaceful, but unwavering, unceasing agitation" (Lih, 2012, p.4; Hufford, 1973; Sassoon, 1996). Lassalle's strategy meant that socialists and non-violent Marxist formations would organise themselves within the structures of parliamentary democracy to win the support of the masses; and this would be by appeasing the liberal bourgeois and simultaneously appealing to the class interests of workers. In essence, the idea was to establish a Parliamentary Labour Party for workers to promote radical ideals of social transformation (Berman, 1998; Colletti, 1972; Sandbrook, 2007).

From the early 1870s, constitutional and parliamentary governance was replacing feudal and aristocratic rule across Europe, and in these times the social democratic movement was feasible as a pragmatic alternative. Although Lassalle died in 1864, Lassalle's form of social democracy manifested in a practical form in the shape of political parties throughout many European countries between the 1880s to the turn of the 20th century. At its inception, the Swedish Social Democratic Party

discovered by workers, this would be the course of history after workers had accumulated class consciousness. Engels posited socialism as something that was material and would emerge in lived human conditions, rather than an abstract and unreal idea, hence he wrote, "capitalism creates its own gravediggers" (Engels, 1880). These 19th century debates about strategies for revolution, and the lessons learnt, would be the contextual foundations for Lenin and then Gramsci to develop their interpretation of Marxism, as discussed later in chapter 3.

followed its more established German counterparts and thus aligned itself to the social democratic *Gotha Programme of 1875*, which was stated in the idiom and vision that Palm had announced in 1882³⁶ (Palm, 1882; Spektorowski and Mirachi, 2004; Therborn, 1984). Whilst the social democratic movement was growing, it was by no means a homogenous movement and the reformist strategy of the *Gotha Programme* caused anguish amongst some on the far-Left that favoured insurrectionary revolution rather than reform, and this was beginning to marginalize the radicals in the Party. The social democratic movement was firmly establishing itself as a reformist and parliamentary rather than a revolutionary Party committed to the overthrow of the capitalist State, and this was the major division amongst members in the movement³⁷.

In 1896 Hjalmar Branting was elected to Parliament as the first Social Democratic Party member in Swedish history (Social Demokraterena, 2006). In his student days, he was the organiser of a socialist circle of students called the *Verdandi*, [To Come], arguing for more the equalization of opportunities for people from worker backgrounds to flourish. Before his election, he became a key figure in the social democratic movement when he delivered a speech that built on Palm's five years earlier. In 1886 he advanced a Lassalleian form of socialism that universalized suffrage and welfare, and increased workers' rights. Like Palm, Branting was

³⁶ See Miller and Potthoff, 1986, pp.238-239 for the *Programme of the Socialist Workers Party of Germany, Gotha 1875* and see Hunt (1963, p.132-134) for Lassalle's influence on German social democracy and the Gotha Programme. These strongly contributed to Palm's general thesis that workers were entitled to a fair proportion of wealth that they created, and this could be achieved without a dictatorship of the proletariat.

³⁷The literature about this period seemingly uses the terms "socialist", "communist" and "Marxist" interchangeably and, therefore, involves some interpretation of what is meant because of a blurring of boundaries and definitions. For clarity and following Thomas (1903), I will deploy revolutionary Communist/Marxist to mean a violent overthrow of the State; and reformist, revisionist and socialist as those committed to change via legal parliamentary means.

aiming to shore up support for the social democratic movement as a parliamentary force, whilst distancing itself from Marxist revolutionary communism (see Branting, 1886), which at the time was reinventing itself in Russia and would be realised through the Bolshevik movement (Shub, 1966).

At the time of Branting's election, Lenin was working within the *Russian Social Democratic Labour Party* [RDSLDP] and configuring his own ideas about socialism. In 1901 he had a correspondence sent to Branting requesting information about the political situation for the Swedish social democrats and suggesting "we should like to establish closer contacts with the Swedish and Finnish comrades" (Lenin, 1901). It is likely that at this moment Lenin was garnering support for his revolutionary strategy, which was to be crystallized in the following few years³⁸, and wanted to explore the possibility of working with Branting who had been a critic of the Russian Tsar, thus a common enemy (Åselius, 1994). Whilst Branting was broadly a radical, in that he advocated a level of social insurance to guard against poverty (see Hufford, 1973, p.3), there was little possibility of alliance as Branting was a reformer, advocating gradual change through parliamentary structures.

Branting was in many ways a product of the development of Lassallerianism rather than revolutionary Marxism. During the formative years of Branting, Lassalle's ideas of social reform had gained strength, particularly in the work of social

³⁸ See Lenin (1902a; 1902b; see also Glyn, 2007, p.317; Lih, 2012, p.5; and, Shub 1966, pp.61-90) for an exposition of Bolshevism in relation to reformism and social democracy. It was after Lenin's return from Siberian exile that the RSDLP split into two factions: the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks and in 1903 this division was formalised (Shub, 1966). The Swedes were indirectly involved in the debates between both factions at RSDLP congress, which in 1906 was held in Sweden. These debates would have had a bearing on the Swedish Left in 1917, which had a choice between aligning with the reformism or the revolutionary movement.

democratic exponent and eventual leader of the German Social Democratic Party, Eduard Bernstein in the 1890s, who was a key influence on Branting. Echoing Lassalle, Bernstein also rejected economic and deterministic readings of Marx's works that predicted class antagonisms to culminate in an inevitable emergence of insurrection through workers gaining class consciousness³⁹. By 1897 the social democratic movement was gaining momentum in Germany, Russia, and also in Sweden due to the influence of Branting.

Both the German and Swedish social democratic movements were a broad coalition of ideologies. Bernstein represented the reformist wing of Marxism promoting social democracy as steps leading to the peaceful, social and civil transition to socialism, which he said was an important move to communist revolution. In this vein, Berman (1998, p.4) notes that: "when they accepted the possibility of a peaceful parliamentary road to socialism, these 'socialists' parties evolved into 'social democratic' ones". This ideological shift was a radical departure from the *Communist Manifesto*, where it was stated that "the communist means *can only* be attained by the *forcible overthrow* of" the bourgeois class (Marx and Engels, 1848 [my emphasis]). The Social Democrats suggested that the desperation of the working class would eventually result in a Communist insurrection and in the meantime, social democracy achieve the intermediate goal of more equity and less inequality in the social structure, such as universal education, full employment and insurance (Glyn, 2007)⁴⁰. Colletti (1972) and

³⁹ For a detailed interpretation of Bernstein's social democracy see Colletti, 1972, pp.45-111.

⁴⁰ Therborn (1984, p.16) provides an original explanation suggesting that the labour movement grew particularly fast in Scandinavia (and Germany and Austria) because bourgeois politics were least advanced compared to other countries. This means that the social democratic movement, comprising of mainly workers, were able to exploit the window of opportunity in parliamentary

Therborn (1984) suggest that the social democratic leadership had accounted for the gradual industrialisation at the time, recognising that the propertied class was expanding. The propertied liberal bourgeois were not likely to pursue a violent overthrow of the State nor would they support Marxist communism, which would expropriate their estates, land and wealth. The social democrats were therefore reconfiguring Marxism for their historical conjunctural moment, to have a broad appeal to capture the support of liberal reformers from the propertied class and also workers, both of whom would engage in a period of orderly political transition (Colletti, 1972; Mandel, 2005). Furthermore, Berman (2012) suggests that a key reason for the Social Democrat's gradual electoral success during the late 1800s was the Party's appeal to a wide range of people in Sweden, including liberal bourgeois and radicals of all persuasions and backgrounds. The broad base appeal of the social democrats was at the core of its early development as Axel Danielsson, one of the leaders of the Swedish social democratic movement in 1890 argued:

[The Party] must come in closer contact with the people, in particular the people who do not yet feel themselves revolutionary, but want to improve their political situation. ... We must become a People's Party (Berman, 2012, p.243).

The message from Danielsson echoed that of Bernstein, which was two-fold. First, the social democratic movement would have to organise itself and manifest in the

politics to advance their cause, rather than struggle against State structures. Social Democracy to reform social structure was a pragmatic emergence in this sense.

form of a political Party; and second, for it to be successful, it would need to have a popular appeal based on a *cultural* assessment and needs, as well as a policies of economic redistribution. This appeal would have to cover those living and working in gruelling conditions *and* also it would need to represent those who were a liberal/progressive faction of the petit bourgeois (Colletti, 1972; Kent, 2008; Miller and Potthoff, 1986). By including all peoples and not just the workers, the Party strategy of coalition was promoting the role of everybody as functionaries struggling for social progress.

While Lassalle till his death had consistently positioned himself as a reformist Communist, both Bernstein and Branting from the late 1880s when social democracy was becoming popularised, had begun to soften the radicalism in their rhetoric in favour of reformism (Hufford, 1973). Unlike the more radical members of the movement and others on the far-Left (see Hufford, 1973 p.3), by the 1890s Branting dismissed Marxist communist's claims that the concessions won by the workers from the bourgeoisie State were aiding capitalism to maintain itself through negating class antagonisms. Branting argued that each reform was a small triumph for the labour movement and a step along the path to strengthening the good of social democracy. For both Bernstein and Branting, the strategy of the Social Democrats was revisionism of the existing bourgeoisie State, meaning that progress was worked through parliamentary structures, and insurrectionary communism was not on the agenda as the objective. In other words, their tactic was increasingly *evolutionary* as opposed to revolutionary change (Miller and Potthoff, 1986, p.3), and they started to place an emphasis on the possibility of

being socialist without adhering to Marxist's ideas about the necessity for overcoming the existing State structure by means of insurrection (Hufford, 1973).

However, some Marxist revolutionaries in the movement were becoming increasingly discontented with settling for social democracy. In 1908 Fredrik Ström, who would later become one of the architects of the *Swedish Social Democratic Left Party* (discussed below), wrote to Branting as the new leader of the *Social Democratic Party* complaining about the extent to which the Party were shifting "into a *much too* revisionist, opportunistic, and unprincipled fold" and how it was necessary to "counteract this dangerous tendency" (Sejersted, 2011, p.141). These sentiments would, within a decade, split the Party. In the context of the difficulties of organising class struggle, an important point to abstract from this history is that the Social Democrats were not immune to internal tension, and there were intra power-struggles, for example there were those in the movement and the Party who advocated a stronger Left or Right political orientation to social policy and cultural development (Tilton, 1990).

By the beginning of WWI one, the appeal of *revolutionary* ideas of Marx began to significantly decline within the Social Democratic Party. Socialist *reformers* who were in favour of Parliamentary democracy in the Swedish Social Democratic Party exploited this decline to gain a political advantage that saw the Party deviate from any kind of revolutionary leanings. There were three main reasons for the strengthening of a shift to a more reformist and Parliamentary rather than revolutionary politics.

First, the period up to 1914 was pivotal for the hegemonic establishment of the contemporary Swedish Social Democratic Party because social democracy had won rights and entitlements for people, especially for the industrial and poor agricultural workers, including: suffrage, social insurance, and unionism to name a few (Therborn, 1984); which had characterised the Social Democratic Party as the voice for the dispossessed (Hufford, 1973). For workers and liberal reformers, this was a sign of political and social progress gradually materialising. The success of the Party in improving the lived world for the mass of people meant that it was now seen to be the most feasible of political alternatives. This situation side-lined discussions about the ownership of production and class consciousness to a minority of revolutionaries who were presented as being out of touch with the material existence of the mass of peoples in Sweden (Hufford, 1973). A strong alliance between working class swedes and social democracy was emerging in culture and politics.

Second, the onset of World War I exhibited a lack of international solidarity and class consciousness amongst workers who were fighting themselves. Class struggle and solidarity, it seemed, had been derailed both within and beyond national boundaries. For the Social Democrats, this was evidence that revolution was not possible because there was an absence of an *international* class solidarity, and nationalism appeared to be more important than class consciousness (Berman, 1998).

Third, and in conjunction with the successes of the social democratic movement, workers of the world had not united to enable radical alternatives to emerge⁴¹. Revolutionary communist ideas were becoming less viable in themselves as all revolutionary moments up till then had been defeated whilst in their embryo, and uprisings resulted in *greater* subjugation and repression rather than emancipation with the forcible purging and seizure of freedoms. Social democracy was emerging as a more stable functioning political system than alternatives in Sweden. In other words, it was feasible in the conditions of the moment, and possibly the best that could be hoped for. There was an emergence of social democracy being set in consciousness as the highest state of social and political progress.

Furthermore, the stability of the social democratic order had begun to negate class antagonisms and was rooting itself as the dominant hegemony. Its broad base appeal to include the liberal faction in the bourgeois class, combined with a recognition that a coalition of workers and liberal elites could be a force for progress, was posing uncomfortable questions for Marxist revolutionaries who had advocated social democratic parties as a road to communism. The strategic dilemma of the epoch for revolutionaries was whether or not it was the case that the communist currents in the social democratic movement had settled on Parliamentary democracy, and whether this was the reason for the mass support (Woods, 2010).

During the first years of the 20th century, the tension between reformist and

⁴¹ For a debate about scientific socialism, strategy and tactics at the time see Luxemburg, 1989 [1900]; Lenin, 1970 [1914], and also, Kun, 1932.

revolutionary wings of the social democratic parties across Europe had begun to deepen. In Sweden, the Social Democratic Party was gaining strength, and social democracy was beginning to look like an end in itself. This meant that it was no longer the vehicle through which a communist revolution would take place, as Bernstein and Branting had originally claimed (Sewell, 2014). The difference between Marxism and social democracy over strategy, and the revolutionaries and reformers was becoming clearer. This was marked by the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, taking Russia in one direction – that of violent revolution, and Karl Kautsky leading the German Social Democrats to increasingly govern by consensus and bipartisanship working within, rather than against, the capitalist ruling elites and structures (Childs, 2000; Sewell, 2014; Shadwell, 1925); the latter is the direction that Branting Sweden led between 1907–1925⁴².

The ideological splits were becoming increasingly apparent. In 1914 the Swedish Social Democratic Party was invited to the *International Socialist Conference* at Zimmerwald in Switzerland. Zeth Höglund represented the Swedes at the conference, which was a broad coalition of liberals, reformers and the Left revolutionaries strategically assembled with the objective to establish a joint agreement to unite against the war, in which workers were being slaughtered from all countries (Sewell, 2014)⁴³. At the conference, the simmering feud between Kautsky and Lenin on the fundamental question and strategy regarding revolution

⁴² See chapter 2 for discussion of the social democratic *Golden Years* in Sweden led by Branting.

⁴³ Whilst the united front, which included the Swedes, were unsuccessful in halting the war, they did draft a manifesto and lay the basis for the *Third Communist International* and preface Leon Trotsky's *The Question of the United Front* speech in 1922 (see Trotsky, 1922). The repercussions the conference was influential for the Swedish Left movement in one respect - they named their theoretical journal *Zimmerwald* (see Dalström, 1920). The important aspects of this conjuncture for this study are discussed in later chapter 3.

came to a head and sectarianism broke out. Lenin organised the Marxists into the *Zimmerwald Left group*, which Höglund significantly sided with.

Lenin had become aware of Höglund's politics when as the leader of a radical youth organisation in the Swedish Social Democratic Party, he had taken a strong and outspoken stance supporting the Norwegians right to self-determination against the Swedish ruling class who had threatened to wage war at the turn of the century (Sejersted, 2011). At that time, Höglund wrote an article entitled *Ned Med Vapnen!* (Down With Weapons!) in which he called on the proletariat in both countries to turn their guns on the ruling class rather than fire on fellow workers if Norway were not allowed to become independent of Swedish rule (Liebknecht, 1907; Sejersted, 2011). All-out war did not materialise but Höglund's stance still rendered him a danger to the establishment and he was subsequently imprisoned (Hufford, 1973). It was the kind of class struggle through agitation and political polemic that endeared him to Lenin and other Russian Marxist Revolutionaries (Shrub, 1966).

In praising Höglund, Lenin later wrote that:

The close alliance between the Norwegian and Swedish workers, their complete fraternal class solidarity, *gained* from the Swedish workers' recognition of the right of the Norwegians to secede. This convinced the Norwegian workers that the Swedish workers were not infected with Swedish nationalism, and that they placed fraternity with the Norwegian proletarians above the privileges of the Swedish bourgeoisie and

aristocracy. The dissolution of the ties imposed upon Norway by the monarchs of Europe and the Swedish aristocracy strengthened the ties between the Norwegian and Swedish workers. The Swedish workers have proved that in spite of *all* the vicissitudes of bourgeois policy—bourgeois relations may quite possibly bring about a repetition of the forcible subjection of the Norwegians to the Swedes! - they will be able to preserve and defend the complete equality and class solidarity of the workers of both nations in the struggle against both the Swedish and the Norwegian bourgeoisie (1914 [original emphasis]).

In Lenin's eyes, Höglund was showing himself to be a potential political ally and three years after the Zimmerwald conference, Lenin's correspondence with Alexandra Kollontai revealed his anxiety about rise of a revisionist form of Marxism, and explored the potential of the Swedish Left to join these non-revolutionary Marxists led by Kautsky. Lenin wrote:

[T]he majority of the Swedish Left, *I am sure, are sincere*. This is clear. And it is necessary at all costs to help them before May 12 [at the All-Russia Conference of Menshevik and Affiliated Organisations] to understand *beforehand* the utter banality of social-pacifism and Kautskianism, all the vileness of the Zimmerwald majority, to help them work out a good programme and tactics for themselves, for the new Party (1917a, p.2 [original emphasis]).

Lenin's "new Party" was a reference to the soured relations in the Swedish Social Democratic Party over tactics and strategy, which eventually led to its fracture in

March 1917 (Sejersted, 2011). At this point, Höglund was by now a leading Communist in Sweden. He had led a revolt against the bourgeois programme of the Party, which resulted in him being expelled from the Party in 1905 and again finally in 1907 (symbolically the time of Branting's election that signified the reformist direction of the Party), Höglund subsequently established the "new Party" - *Swedish Social Democratic Left Party* [Vänstersocialistiska Partiet] with other Marxist's (Hufford, 1973; Sejersted, 2011). This was a Party committed to bringing revolution to Sweden, making it a communist republic controlled by workers, farmers and soldiers (Hufford, 1973, p.10). In Russia, Lenin was keen to provide Bolshevik tutelage to Höglund and his supporters. In a letter to his comrade Kollontai who was based in Sweden, Lenin expressed a desire to aid the renegade Leftists in Sweden and bring them into the emerging nucleus of the Russian Marxist revolutionaries (see 1917a). He said:

I am sure you are doing a great deal. One would like to rally and unite the Left to help the Swedes at such a difficult moment in their life. ... [T]he question of the programme and tactics of a *new* socialism, genuinely revolutionary Marxism and not rotten Kautskianism, *is* on the agenda everywhere. ... The struggle with Branting and co. is a serious business: necessity *must* force them to take a more serious attitude to questions of the theory and tactics of revolutionary Marxism (Lenin, 1917a, p. 2-3 [original emphasis]).

Lenin saw the opportunity for the Bolsheviks to extend their revolutionary frontier to Sweden and Kollontai was a key lieutenant. She was assigned as the liaison

officer for the Russians as she read and spoke Swedish, and therefore was asked by Lenin to review the political situation in Sweden with regards to both the Left and Right parties and explore the potential of translating Bolshevik material into Swedish (see Lenin, 1917a).

Lenin was successful in recruiting Höglund and his Swedish Social Democratic Left Party with the aim of following the Russian's lead in building a momentum for revolution in Sweden. This alliance consolidated the shift further to the far-Left in Höglund's leadership and ideology and away from the non-violent, reformist and Parliamentary methods advocated by the Social Democratic Party. A month after the split of the Social Democratic Party, in April 1917 Lenin, speaking at the *Seventh All-Russia Conference of the RSDLP*, offered his support for Höglund and those consorting with him in the Swedish Social Democratic Left Party in opposing the revisionist social democrats⁴⁴:

The only socialist party in Sweden we recognize is the Party headed by Höglund, Lindhagen, Strom, Carleson, and others (Lenin, 1917b).

During 1917 Lenin, and other Bolsheviks⁴⁵, were establishing a close relationship with the revolutionary Left Swedish social democrats, and this was strengthened when he travelled to address their conference in March 1917, and the invitation

⁴⁴ In a letter to Stockholm, Lenin makes a passing reference to the Social Democratic leader, Branting, "attacking" Karl Radek, at the time a RSDLP member, but details about the nature of their disagreement are scant. These personal correspondences hint at, and provide a passing glimpse of, the fractious relationship and personalised rifts between the Leftists in the Social Democratic movement and Party at this crucial moment in history (see Lenin, 1917b).

⁴⁵ Alexander Shlyapnikov had attended the 1914 Swedish Social Democrats' Congress where he outlined the Russian strategy for revolution, which solidified the impasse between Höglund and Branting that culminated in the splitting of the Party in 1917 (see Shlyapnikov, 1917).

was reciprocated in December that year. Through Lenin's correspondences, it was clear that the Bolshevik leader held the Swedish Social Democratic Left Party in high esteem, and especially Höglund who was advancing Marxist-Leninism as opposed to social democracy and German Kautskianism, both of which Lenin described as "robbing Marxism of its revolutionary spirit" (Lenin, 1970 [1915], p.20), depicting his characterisation of the reconstruction Marxism. The Swedish Social Democratic Left Party were moved further to the Bolsheviks and evolved from revisionism and increasingly becoming internationalist, for example by joining the Communist *International* movement (Lenin, 1917c) and were by now unofficially known as the *Stockholm Group of Bolshevik Social Democrats* (Shlyapnikov, 1917).

Meanwhile, the Social Democratic Party in Sweden under Branting was becoming more integrated into parliamentary politics, and there was prioritisation of issues of national concern rather than international solidarity with the communists. This shift to peaceful and reformist politics from his earlier radicalism was marked in the autumn of 1917 when his Party entered a coalition government with the *Liberal Party*, who were committed to parliamentary liberal progressive democracy as opposed to the Bolsheviks Marxist revolutionary overthrow of the existing structures (Hufford, 1973; Sejersted, 2011). At this juncture in history, the Social Democratic Party were not concerned so much about nationalising production, rather Branting's programme was aimed at controlling and regulating capitalism in compromise with the ruling class. Unlike Höglund's *Stockholm group of Bolshevik social democrats* who would have attempted to expropriate private property forcefully (George and Wilding, 1994) and establish democracy through

workers controlling the means of production, the overriding principle for Branting's Swedish social democratic reformers was establishing favourable conditions for capital accumulation with protection for workers against excessive exploitation. It was a programme that had an objective to create an economy that would not only serve capitalism but also facilitate expanding social egalitarianism (Hvinden, 2010; Judt, 2010; Rosenblum, 1980).

Between 1917 and 1919, revolutions were emerging in Russia and Branting's response was to suggest that revolution threatened the gains that workers had made in Sweden. He also suggested to the liberal faction of the bourgeoisie that workers should to be culturally pacified because if revolution came to Sweden, their property and wealth would be threatened with expropriation (Hufford, 1973). This strategy allowed him to enact, with immediacy, reforms to voting rights to expand those made in the 1860s (Sejersted, 2011). Expanding democratic entitlement to include workers who had been disenfranchised would culturally negate the need to revolt (Sejersted, 2011). Branting's strategy was successful, and Hobsbawm illustrates the cultural mood of the time and the lack of appetite for communism:

Compromise and consensus tended to prevail, as even the most impassioned believers in the overthrow of capitalism found the status quo less intolerable in practice than in theory (Hobsbawm, 1994 p.137).

Many proponents of the Social Democratic Party continued their political strategy in the midst of the Bolshevik revolutions, claiming that Marxist ideals were

theoretically desirable but they were deemed to be unfeasible for that moment in history when significant strides had been made in achieving a better standard of living. The ruling class with the revisionist Social Democrats were winning *consent* of their governance from the masses through “compromise and consensus” (Berman, 2003; Hufford, 1973; Spektorowski and Mizrachi, 2004). In other words, they were not ruling through direct and violent repression, and this averted workers’ resistance who felt that progress was being made. The class war at this time was being waged through cultural forms generating appeasement. Social democracy struck the right note at the time by winning wage increases and fringe benefits, which averted the conditions for the emergence of revolutionary class consciousness (Blomqvist, 1989; Hobsbawm, 1994). The ideological flexibility of the ruling class to accommodate consensual politics on their terms and the revisionist social democrats making small strides for workers’ emancipation worked well in the years after the end of WWI, gaining much popularity by campaigning on the platform of the all *Peoples Party* and *nationhood* (Social Demokraterena, 2006)⁴⁶.

The Swedish Social Democratic Left Party’s alliance with the Russians remained until after the War. In 1920, the revolutionary Leftist Swedes were represented by Kata Dalström⁴⁷ and Sven Linderot at the *Second Congress of the Communist International* (Marxist Internet Archive, 1920). It was on this occasion that Dalström reaffirmed the Left Swedes’ commitment to the Bolshevik revolutionary strategy, effectively distancing themselves from Branting’s social democracy. The minutes

⁴⁶ These political ideas – *Peoples Party* and *nationhood* are elaborated in Vartianen, 2001, pp.21-52.

⁴⁷ In literature Kata’s surname also appears as *Dalströms*, *Dahlström*, and also *Dahlströms*. For consistency and clarity, I will adopt *Dalström*.

of the meeting recorded the following statement:

We have placed ourselves unreservedly on the basis of the Communist International and we recognise unreservedly the Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx. The dictatorship of the proletariat and the arming of the working class is for us the precondition of the successful carrying out of the social revolution (Dalström, 1920).

Mindful the way that the *Second International* stalled because it was composed of a variety of tendencies and interest groups that pulled the organisation into different formations, crucially at this meeting the delegates passed 21 Theses that established a set of common conditions of membership to the *Communist International* (see Zinoviev, 1920), thus to consolidate factional differences by establishing a core ideology to organise around.

These conditions were the main agenda of the *Third Congress of the Communist International* in 1921, and in preparation for this meeting, Höglund needed to persuade others in the Swedish Left Social Democratic Party to support the controversial Theses. They were controversial because they were designed to drive a new type of political formation – an international movement of communism led from the central committee, and the leading Communists were unwavering, even dogmatic, in their demands of the affiliates. One intention of the Theses was to empty the Comintern of those people and organisations who did not fit with their interpretation of revolutionary Marxism. Point seven in the Theses caused consternation for some in the Swedish Social Democratic Left Party. It read:

The parties that wish to belong to the Communist International have the obligation of recognizing the necessity of a complete break with reformism and 'centrist' politics and of spreading this break among the widest possible circles of their party members. Consistent communist politics are impossible without this (see Zinoviev, 1920).

The consternation laid in the fact that *The Moscow Theses*, as they became known, had two major implications for the Swedish Social Democratic Left Party (Sejersted, 2011). First, that the Party would need to change its name to the *Communist Party* to denote an emptying of social democratic values; and second, it would have to completely break ties with the Social Democratic Party in Sweden, who would need to be viewed as an enemy to the communists.

The Bolshevik objective was to structure the Comintern on a tightly regulated centralised model to coordinate and organise and the possibility of deviating from the official ideology would be closed-off (Shub, 1966; Sejersted, 2011). It was a top-down revolutionary strategy rather than a revolution that was worker-led, and it was described by Hobsbawm (1994, p.62) as "the Leninist vanguard Party of an elite of full-time professional revolutionaries", meaning that all parties and individuals who were associated were fully committed to exclusively Bolshevism, and there would be no flexibility to these iron rules.

Crucially, Theses 21 stated, "Those party members who fundamentally reject the conditions and Theses laid down by the Communist International are to be expelled

from the party” (Zinoviev, 1920). The Bolsheviks were attempting to establish a membership that was described by Hobsbawm (1994, p.63) as “a corps of utterly committed and disciplined activists, a sort of global strike-force for revolutionary conquest. ... In the imminent battle there could be a place only for soldiers”. In essence, the Bolshevik movement would be a centrally controlled aggressive unit designed to impose communism with force and without concession or compromise. The message was clear, revolution would be imposed from top-down by a cadre of communists, not necessarily by class consciousness *workers* organised for social transformation. It was evident that Lenin believed that class antagonisms would not be enough to organically spark revolutionary change, and even if it did, the workers had little possibility of succeeding, he said social transformation needed to be created by instigating a full frontal class war:

What idiot believes that the armed bourgeoisie can be overthrown without a struggle? It is simply insane to talk about abolishing capitalism without a frightful civil war or without a succession of such wars. ...
Down with the sentimental, hypocritical slogans: [such as] “peace at any price!” [I say] “Long Live the Civil War!” (Shub, 1966, p.163).

The strategy proposed by the Bolsheviks was problematic for Höglund and Carl Lindhagen who were expelled for disagreeing with the seemingly totalitarian nature of the *Theses*. The imposition of top-down centralised control did not fit easy with the federalists, such as Lindhagen, who saw effective implementation of revolutionary tactics to depend on the national situation (Shub, 1966). Lindhagen’s concern with the specificity of individual experiences conveyed his perception that

the world was stratified and local conditions would be important in relation to whether or not revolutionary strategy from a central organisation in Russia would resonate with Swedish experiences. These concerns would later be followed-up by Antonio Gramsci in his development of Marxist revolutionary strategy as a critique of Lenin's rendering of Marxism⁴⁸.

Furthermore, Lindhagen and others could not accept that, as a youth organisation in the Swedish Social Democratic Party and then as part of the Swedish Left Social Democrats, they had been staunchly anti-militarists, and Höglund had even twice spent time in prison after adopting an anti-militarist position against the Swedish bourgeoisie in 1905 and 1915 (Lazic et al, 1986). It was impossible to reconcile this stance, which adopted compromise as the main combat strategy, with new conditions set by the Bolsheviks, which explicitly required a full frontal violent revolution vis-à-vis an armed ruling class. The result was fractionalisation within the Swedish Left Social Democratic Party and it eventually dismantled, with a small number of members re-organising as the *Swedish Communist Party*. Höglund had succeeded in his Bolshevikisation of Swedish Left Social Democratic Party (Lazic et al, 1986) but the *Moscow Theses* have subsequently, as an expression of totalitarianism, been described as a "major error" by Hobsbawm (1994, p.62), resulting in the fatal implosion of the Swedish Left and ultimately the Comintern by 1923⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ See the discussion of culture and hegemony as part of Gramsci's intervention to Marxism in later this chapter.

⁴⁹ This moment in the history of communism is seen by many to be the beginning of its end and the onset of Stalinism. The split has had much exploration, see for example: 2003; Hobsbawm, 1994; Sejersted, 2011.

After the split in the Swedish Left, Höglund continued as the leader of the Swedish Communist Party, and he was elected to the Comintern Executive Committee in 1922. However, this relationship with the Bolsheviks did not last as Höglund's strategic differences came to an impasse and he became known as "*that* renegade Höglund" (Lazic et al, 1986, p.180), meaning that he was politically side-lined in Russia as well as in Sweden. In addition, the Bolsheviks powerbase and popularity disintegrated after several unsuccessful revolutions (Hobsbawm, 2005)⁵⁰. In Sweden the Comintern's immovable insistence that members could not work in alliance with non-Marxist-Leninist parties meant that the Swedish Communist Party were unable to forge coalitions, for example with the disenfranchised Swedish farmers who were a sizable and potentially radical minority. Höglund became disillusioned with the Bolshevik's dogmatic doctrines and centralisation, which was counter-productive and incompatible with the situation in Sweden and eventually, like Lindhagen before him, he left the Comintern in 1924 (Lazic et al, 1986; Sejersted, 2011)⁵¹.

Unlike many others who left the Comintern and drifted back to anti/non-communist and moderate movements, back in Sweden along with Otto Grimlund, Höglund once again founded a new independent *Communist Party of Sweden*, and his Party set about creating a bond between communists, workers and farmers, attempting

⁵⁰ Disunity broke out in Bolshevik Party itself by 1922 after communism seemed to be defeated. In an attempt to recapture the vibrancy of the communist movement, the Party re-assessed its strategy, and in turn introduced a new economic policy (NEP), which caused deep divisions between those who wanted to maintain a radical revolutionary trajectory – led by Leon Trotsky, and those on the right of the Party who wanted to reconsider strategy – led by Nikolai Bukharin (for a detailed account see Hobsbawm, 2005, pp.339-353).

⁵¹ Höglund stood with Norwegian communists on this position who also broke from the Comintern. For a detailed account of the relationship between the two as part of Left movement see Sejersted, 2011, especially pp.147-149).

to garner their support by attacking the Social Democratic Party for adopting bourgeois politics that maintained inequality by eliding it with meagre compromises on more access to rights and entitlements (Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti kongressen, 1924)⁵². Significantly, and in opposition to the tactics advocated by the Bolsheviks, Höglund integrated his Party into Parliamentary politics. Höglund felt that the feasibility of a revolution in Sweden outside of established structure was unrealistic, and the Swedish situation was that radical social transformation would be brought about through Parliamentary Party politics.

A combination of the degeneration of Leninist Russian Communism (and his death in 1924), and the onset of industrial capitalism and parliamentary democracy (Hobsbawn, 2005), meant that the Bolshevik form of Communism that strategized to seize power outside of State structures was no longer appealing to the Swedish workers. In Sweden workers were appeased by parliamentary democracy with its gains and they would not be mobilised by the strategy advocated by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. In Parliament the Communist Party of Sweden fought for, inter alia, safeguarding the eight hour working day, unemployment insurance, and protection of capitalist exploitation of farmers bringing them into insurance schemes— these were populist policies in which the Social Democrats, under Branting, had been successful (Hufford, 1973). What Grimlund and Höglund hoped would distinguish the Communist Party was their position on fully nationalised industries, expropriation of land from the bourgeoisie, protection from capitalist exploitation of farmers, reform of parliament, and republicanism (Sveriges Communist Party

⁵² The complete Manifesto of Höglund's then new Party can be found here: http://snd.gu.se/sv/vivill/party/k_h/manifesto/1924

Manifesto, 1924). It was clear that strategy for the Swedish Communist Party was conceived as nationally orientated to mobilise workers in Sweden rather than imposed by the Bolsheviks from Russia. However, the Social Democrats had established themselves as being in touch politically with workers in Sweden and they had gained massive political and cultural support, and after two unsuccessful years of campaigning, Höglund returned to the Social Democratic Party following Branting's departure, where he was able to establish a Left-wing radical faction, much like the one he had earlier led. The Social Democratic Party's broad constitution showed itself to be compromising and flexible to accommodate Left-wing Marxists who had once split the Party.

Höglund was part of the Social Democrats that began to take root as the most popular Party in Sweden for many decades from 1932 almost uninterrupted. After Höglund left the *Communist Party of Sweden* in 1926, Stalinists resurrected it from the early 1930s, and led it as a minority Party from Russia with the *Socialist Party*. The Socialist Party itself collapsed soon after, due to the popularity of the Social Democratic Party who were succeeding in creating a broad appeal, finding support amongst the Swedish working class and farmers, as well as the liberals, and bourgeois, based on the platform of making Sweden stable and fairer.

I have begun this chapter (3) by sketching the crisis for Marxist strategy for social transformation for workers' emancipation. This has been expressed through an account of the revolutionary strategy of both: i) Lenin's insurrectionary Bolsheviks, who had wanted rapid social change across Europe led by a Russian revolutionary vanguard; and, ii) other Marxist's, who had in Germany and Sweden conceived of

reformist social transformation surfacing in history through a gradual process transitioning through social democracy, but a workers State never transpired, and as chapter 2 discussed social democracy is itself now in crisis in Sweden. Both of these strategies calculated history to evolve leading inevitably to workers' emancipation. However, history evolved in nuanced and complex ways in Sweden, and also in Germany, Italy and Russia. In these countries, far-Left social transformation was a feasible spectre before WW1, but the rise of dictatorship (Italy), totalitarianism (Russia) and social democracy (Germany and Sweden) showed the failure of the prevailing Marxist theory for revolution as espoused by Lenin, Bernstein, Kautsky and Branting. From this emerged important problematics about positivistic conceptions of historical materialism, economic determinism, and leadership.

The sketching of this crisis consolidates the first that was highlighted in chapter 2, which traced the emergent crisis of contemporary Swedish social democratic hegemony in the context of two ideological and political alternatives: i) post-1970s neoliberalisation; and, ii) more recently the rise of the far-Right in the wake of social problems concerning ethno-racial issues, and widening inequality. I now turn to sections that methodologically position this thesis in the context of these problematics to establish a theoretical framework underlaboured by critical realist philosophy with a broad commitment to, and in the spirit of, Marxism as a dialectical science.

Historical Materialism and Critical Realism

My discussions of the crises in Marxist theory for revolution so far have opened the space to critically revisit the prevailing pre-WW1 Marxism, which assumed society was evolving in a naturalistic law-like linear manner. This discussion surfaces broadly within consideration of historical materialism as a social science, and how this articulates with the specific focuses of class consciousness and class formation for social transformation. However, it must be made clear that this thesis does not seek to make a *primary* contribution to the debate concerning historical materialism, which is beyond the scope of the thesis⁵³; but what this discussion is designed to do is bring to the fore the pertinent methodological and philosophical problematics for Marxist science. More specifically, commencing from the failure of far-Left revolutions (discussed above) the problematics highlight: i) the *economic* determinism of Marxists, thus raising questions about class struggle manifesting in complex *socio-cultural* forms ii) the *positivist* conceptions of historical materialism, thus raising questions about the role of *dialectics* in the emergent course of history as open and evolving in *complex* and unpredictable ways. These problematics are now considered as part of a theoretical framework articulating a broad commitment to, and in the spirit of a developing dialectical historical materialism, and is inspired by a critical realist meta-theoretical philosophy of social science methodology.

In the opening section to chapter 3 above⁵⁴, I noted the currents of Marxist thought that subscribed to a historically deterministic and vanguard-led *materialism*. Here,

⁵³ The existence of the journal *Historical Materialism* and its annual conference is testament to the enormity, complexity and contentious nature of this debate.

⁵⁴ The reference here is to the section entitled: *19th and Early 20th Century Crisis of Marxist Theory for Revolution*

I begin by positing that this type of dogmatic Marxism was antithetical to Marx and Engels's work. It has been unfortunate that many of Marx and Engels's ideas were not published until after communist revolutions had been defeated by social democracy, fascism and totalitarianism. In *The German Ideology* Marx had posited his most complete and unique insights into the importance of mass consciousness for revolution. However, this work was not published until 1932 (Allman, 2007) and it would almost certainly have had profound implications on the revolutionary strategy of those Marxist's who had heretofore prioritised economy, positivist conceptions of historical materialism and vanguard leadership prior to the Great War. However aspects of Marx's dialectical critical scientific analysis had been available piecemeal. More than 70 years before WW1 Marx had written about the problematic nature of deterministic readings of history: "the question "where to?" is a rich source of confusion. ... [E]very individual must admit to himself that he has no precise idea about what ought to happen" (Marx, 1843). The point Marx made in this letter to Arnold Ruge was that history is complex and historically indeterminate, and he went on to say that positivistic and closed readings of the course of human history are likely to be mistaken because history was not made in philosophy's of the world but in practical struggles and emergent phenomena in experiences (Marx, 1943).

It was in relation to lived practical struggles that Marx wrote his famous maxim, which is worth quoting in full:

Men [sic] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under

circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past (Marx, 1852).

This was an aphoristic expression relating to the problematic of materialism. He considered proponents of materialism to be engendering an overly deterministic dogmatic science, whereby humans were merely products of social structures who think and act as intended by the ruling class (Marx, 1852; Sayer, 2008). In this account of materialism, history was foreclosed and there was no potential for class struggle, and therefore revolutionary social transformation was ideologically negated. In addition to lacking in emancipatory capacity, this totalising science of materialism was, according Marx, antithetical to the agential capacity of humans, and as the opening epigrams to this thesis quoted: “The materialist doctrine ... forgets, that it is men that change circumstances” (Marx, 1969 [1845]). Put another way, materialism conceived as a deterministic positivistic science of nature, does not allow for history to change in unpredictable ways, nor does it allow for humans to have a say in the construction of hegemony. Marx (1969 [1845]) points out the “defects” in positivistic conceptions of materialism, and in his theses on critiquing Feuerbach, Marx provides an exegesis in which he makes explicit the potential of human capacity to make history *as individuals and in class formation*. An important articulation to this explication he makes, thus after the failed revolutions of 1848, was to point out the *limits of human capacity to make history*, stating that “they do not make it as they please” and historically conditioned “circumstances” create the parameters within which agency is possible (Marx, 1852). Therefore, Marx (and Engels) provided an antidote to Feuerbach’s materialism, while also being antithetical to the idea that human agents were totally free to act in constructing

their conditions of existence (Marx, 1852). In other words, Marx (and Engels) were positing that materialism ought to be regarded as dialectical, meaning the evolution of history is not straightforward or self-evidently teleological and it is manifested through an emergent dialectical process of mediation and negation⁵⁵. This is comprised of a complex totality of dynamics, including: antecedent socio-cultural forms manifesting in ideas from history, along with humans having some agential capacity to shape society, as well as potential to challenge the dominant ideas and institutional forms and practices of the ruling class of that historical epoch (Banfield, 2015; Marx, 1969 [1845]; Molyneux, 1995).

It is in this dialectical historical materialist Marxist context, that I have drawn inspiration from critical realism to philosophically *underlabour* Marxism. *Underlabouring* is a term used here to mean conceptual ground-clearing (Bhaskar, 2009b), for example to avoid economic determinism, positivistic conceptions of history and maintaining open horizons for critique and change. That is to say, critical realism can be deployed methodologically as supportive meta-theoretical background to Marxism as a dialectical and non-positivistic *science* for the purpose of human emancipation. As an introductory remark following some Marxist's, such as Banfield (2005; 2010; 2015) and Creaven (2007), it is important to note that this thesis does not propose that Marxism *needs* critical realism to be effective as a science and emancipatory project, rather the relationship is to be "understood as some kind of intervention on the terrain" of Marxist philosophy of social science (Creaven, 2007, p.7), to clarify the *dialectical historical materialism* that Marx and

⁵⁵ This could be an entrance to the discussion of relative autonomy, see particularly Banfield (2015) chapter 5 for a detailed exposition of this.

Engels themselves advocated. This intervention is a philosophical framework to underpin Marxism, particularly as a social science that articulates epistemology with an ontological axiology (Banfield, 2015). Critical realism therefore does not operate as a practical/empirical social theory for human flourishing, this is the terrain of Marx's work as a practical project for practices of revolutionary social change, as Marx together with Engels had intended (Marx, 1969 [1845]). Nevertheless, Marxism in this endeavor can be philosophically served by critical realism, and I now turn my attention to the task of detailing this articulation, beginning with some introductory remarks about critical realism.

Roy Bhaskar is a principle architect of critical realism. It is well established that Bhaskar's development of the critical realist philosophy came in three sequential waves: foundational first wave critical realism in the late 1970s, dialectical critical realism in the 1980/90s, and since the turn of the century transcendental dialectical critical realism (Bhaskar, 1975; 1986; 2009). Detailing the breadth, depth and complexity of its body of work is not the purpose of this thesis, but what is important as a philosophical background to this study is first wave critical realism, which was intended by Bhaskar to provide a philosophical *underlabouring*, as he called it, useful to the Marxist theory for revolution (Bhaskar, 1975).

Critical realism was established as a response to the dominance of positivism in the social sciences. The social science presupposition that Bhaskar encountered as a student in the 1960s was that human society could be studied scientifically like the natural world, for example of plants, which was predicated on regularity

and determinism. This positivistic and scientific thinking can be observed with the way that 19C/early 20C Marxists had predicted history evolving in sequential stages that would inevitably lead to a sustained communist transformation and internationalism. The failure of this type of deterministic Marxist revolutionary theory had shown to lack traction in the course of history, for example in Russia where society had descended into Stalinist totalitarianism for workers; and Swedish history had emerged with social democratic hegemony over the alternative of communism. This was a problematic suggesting that history is never in complete harmony, demonstrating the methodological conundrum with treating social history as a positivistic science following iron laws of constant conjunctions and humans as passively *consenting* to impositions of ideas, a-historically. To address this problematic, as a socialist, Bhaskar set out in the 1970s to develop an emancipatory philosophy of social science (Collier, 1994, p.ix), which would sit permissively to philosophically facilitate the Marxist project of revolution for human emancipation (Banfield, 2015). Marxism as a practical emancipatory project was clearly expressed by Marx's critical treatment of the abstracted philosophical idealism of the Young Hegelians in the *Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach*, where he wrote "philosophers have only interpreted the world ... the point, however, is to change it" (Marx, 1969 [1845]).

In its role as *underlabouring* for a *dialectical* historical materialism for revolution, from its extensive body of work, I particularly draw upon the philosophical intervention that the social universe is an *open system*. *Open systems' perspectives* stress the need to account for the social world as having many layers of complexity, which are stratified and constantly changing. Human society cannot

be observed scientifically operating with regularity enabling predictive evolution, as is arguably so for the natural world. The critical realist critique of positivistic philosophy of social science centred on the problem that it absented ontology, and/or it had been conflated with epistemology. Absenting or conflating ontology was problematic because it provided an inadequate account of the social world as it existed. Absenting or conflating ontology commonly meant that epistemology was prioritised and the danger of handing priority to questions of epistemology was that social questions are conflated into merely theory(ies) of knowing the world, which reduce science to *how* we might obtain knowledge of what exists, rather than *what does exist* in the historical and material and lived world with all its complexity; what creates the possibility for this empirical reality (Sayer, 1992; 2008). This reduction is termed the “epistemic fallacy” in critical realism (Bhaskar, 1975, p.47; Sayer, 2008, p.156), and the *open systems* response to this can be deployed philosophically to frame historical materialism *dialectically*.

More specifically, to foreground the *dialectical* aspect of philosophical *underlabouring*, the Marxist scientific determinism that is present in grand narrative accounts of history cannot be effective in capturing the complex evolution of human society, which is “the product of a multiplicity of causes” (Bhaskar, 1986, p.107). For Marxist theory to have efficacy for revolutionary change, it needs to be “serious” about the empirical reality of the social universe, which evidently it was not in the event of communism never sustaining itself in Russia, Sweden and the rest of Europe. Bhaskar (2009b) indicates the problem of a lack of seriousness prevalent in philosophy of social science:

When, for example, David Hume, the eighteenth century British Empiricist,

says he has no better reason for leaving a room by the ground floor door than by the second floor window, he is not being serious. For if he were, he should leave such rooms by the second floor window on at least fifty per cent of all occasions. But of course he never does, because he has reason, and good reason, for always choosing to exit by the ground floor door, namely the force of gravity (which of course his epistemology was not able to accommodate) (Bhaskar, 2009b).

Bhaskar in this statement addresses the problem that arises from a lack of internal unity between ideas and practice, much as Marx did with his critique of the Young Hegelians. This lack of unity manifested itself in Hume's epistemological proposition for exiting a room, and the empirical reality world circumstances that makes his ideas un-serious, which in this case was the ontological existence of gravity that would have caused him physical harm had he acted upon his idea of leaving the room by the second floor window. Put another way, Hume was committing an *epistemic fallacy* by separating his values and beliefs from real empirical world ontological facts (Bhaskar, 2009b), and this engenders a simple realism rendering his theory of empiricism as not being serious in the empirical lived world.

Building on critique of the *epistemological fallacy*, for a *serious* dialectical historical materialism, the articulation with critical realism is constituted in the philosophical presupposition that the world exists in lived manifestations, and not just in ideas, theories or in mental constructions. The importance of ontology, as related to, while

distinct from epistemology, surfaces here and articulates with Marx's perspective that "objective" perceptions about the world, are "practical question[s]", they are not "isolated from practice" and existing in theory or idealism (Marx, 1969 [1845]). The point here is that the interplay between *objective* and *subjective* domains of consciousness and practices are part of the same empirical reality. Following from this, the idea I propose for this articulation between critical realism and dialectical historical materialism, is that knowledge about the world must come from an exploration of conditions of existence, taking into account that these are shaped by the emergent nexus of changing dynamics involving complexity, historical trajectory and conscious and unconscious human actions.

The historical materialist Marxist project is about changing the world. Accounting for world as an *open system* is important for Marxism because an *open system* conception allows for understanding the world as it exists in empirical reality and this empirical reality is in constant change, which provides an opportunity to conceive of revolutionary social change as always possible. This is a reference to the role of dialectics for the possibility of social transformation. Dialectics is about the presupposition that history consists of constant changes. These changes are a result of struggles between historically dominant ruling ideas and the way that individuals *consent* or resist these in their own lived material world, which has revolutionary implications as it opens the space for the possibility of revolution (Molyneux, 1995). Rejecting positivism means that nothing in the social universe is constant and fixed, and minor struggles mean transitions are taking place in the totality of the social universe all the time. Some of these transitions may strengthen the dominant status quo and crucially there are others that open the window of

opportunity for new historical transformative possibilities.

What is crucial to point out is that, negating the idea of positivistic conception in social science, does not lead to a theory of unbridled human voluntarism. While Bhaskar's critical realism is a philosophy designed to reject positivist social science, it also exposes the pitfalls of some post-modernist thinking, particularly of the radical social constructivist sort. Critical realism is in broad agreement with the general post-modernist emphasis on diversity, plurality of perspectives and the openness of the social world, thus inferring complexity about the social world (Sayer, 2008, p.30). However, there is a tendency with some post-modernists to extend these claims about complexity to an extreme relativism where knowledge is unobtainable, unreliable, not worthwhile, and that what we know is mainly constructed and existent our minds. This brings back into play Bhaskar's rejection of Hume's empiricism rendered un-serious in the discussion above, because if all knowledge is merely constructions in our mind then "how can we be ever mistaken about anything"? (Sayer, 2008, p.2). Our ideas ought never to be fallible but often are. The *realist* aspect of critical realism is that the real world exists independent of thinking about it. Events and knowledge of these events exist outside of our direct experience and realisation, and our knowledge about events past and future history can be fallible (Sayer, 2008, p.2; Collier, 2003). The latter point about fallibility strongly resonates with the 19th and early 20th Marxist theory and practices which failed to deliver revolutionary transformation, as discussed earlier.

The development of a Marxist social science inspired by critical realism entails a

dialectical historical materialism emphasising the complexity of the social world, which it seeks simultaneously to *explain* and also *critique* for emancipatory purposes by bringing into play the role of *explanatory critique*. Explanatory critique is a methodological approach that tries to explain how *common sense* theory and practices are made to be plausible and credible in that specific socio-cultural context, and at the same time be critical of that *common sense* by understanding it to be a strategic resource for the ruling class to maintain their dominant hegemony. This methodology is designed to grasp the condition that makes it possible for the status quo to be existent, and understanding these socio-cultural formations will provide the footing to strategise against them. Effective resistance must be prefigured by understanding the contextual conditional constitution of the object that is being resisted. Only then will emancipation be available as a possibility.

Furthermore, the *explanatory* aspect refers to knowledge about the dynamics and connections of “generative mechanisms at work” (Bhaskar, 2008, p.183). Critical realism broadly delineates three levels of realities: *real*, *actual* and *empirical*. At the level of the *real* are generative *mechanisms*, which can be identified as efficacious for consciousness and practices. These mechanisms exist as part of the contextual conditional constitution of social structures, beyond what can be empirically observed (Sayer, 1992, p.105). An example of a mechanism may be social democracy. Social democracy has the potential power to influence human thinking and behaviour, but it cannot be empirically seen (Bhaskar, 1975) (other than symbolically represented in visual metaphors, such as a national flag). These generative *mechanisms* have the power to set-off *tendencies* for qualitative

changes to consciousness and practices in empirical reality. *Tendencies* are conceptualised as being at the second level, the *actual*, where dominant ideas can establish social norms. This means there is a causal link between the *mechanisms* that create the possibility of *tendencies*, and it follows that revealing these provides explanations about causal efficacy in the empirical world in which people experience the results of a multiplicity of tendencies (Bhaskar, 1986, p.xxvii). It is important to state that the term “actual” is not a reference to material events and practices, which is the way that it is often used in common parlance; in critical realism it refers to specifically the *empirical* level where manifestation of mechanisms that create tendencies can be observed in existence⁵⁶. The use of *tendency* is methodologically important. The term reflects the presentation of the social world as being open to a multiplicity of agential possibilities. This means that the mechanisms generating particular tendencies may be present but does not necessarily mean the definite materialisation of those tendencies as manifesting in empirical reality. Here is the exposure of the inadequacy of empiricism as science, because it is unable to account for, or at least conceive of, the many deep lying causally efficacious and latent mechanisms, as i) they are beyond what can be seen empirically and ii) empirical phenomena may be an event emergent from a multiplicity of mechanisms. Elucidation and explanation is always required to establish the case and its dynamics (Bhaskar, 1986).

Critical realism underlabours Marxism methodologically to account for the complexity of the structures that create the conditions for empirical reality. This

⁵⁶ See Chapter 6 where informants used “actual” to mean material events and practices.

complexity is about the fact that there are multiplicities of mechanisms creating their own tendencies, these mechanisms are dynamically connected, manifesting in ever changing dominant and counteracting tendencies (Sayer, 2000, p.15). This is demonstrated by Sayer (2000, p.15), and diagrammatically represented below [Figure 2]:

Figure 2: *Mechanisms and Tendencies* in Open Systems

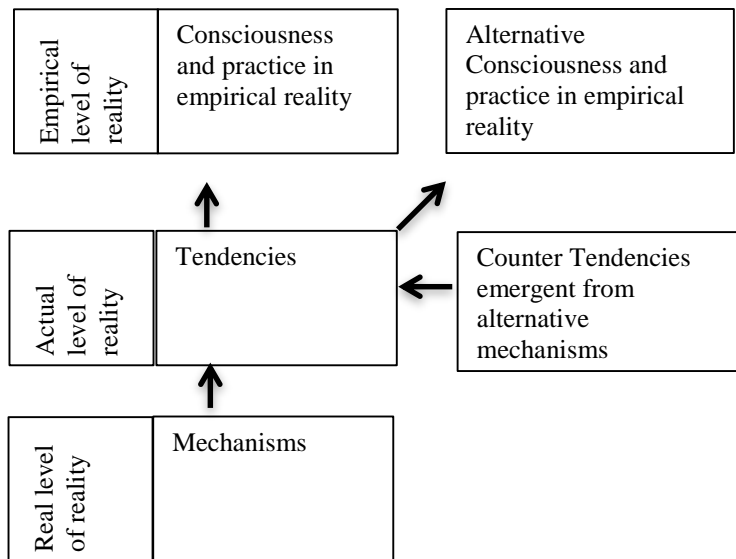


Figure 2 shows mechanisms as causally efficacious for tendencies for social practice in empirical reality. Furthermore, it is a visual representation of the critical realist philosophical conception of the complexity of the social universe, in which historical materialism does not unfold as a sequential science, and there are counter-tendencies that can interrupt causality of dominant mechanisms with their tendencies manifesting in empirical reality. These counter-tendencies produce a different set of conditions and the complex, dynamic and changing totality of these tendencies manifest in empirical reality that do not follow the dominant mechanisms that are generative of dominant hegemony (Sayer, 2000, p.15). The point here is that, given generative mechanisms do not necessarily materialise in empirical reality, historical materialism cannot be a straightforward science of iron laws but importantly the social world can be perceived to have a direction with which it is evolving when mechanisms are known, this knowledge can provide

predictive powers for explaining the possibility of outcomes (Creaven, 2007). The conceptualisation of *tendencies* in this way crucially avoids the relativism and indeterminacy of the post-modern paradigm and also offers greater explanatory potential than the types of thinking associated with positivism/positivistic thinking and empiricism (Creaven, 2007), as discussed above.

Furthermore, the *critique* aspect of explanatory critique is a theoretical and methodological framing for historical materialism that is an intervention on the Marxist terrain for emancipation (Banfield, 2015). The point is that knowledge of mechanisms at the *real* level, with an appreciation of history as it materially evolved (Marx, 1943; Allman, 2007, p.32), provides the footing on which to critique the underlying causes of beliefs and practices that alienate, exploit and limit human flourishing, while simultaneously appreciating the latency of non-efficacious mechanisms (Collier, 1999, p.35), for example those that harness the power to generate class consciousness for social transformation. In the struggle for human emancipation critical realism has an affinity *with*, not necessary *to* but *useful for*, *Marxism as a philosophical practice within open systems*.

Within the context of the crises in Marxist theory for revolution, this section has discussed how a Marxist dialectical historical materialism can be philosophically supported by critical realism. These are important discussions for a broad philosophical and methodological research strategy in which Sweden has been selected as form of critical case study to explore consciousness and practices of class, providing the materials to speculate on social transformation. The opening

epigram and the introduction to this chapter noted that Gramsci's development of Marxist theory has been elaborated by framing class struggle in cultural forms for establishing *hegemony*. I now continue in the presentation of the chapter by detailing key features of Gramsci's work that will subsequently set the scene to provide a statement on the theoretical framework and connective tissue with the fieldwork as part of the research problematic.

Antonio Gramsci's Historical Materialism and Revolutionary Marxism

The preceding sections in this chapter have set the context within which Gramsci is used as the theoretical inspiration in this thesis. More specifically, the discussion of the Marxist theory for revolution, after the emergence and degeneration of the Bolsheviks through to the early part of the 20th century, and also the failure of social democracy to result in workers' emancipation, has been important to raise some fundamental questions related to a historical materialist understanding of the development of class struggle for social transformation. This historical trajectory is an important backdrop to appreciate Gramsci's contribution to revolutionary Marxism, who crucially had witnessed the degeneration of the Russian revolution and socialist factory occupations of Turin degenerate into fascism and totalitarianism (Burawoy, 2011). The limited success of the combination of the, full-frontal attack Marxist strategy, the focus on economy, and a top-down revolutionary vanguard; were all reassessed by Gramsci (Burawoy, 2011). Instead he emphasised: i) the dialectic relationship between culture and economy, ii) the

protracted nature of struggle at the level of empirical reality, and the iii) idea of humans as change agents. Gramsci's theoretical and conceptual framework has been the inspiration to the analysis elucidating the fieldwork reported in this thesis.

Gramsci observed the crucial period between 1917-19 during which history played out in complex ways, including Lenin ascending to leadership through the collapse of Tsarism in Russia, and the culmination of defeated communist revolutions across the West, including in his native Italy. In relation to the Bolsheviks winning power in October 1917 that seemingly contradicted the dominant interpretations of Marx as advocating the unfolding of history in a sequence of conjunctures that would culminate in communism, Gramsci wrote his earliest treatment of Marx in *The Revolution Against Das Capital* (Germino, 1990, pp.61-62). In this polemic piece, Gramsci fiercely defended Marx as a dialectician and vehemently criticised those, such as Plekhanov, who went against this interpretation by selectively using passages from Marx's works (Marx, 1970 [1875]). As a consequence of this robust defence of Marx, Gramsci was himself traduced and attacked for the apparent voluntarism because of the emphasis he placed on the capacity of humans to change the course of history (Mayo, 2015).

Gramsci's later writings in the *Prison Notebooks* were less polemical, and more nuanced, complex and subtle. He made distinction between eastern and western societies and the development of social, cultural, economic conditions needed for a successful frontal attack to take place (Mayo, 2015). He wrote these as a critical

evaluation and development of Russian positivistic Marxism, and especially in the reflexion of his own lived world in what became fascist Italy where he was by then imprisoned⁵⁷. His development of a revolutionary strategy through trying to understand why events had unfolded in the way that they had, and the mechanisms with which the revolutionary spirit lost traction amongst the proletariat, brought him more firmly to the idea that history is uncertain and materialises in unpredictable ways, and this provides a challenge for revolutionary planning. Gramsci wrote in *The Revolution Against Das Capital*:

In Russia, Marx's Capital was more the book of the bourgeoisie than of the proletariat. It stood as the critical demonstration of how events should follow a predetermined course. ... Events have overcome *ideologies*. Events have exploded the critical schema determining how the history of Russia would unfold according to the canons of historical materialism⁵⁸ (Gramsci *et al*, 1977, p.34 [my emphasis]).

As part of this quote, Gramsci brings into focus the importance of philosophy of history. He was shedding light on how Leninism was defeated because history was not “predetermined” and “events” had changed the course of history (ibid.). Gramsci was representing the unpredictability of socio-political change and absence of determinate laws governing its progress. In other words, history was being made in the conditions of the time, which were part of a changing

⁵⁷ See Appendix E for a brief outlining of the distinct broader historical, political and cultural history of when, and in what conditions, Gramsci was writing – indeed Gramsci’s own subjective empirical reality had a significant bearing on his ideas.

⁵⁸ Marx never deployed the term *historical materialism* in his own writings. He consistently described his theory as the *materialist conception of history*. To be clear, in this thesis the two terms will be used interchangeably.

constellation of connections. Gramsci in this quote was unequivocal about his ontological perspective. "Events have overcome ideologies" was Gramsci's way of saying that the social world was constituted by material unpredictability, hence Gramsci was conscious of being *sensitive to* and *working with* an appreciation of the complexities of empirical reality of the moment to create the conditions of class struggle for social change. In these terms, Gramscianism is compatible with the critical realist emphasis on seeking to model the *real* level mechanisms and tendencies in open systems that give rise to empirically experienced social realities.

Crucially to develop Marxist strategy, Gramsci more explicitly than Lenin (Strauss, 2012) focussed on strategic action emphasising building the conditions necessary to seize power, *and* also to retain leadership through a struggle to dominate culture and consciousness to advance class struggle. Gramsci's contribution to Marxism was developed as part of his endeavour to build on and critically appreciate Lenin's failed revolution focussing on the role and function of consciousness for struggle. Boggs writes:

During his more than ten isolated and agonizing years in prison, Gramsci returned again and again to the *problem of consciousness* as part of his project of outlining a new revolutionary theory. Hardly a page of the Prison Notebooks escapes the spirit of this effort (Boggs, 1980, p.61 [my emphasis]).

In relation to class consciousness and class formation, in this *Theoretical Framing* chapter, I now discuss two specific concepts from Gramsci's extensive works that will provide analytical purchase for the reporting of the fieldwork, these are: *culture* and *hegemony*. I take these concepts as being fundamental to thinking about, as the quote above states: the "problem of consciousness" (Boggs, 1980, p.61) – a "problem" because the importance of it had significantly been fatefully disregarded by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, thus developing into a historical materialist crisis for their revolutionary strategy, something that Gramsci sought to re-think and remedy theoretically and methodologically. This theoretical framework lies behind the approach to reporting on class consciousness (Part three), and through this, analytically discussing the possibilities of social change in contemporary Sweden. I begin with the concept of *culture*.

Class Struggle in Cultural Forms

Lenin placed an emphasis on the economic base of society determining social phenomena. For Lenin, revolutionary strategy focussed on the need for insurrection and force. In analysing how and why the 1917 Russian Communist revolution had failed to establish itself, Gramsci critically developed, not rejected, Leninism by emphasising the mechanism of culture, through which he asserted that class struggle took place, as well as, and with, relations of economic production (Strauss, 2012). Gramsci's ideas evolved from the dominant theme, at the time common amongst Communist revolutionaries before 1919, that culture could be reduced to simply a reflex of the economic base, which he pejoratively called "vulgar" and "economism" and (Banfield, 2010, p.129; Bennett et al, 1986,

p.192). Instead, Gramsci suggested that cultural formation was one fundamental mechanism to understand materiality and the way that culture can be used to manufacture the conditions for creating dominant perceptions amongst the masses. Gramsci called this *common sense*⁵⁹ (Rees, 1998, p.241). The focus on mechanisms in the process of creating the conditions of empirical reality provides a critical realist inflection to the Gramscianism deployed in this study.

For Gramsci, the dominant culture, played out in experiences as *common sense*, is in constant struggle with alternative ways of thinking and acting. In other words, Gramsci was getting at a lived world that was open and dialectical, not predictable, and history is always open, necessarily having to be made and not prefigured by any single determinant (Banfield, 2010, p.137). Gramsci insisted that an individual's consciousness and practices are generated and articulated in social and cultural mechanisms in reality and in the specification of the life-world of each individual (Boggs, 1980, p.39). Boggs (1980) elaborates this point about complexity in relation to social change:

In Gramsci's conception, the only truly revolutionary theory would be one that went beyond economic determinism to take into account the concrete and rich interplay of diverse forces during 'conjunctural' periods of social transformation. Thus instead of conceiving of the superstructure as a simple reflection of the economic base, Gramsci viewed the relationship as constantly changing and reciprocal in its historical complexity; politics ideas, religion, and culture may not be

⁵⁹ *Common sense* is italicized to denote the Gramscian meaning with which it is deployed.

autonomous in any 'ultimate' sense, but their casual power in any given transitional period could be overriding (Boggs, 1980, pp.36-37).

Crucially, Gramsci's insight was that empirical reality is emergent in a complex integration of diverse and potentially unstable forces, which are more than just economics and politics as causally efficacious; and the connections between these were in constant flux. Gramsci was critically attentive to the importance of revolutionary theory as realist by appreciating the world *as it is* in historical materiality, which is both, open to change and not reducible to simple positivistic and economic formulations; and this was part of his critical evaluation from witnessing Leninism's eventual decline (Strauss, 2012).

Through his critique of Leninism, Gramsci arrived at a theoretical understanding that the conditions of social existence are comprised of multiplicity of mechanisms. Included within this context is the ever-present possibility of mechanisms that have the tendency to challenge the dominant hegemony, meaning that the antithesis is part of the totality. Furthermore, the understanding of the sophisticated integrated nature of what constitutes empirical reality importantly needs to entail more than understanding it in political and economic terms, these are part of a complex and changing synthesis of elements in society that makes the course of history unpredictable and at constant conjunctures of reconfiguration. Second, on this point of unpredictability, Gramsci said that the nature of empirical reality was that political doctrines, such as Bolshevism, were too narrowly conceived and their prefiguring that social change would be a straight forward and linear transition was problematic, he said:

This reasoning is based on the necessary reciprocity between structure and superstructure, a reciprocity which is nothing other than the real dialectical process (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 1971, p.366).

The deployment of “the real dialectical process” was important here stating two related points that he was making. Firstly, that the dominant hegemony of the ruling class is always in various degrees of struggle. Secondly, for Marxist’s ideas to be efficacious they needed to be more sophisticated than the prevailing focus on the economic structure of social relations, which were based on a simplistic antagonistic relationship that would inevitably lead to a revolutionary conjuncture. It signals that Gramsci conceived of the need for Marxism’s theory of revolution to be appreciative of the complex connections in the totality of existence. He was highlighting that history is always in struggle and people could not be simply handed down cultures and ideas that would be unproblematically imbibed and absorbed. In this theoretical and strategic conception, Gramsci developed Leninist epistemology – that revolution could be a direct product of “political doctrine” to implant abstract communist ideas within the proletariat, irrespective of individual’s conditions of existence (see Lenin, 1902a). Gramsci infused Marxist-Leninism with realist ontology, this is about the revolutionary philosophy assimilating the complexity of the world as *it* exists (Joseph, 2006, pp.49-50). Put another way, here Gramsci was writing in the spirit of Marx’s *German Ideology* (which it must be remembered was not published until after Gramsci’s death) that a body of ideas had to take into account *both* the material and cultural forms at the level of agential action (Marx, 1969 [1845]). Gramsci was extending this to embrace class struggle

as being grounded in the socio-cultural lived world, and manifested and represented in consciousness, which were the emergent conditions of mechanisms. The dialectic between materialism and idealism, which expressed itself as an inseparable unity of consciousness and practice (Allman, 2007, p.33) was referred to by Gramsci as the *philosophy of praxis* (Jones, 2006). Therefore, a Gramscian inspired realist ontology for Marxist science asks questions about the world as it exists, thus to relate to “what is out there to know” (Thomas, 1993, p.34) about empirical reality, the *knowing* of it and how this is generated. This is the basis for the revolutionaries to work with these conditions to generate new conditions for social transformation⁶⁰.

In the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci used the term *philosophy of praxis* in two ways. First, *philosophy of praxis* was deployed as a phrase to refer to *Marxism* to evade censorship. Second and more significant for the problematic of this study, it was also central to his appraisal of the methodological development on the prevailing focus on the economic structure for some prominent Marxist's. The theoretical and methodological focus on economy and top-down leadership was problematic for Gramsci. He saw the importance of socio-cultural forms of struggle in empirical reality as important, not *instead of* but along *with* economy and productive practices and their relations for revolution. Gramscianism therefore highlights the significance of interplay between revolutionary theory and the empirical reality of the material world, which is dialectally not mechanically related. Put another way, there is a series of connections between abstracted *ideas* about social change,

⁶⁰ This is specified with the notion of critical nuances in the context of detailing the research problematic in the final section of this chapter (chapter 3).

and the efficacy of these to materialise social change in complex cultural contexts, and these contexts and connections are in constant flux.

Gramsci explicitly advanced a form of Marxism that was about understanding empirical reality as historically contextualised: “The *philosophy of praxis* is absolute historicism, the absolute bringing down to earth and worldliness of thought, an absolute humanism of history” (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 1971, p.465). Gramsci was advancing a form of Marxism that took seriously the development of revolutionary theory and the complexity with which it had unfolded in history in the lived world. It was a form of Marxist realism that concerned itself with the existent world, because a revolutionary theory would need to align ontologically with this complexity, which he stated by saying: “It is along this [historical] line that one must trace the thread of the new conception of the world” (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 1971, p.465; Forgacs, 2000, p.429).

Gramsci not only used *philosophy of praxis* to mean class antagonisms that may have created the structural conditions for social change, but also how these antagonisms are understood and represented by the individuals of the masses to be *lived antagonisms*. The focus here is on critical consciousness needed to build for a “formation of a revolutionary collective” (Forgacs, 2000, p.429); in other words, workers fighting for their own class interests through their critical reflection on their own *practices*. On these terms, Gramscianism conceived as the *philosophy of praxis*, was a theoretical tool to appreciate the complex connections in the totality of existence; and as such it was a reference to the generative mechanisms involved in the creation of tendencies for cultural formation in the lived

world (Forgacs, 2000, p.429). These cultural formations interplayed with class consciousness and the class struggle.

Furthermore, *philosophy of praxis* for Gramsci was linked to what he termed the *conception of the world* (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 1971, p.324), which is a reference to the way that people understand themselves and the social structure of society, and their articulation of this as part of their consciousness in practice. Gramsci believed that lived cultural forms and practices had a fundamental role in developing and dialectically constituting critical consciousness. For Gramsci, this capturing of culture for social transformation is a difficult task for revolutionaries, as culture is never settled, and it is changeable and open. The challenge therefore is to grasp the genesis of cultural tendencies that can lead to particular outcomes in lived socio-cultural empirical reality.

Gramsci argued that culture was not a-political, and whilst it is necessarily true that the ruling class will attempt to create the cultural conditions in which their dominance prevails, their successful accomplishment of this is not guaranteed. In positing the way that *conceptions of the world* are cultivated, he also suggested that culture was unstable and open, in which there was the in-built space for critical narratives to the dominance of ruling class ideas through which negation and countering tendencies to the status quo could be established (Gramsci *et al*, 1977, p.365). It was on these terms that Gramsci placed an emphasis on the socio-cultural lived world, and sought through his Marxist practices to advance an understanding of the mechanisms that create socio-cultural tendencies through which the dominant class maintain their position in the social structure. Importantly,

this emphasis also included identifying and generating critical spaces in the dominant status quo that represent the possibility of struggle in and against its hegemony.

For Gramsci then, class struggle was necessarily articulated with social and cultural mechanisms, which were intertwined with politics and economy, in other words they were dialectically related. Gramsci came to this conception of culture after the collapse of Leninism, which had interpreted culture as no more than knowing “a little Latin and history” or “writing a scrap of paper called a degree” (Gramsci *et al*, 1977, p.11). He went on to rearticulate this conception of culture:

Culture is something quite different. It is organisation, discipline of one’s inner self, a coming to terms with one’s own personality; it is the attainment of higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in one’s own historical value, one’s own function in life, one’s own rights and obligations (Gramsci *et al*, 1977, p.11).

This is a key quote in which Gramsci explicated his definition of culture as more than “a mass of unconnected raw facts which have to be filed in the brain as in the columns of a dictionary” (Gramsci *et al*, 1977, p.11). Culture for Gramsci was connected to the way that individuals conceive their own lived world as well as the world around them individually and *collectively*, and in so doing to develop a reflexive understanding of their own role and function in society as agential beings. Furthermore, cultural forms and practices were not only about having a consciousness of one’s self, it created the conditions for a “higher awareness”

(Gramsci *et al*, 1977, p.11). This was a reference to a capacity to conceive of the social world in a critical way and therefore mentally transgress their own lived experience, both, individually and collectively, and imagine a different existence whilst negating fatalism.

Gramsci pointed out that it was incumbent on revolutionaries to epistemologically conceptualise the role and function of culture in this way, which allowed for an understanding of the complexities with which people thought about values, rights, obligations, and their own function in life. The point here is that culture is connected to creating the conditions with which consciousness of *world as it is*, and the *possibilities for the future*, emerges in class conscious action.

Boggs (1980, p.63) extends the importance of culture and consciousness, and relates it to generating the possibility for class struggle and social change, suggesting that “[c]onsciousness for Gramsci was not an abstract realm of thought, detached from everyday life” and it “shapes political struggle” in which there is the emergent possibility that people become “self-determining revolutionary subjects”. Boggs is getting at the point that people, specifically the working class, will only emerge as they organise as a class for their common interest; in the process attaining consciousness of their class position in the capitalist mode of production.

In reassessing and offering a counter-point to Leninism and providing the epistemological underpinnings for appreciating the failure of revolutions across Europe to maintain their momentum, Gramsci had come to the conclusion that, throughout history, the ruling class maintained their dominance in major part

through a development of mechanisms to create tendencies for a culture that disguised class interests. Gramsci identified the importance of tendencies that operated at the socio-cultural dimension to gain *consent* from the individuals of the masses. He specifically noted the role of *prizes* that function to appear as though “meritorious activity is rewarded” (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 1971, p.247). This means generating and maintaining the cultural narrative that those who *deserved* merit were rewarded, and it was a way that the ruling class managed evident inequality by attempting to create a prevailing perception of meritocracy. This perception cultivates the *appearance* of fair distribution of opportunities to flourish, which have resulted in differential merit (Joseph, 2006, p.53). Gramsci observed how this socio-cultural condition in which a consciousness of equity prevails functioning to establish *consent* to the status quo by making inequality appear to be socially just. In this way, the dominant class were “concealing the contradictions” and antagonisms between the classes to sustain order (Roberts, 1999, p.27; and Green, 2011, p.3)⁶¹. For Gramsci this constituted the appearance of ruling by *consent*, not violent repression, and the manufacturing of *consent* on the cultural plane.

The combined struggle *for* and *in* culture was a key theme throughout Gramsci’s work. He stressed that a *war of position* was perpetually taking place, which described the relentless ideological battle played out culturally to continually gain advantage and legitimise power relations. Dominating in this battle was crucial to set the conditions to be created in which class consciousness, class formation and

⁶¹ It was noted earlier that King Oscar I had adopted the strategy of appeasement in Sweden to generate *consent* after the uprising in Europe after 1948 and the Communist Manifesto was released in Sweden. In Gramsci’s terms, this was a strategy in class struggle fought at the level of culture designed to create passivity to inequality.

class struggle can emerge (Boggs, 1980, p.52). In other words, *war of position* was a reference to practices of the ideological, philosophical and political interaction individuals and emergent workers' formations had with the ruling class on the dimension of culture and ideas. The important conceptual point here is that for the revolutionary project to flourish, the mechanisms of the cultural tendencies that create the conditions of existence, and how they are experienced and understood by the masses, need to be appreciated in order to get tactical footholds for struggle. This is part of building strategic alternative class hegemony through addressing the *real* level casually efficacious mechanisms (Banfield, 2010, p.149), in other words asking what conditions enable the emergence of particular dominant hegemonies to exist, and in turn what conditions would enable the counteracting tendencies for radical Left alternative hegemony.

Gramsci drew attention to understanding class struggle as continuous in dialectical historical materialism, which was central to his conceptualisation of *war of position*. *War of position* was distinct from *war of manoeuvre*, the latter was defined as a type of struggle that was characterised by the revolutionary strategy comprising full frontal and violent attack, which according to Gramsci, was potentially only successful when significant masses of people are not *consenting* to the status quo and the State is severely weakened and disintegrating. Gramsci's observations of the Russian Tsarist State's defeat by the Bolsheviks had contributed to his thinking here, and from this emerged his views about the impossibility of a violent overthrow and societal transformation in contemporary capitalist democracies where appeasement and concessions "guard against internal disintegration and make revolution a political and psychological impossibility" (Jones, 2006, p.31).

Importantly, in these contexts, class warfare is located primarily at the level of socio-cultural ideas in the struggle for dominant hegemony.

The next section discusses Gramsci's theory of hegemony as integral to class struggle in daily experiences and practices. This provides an analytical framework for subsequent analysis of fieldwork with a focus on the cultural formations that create the conditions of class consciousness, and the *war of position* around how it might be obscured in particular moments in history lived in daily life.

The Significance of *Hegemony* in Class Struggle

Gramsci was writing at a time of rapid transformations and Marxism-Leninism had failed to lead to a sustained communist society in Russia. In Italy workers' uprisings did not sustain a revolution, and as a result paved the way for the fascist and alternative political and ideological dominant projects to emerge. Gramsci sought to understand these transitions and as part of this endeavour, he reformulated the concept of *hegemony*⁶² to understand why history had unfolded in the way it had referring to the role of *leadership* in class struggle. Connecting with his treatment of the dialectical relationship of culture and consciousness, Gramsci emphasised the need to understand how the ruling class (whether they be social democrats or fascists) had galvanised influence on social consciousness and practices, and the mechanisms, such as the educative function of a national curriculum, by which they create the cultural conditions for this empirical reality.

⁶² According to Joseph (2002), the term *hegemony* was coined before Gramsci by Akselrod.

Gramsci explicated the role and function of hegemony, as about power and domination at the level of leading ideas and cultures, and as crucial to understanding the ebb and flow of class struggle (Williams, 1989, p.110). The saturation of the ruling ideas and culture into dominant socio-cultural tendencies that surfaced in empirical reality was the genesis of the masses giving *consent* to the status quo. But this was not to assume that these ideas and culture were fixed in a dominant and subordinate relationship; individuals understand these with the specification of their own life-worlds and therein have the potential capacity to mediate, negotiate and even negate these and this is what makes rebellion, resistance and social change immanent (Gledhill, 1994, p.81). The point here is that even when ruling ideas and culture are deeply embedded in social-cultural relations and institutional forms, individuals do not totally become habituated to the status quo, these relations are still in an “unstable equilibria” (Forgacs, 2000, p.206). Put another way, the problematics of hegemony contains the potential seeds of change and revolution within its *own* interstices (Marx, and Engels, 1848; Mayo, 2015). In this way, humans and active beings have the historically based agential capacity to engage *in* and *with* class struggle. History, conceptualised on these terms, is constituted in perpetual struggle and always in degrees of openness to different ideas to become hegemonic.

Gramsci did not explicate a precise definition of hegemony (Borg, Buttigieg and Mayo, 2002, p.1), and in the light of this absence the discussions above have been laying the ground for the methodological deployment in this thesis. In the context of his scholarship of trying to understand the materialist conception of history and devise revolutionary strategy, hegemony can be defined as *leading for the purpose*

of subjugation, and this is done by setting in motion the continued establishing of socio-cultural conditions in which the arrangement lends itself to benefit a particular stratum in the social formation for facilitating their dominance (Mayo, 2015, p.15; Williams, 1976, p.205; 1977, p.110). Gramsci explained how this had manifested in history:

[T]he supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'. A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to 'liquidate', or to subjugate perhaps even by force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (indeed this is the principle conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 1971, pp.57-58).

This is a dense statement in which Gramsci drew attention to the importance of contesting hegemony for social transformation of building the conditions for class struggles for the possibility and necessity of revolutionary hegemony specifically in two ways: first, through force and coercion to liquidate the opposition; and second, by providing "leadership" which is fundamental to guiding at the level of ideas to winning and *sustaining* power, the latter being a failing of Leninism during 1917-1919. Leadership was at the heart of Gramsci's concept of hegemony. For Gramsci, the fascists and social democrats had won leadership, not simply because they had won militarily and by force, but also because they had the

winning of hearts and minds to cultivate a sense of alliance and kindred from those dominated in a relationship that negated questions of *who wins* and *who loses* in such an arrangement. Hegemony was therefore about leading with cultural forms and conditions *for* and then *after* revolution. Therborn (1978, p.157) explicates that *leadership* was manifested in two ways. First, as of one class over another, this is conceived as an antagonistic relationship, which is characterised by subordination. Second, leadership based on the formation of alliances. The latter, according to Gramsci, is more effective it is a relationship that *appears* as consensual⁶³, whereby all persons in society are presented as if their interests are mutual (Gramsci, 1971, p.9). In this latter arrangement, Gramsci explains the mechanics of the way that the alliance building happens:

Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposed that account be taken of the interests and the *tendencies* of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed - in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. But there is no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 1971, p.161 [my emphasis]).

There are three points of significance that Gramsci makes about the mechanisms with which a hegemonic alliance is created. First, that the dominant class needs to be aware of “interests” – what people expect and want, and “tendencies” – their

⁶³ This resonates with the earlier discussion of the Swedish Social Democrats and the *Saltsjöbaden pact* in 1938, which set in motion their dominance on a basis of compromise between capitalists and workers entitlements.

likelihood of their empirically manifesting specific ways of thinking and acting. Gramsci's explicit reference to "tendencies" was an important statement of his rejection of treating social phenomena and their histories as being prescriptively determined, acknowledging history's open, changing and evolving nature, which has to be considered while devising strategy in the struggle for hegemony. "Tendencies" taken in this way resonates with critical realism's open systems discussed earlier. Second, for the ruling class to dominate, they have to know the subjugated so that a compromise can be reached for the purpose of appeasement, thus to create the condition in which likelihood of resistance and rebellion is minimised. Third, there may be "concessions" (Joseph, 2006, p.53) given away to the dominated class, for example the appearance of some powers, privileges and a little wealth. However these concessions are managed by the ruling class to ensure that the core of the social structure and their hegemony is maintained.

A contemporary example may be the winning of parliamentary democracy to enable representation of the working class in governance. In Marxist critical Gramscian mode, this situation where the workers in society have gained entitlements shows that the prevailing history of the dominant ruling class is open to revision, however the situation remains that only political parties who represent the maintenance of capitalism are feasibly able to win power, and so the status quo hegemony is reproduced. The point here is that class struggle is being elided by mechanisms designed by the ruling class, such as forms of 'representative' parliamentary democracy, and these obscure the antagonistic relationship between the capitalists and working class. It follows that issues such as class inequality become obscured in consciousness, which in turn that create the socio-

cultural conditions of gaining and maintaining the *consent* of the dominated working class to the status quo (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 1971, pp.119-120). However what is absolutely crucial, as I have argued above, is that dialectical historical materialism and the theory of *opens systems* means that domination is likely to be never total and change is always possible. This resonates methodologically with critical realism as its philosophical underpinning.

The key then for attaining alliance has to be for a dominant, or potentially dominant, class to present its *own* interests as being accepted as the interests of *all*. This includes the acquiescence of significant dissenters, such as the liberal progressives in the higher echelons of the social structure who have wealth, power and influence to make a change. The key to maintaining any type of hegemony is to establish all aspects of it (for instance: politically, ideologically, socially, culturally) as a normal state of equilibrium to be gained and defended. Hegemony is most effectively achieved by making it appear as being fair for the many, or, to achieve viable political acquiescence *as good as it can get*. This is an idea that can be placed in the spirit of the Marx (and Engel's) *German Ideology*, which was unknown to Gramsci, when they wrote:

...each new class which puts itself in place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones. (Marx, 1970 [1875])

To underline the point about the importance of culture and hegemony in class struggle, Gramsci polemically pointed out the implication of denying this claim of the importance of a hegemonic alliance: “[o]therwise how could one explain the fact, given that there have always been exploiters and exploited, creators of wealth and its selfish consumers, that socialism has not yet come into being!” (Gramsci *et al*, 1977, p.11). Not unlike the un-seriousness of Humeian anti-realist methodology discussed earlier, with this statement Gramsci was clear that attention to the lived hegemony and its struggle in culture had to be a crucial aspect of revolutionary strategy. Furthermore, this struggle was in constant motion, never won outright, even when the State had been seized. This meant that even when any ruling class had deeply embedded their ideas and culture, hegemony was always contingent on struggle and class struggle was continuous.

This means that the task for a dominant class is to deepen its grip on hegemony, and this task takes place within a socio-cultural *and* economic nexus. This is for the *winning* and then *maintaining* the struggle against resistance, rebellion and negation for the emergence of different dominant hegemony (Bennett, Mercer and Woollacott, 1986, p.192). Elaborating on this, Joseph (2002a, p.125) explains: “Hegemony is concerned not just with the construction of a ruling historic bloc, but with the reproduction of the social structures that create the material conditions for such a bloc”. Gramsci made this point about the necessity for focussing on strategy that included struggling for revolutionary consciousness, stating that people do not just act and think the dominant tendencies but also actively create it through the

way that they interact with the dominant classes ideas and culture, making hegemony emergent in empirical reality but crucially never won outright. Thus, the space for struggle for a new dominant hegemony in all epochs is always present in the existent historical conjecture (Joseph, 2002a, p.39; Roberts, 1999).

Gramsci explains that history exerts a powerful conditioning effect on the masses and this means that individual's actions may seemingly be "contradictory" and "in opposition to" his/her class and "theoretical conception" of what is good and socially just. This is a consciousness that is an historical antecedent that was "inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed" (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 1971, p.333). Because Gramsci deploys dialectical historical materialist method, in that he approaches class consciousness and formation for social transformation as always possible, he was optimistic about the potential for communism. This optimism was constituted in his conviction that human agents contribute to making their own history and also they have the historical potential for *good sense* to struggle for hegemony on their terms. Gramsci suggests that all humans have a consciousness comprised of a sense-of-self in relation to others, and this potentially "unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world" (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 1971, p.333). Even within conservative historical moments in culture where consciousness and practices are assenting, the possibility exists where these socio-cultural states of being can elide with socially progressive idealism. The point here is that, *even* in times when the dominant hegemony is strong, there still exists in human practices the potential to have a different conception of the world, this is having an alternative idealism that transgresses the existent empirical reality (Gramsci, Hoare and

Nowell-Smith, 1971, p.333). Idealism is therefore conceptualised as having the potential to dialectically create socially transformative tendencies in consciousness that may manifest as social action and praxis. This shift from practices of *common sense* characterised by passive *consent* to a consciousness of a different conception of the world is termed by Gramsci as *good sense*. The capacity of people being agents for change is captured in Gramsci's statement that "all men [sic] are intellectuals" (1971, p.9), and this entails the creation of a collective consciousness to imagine a social transformation that may be presented in the dominant conditions as beyond the boundaries of what is practically feasible.

The function of Marxists in this process of creating the conditions for the impetus for *good sense* comes by way of labouring at the level of lived experiences, in which revolutionaries had to be active in struggling for hegemony by offering conceptions of the world in which empirical reality is characterised by human emancipation and where flourishing is possible. In this regard, Gramsci referenced Napoléon and the French Revolution as constituted in cultural forms and practices for an example of how *good sense* was generated amongst the mass of peoples to build a different hegemonic class formation *over a prolonged* period of time that was necessary for the possibility of social transformation:

Every revolution has been *preceded* by an intense labour of criticism, by the diffusion of culture and the spread of ideas among masses of men who are at first resistant and think only of solving their own immediate economic and political problems for themselves, who have no ties of solidarity with others in the same condition. ... The bayonets

of Napoléon's armies found their road already smoothed by an invisible army of books and pamphlets that had swarmed out of Paris from the first half of the eighteenth century and had prepared both men and institutions for the necessary renewal (Gramsci *et al*, 1977, p.12).

Gramsci continued outlining the importance of revolutionaries building cultural inroads into the dominant hegemony to gain influence and build the momentum that created the conditions for struggle. Doing this cultural work, for example on the educational and socio-political terrain, for building solidarity is difficult because it is going against the grain of the dominant hegemony that is defended by cultural norms and State institutions. However difficult as it is, it remains necessary for creating the conditions in which a new conception of the world could gain leverage before, during and after revolution, as could be seen as part of the French revolution as a protracted historical process long before 1789.

The specific research problematic of this study has to this point been discussed in general terms and before elaborating in more specific detail, I now provide a reminder of how this moment in the thesis has been setup. Chapter 2 described the history of Swedish social democracy, which had established dominant hegemony up to the mid-1970s, when the onset of its crisis began. This crisis was discussed in terms of the contemporary introduction of neoliberal economics and the rise of the recent far-Right politics. A second crisis was elucidated in chapter 3. In the discussion of the theoretical framework the crisis for Marxist theory for revolution, expressed as part of the history of i) Leninism, where history scientifically led by a revolutionary vanguard would lead to communism, and ii)

German and Swedish reformist's predicting social transformation through a period of social democracy; both of the theories for far-Left hegemony had failed, and a new Marxist science for revolution was needed post-WW1. It was in *this* context of the two crises that I developed an argument for Marxism to be underlaboured by critical realism. Using this, I went on to elaborate this thesis's Gramscianism, thus positing the importance of internal unity between culture and economics in class struggle, and also, the complexity of history through hegemonic struggles in a *war of position*. In this context of the spirit of dialectical historical Marxism, I now turn to detailing the specific Research Problematic of the study.

The Research Problematic

As Althusser explains, a “concept cannot be considered in isolation; it only exists in the theoretical or ideological framework in which it is used: [this is] its problematic” (Althusser, 2005 [1965], pp.253-254). The “concept” in focus in this thesis is class consciousness and the “framework” (Althusser, 2005 [1965], pp.253-254), is Marxist historical materialism supplemented by Gramscianism elaborating class struggle in culture and hegemony. This is all within the broader purpose of attempting to grasp the possibility of social transformation in contemporary Sweden with all its historical and contemporary conjunctural complexity, as discussed in chapter 2.

The research problematic for this study is framed in terms of an understanding of class consciousness as the pivotal precondition for *class formation for class*

struggle. This problematic originates in Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy* (2009 [1847]), where he explains the revolutionary implications when the proletariat are constituted as an emergent class *for themselves* engaged in class struggle rather than a passive class *in themselves*⁶⁴. This study draws inspiration from developments on this theoretical contribution, particularly by Gramsci, and also others including: Slaughter, (1975); Wright (1989) Rikowski (2001); Hill, Sanders and Hankin (2001), who clarify how Marx's scholarship is useful to understanding working class struggle in contemporary neoliberal capitalism. They suggest that to be class conscious means that the working class person has the *good sense* of him/herself to be implicated in an exploitative and alienating relational social structure, whereby there are capitalists who benefit from the fruits of their labour as workers. Furthermore, studies by: Burawoy (1999); Beach and Dovemark (2007); Korpi (1980); Livingstone and Sawchuck (2004); Lockwood (1958); Rose (2001); and Westergaard and Resler (1975), have provided the inspiration to explore class struggle and its manifestations *specifically* at the level of empirical reality, this includes the way that dominant hegemony is mediated, negotiated and even negated at moments, in the cultural practice of everyday lives, and how these moments are representative of potential struggle for social transformation.

The rationale for the research strategy and specific research design of the fieldwork were based on a Gramscian historical materialist theoretical and

⁶⁴ The full quote that pertains to this interpretation is as follows: "Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests" (Marx, 2009 [1847]).

methodological commitment, as discussed above. This study has been designed to bring appreciation to the integrated multiplicity of mechanisms that are generative of tendencies to shape the experience of empirical reality. But I carefully posited that the relationship between mechanisms, tendencies and empirical reality was not teleological, and there is always space for counteracting tendencies that create alternative empirical realities, including revolutionary possibilities. This study has been based on the theory that the social and cultural world is an *open system* (Bhaskar, 1975) with multiplicity of relations that involve social class, for example the articulation between ethno-racial identity and social class, which are constantly being reconstituted. Attending to fine textured lived social worlds provides knowledge of the way that mechanisms *elide*, meaning come together to produce the *tendency* for acting and thinking in particular ways, and what is analytically interesting is the reporting of the practical manifestation of this in empirical reality. Doing this exploratory work on Swedish lived socio-cultural empirical reality and formations provides materials to establish an explanatory critique for the purpose of heuristic theory building about possibilities for alternative conceptions of the world and praxis (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009, p.40; Danermark, 2002, p.21; Sharp, Green and Lewis, 1975, p.25).

The deployment of *explanatory* critique, as defined earlier in this chapter, is important in this study because it identifies where and how mechanisms are causally linked to tendencies in formation of consciousness and practices. This provides the impetus to understand *common sense* ideas that maintain *consent* to the status quo among the masses. Conditions of *consent* are created through tendencies of *assent* or *acquiescence*. *Assent* is a tendency to actively and

enthusiastically agree to endorse the status quo; *acquiescence* is when compliance occurs but where full *consent* is withheld because of some criticism or *consent* is passively generated through inaction or tacit agreement. In the case of *acquiescence*, *consent* is given in spite of incipient criticism of the status quo, this may be because, for example, the tendency to think of there being no alternatives to the dominant hegemony, or the alternatives as being unfeasible, or indeed too risky. Feasibility is important in the *consent* building process. It is the perception of the material possibility, or not, embedding a particular conception of the world, for example: egalitarianism, social democracy or communism. Both types of *consenting* (assenting/acquiescence) are a part of the *war of position* in the struggle for hegemony described by Gramsci and detailed earlier in this chapter (3).

The exploring and reporting of subjective empirical realities and perceptions about what is possible for the future is important for understanding the deep mechanisms, which are a part of the dynamics of class struggle and class formation in contemporary society. Deploying the notion *depth* in these terms is a reference to critically appreciating the, often invisible, and always complex mechanisms that create the conditions for these experiences (Slaughter, 1975; Van Manen, 1990), which provides the analytical possibility of grasping their practical function in the social world. Understanding the deep mechanisms at the level of the real and their cultural manifestations at the level of the actual is valuable because this is where hegemonic class struggle is on-going in capitalist democracies. These struggles can be observed in consciousness and practices in everyday experiences - the empirical level.

This attempt to grasp what is causally efficacious concerning more than what “meets the eye” Sayer (1992, p.51) by searching for deep mechanisms is fundamental to understanding class formation and class practices as part of socio-cultural phenomena, for example in a phenomena constructed as constituting Swedishness. Attempting to unearth deep mechanisms about socio-cultural phenomena is complex, and this complexity is compounded because in the capitalist relations of production, class antagonisms are mystified (Banfield, 2005; Larrain, 1979; Marx, 1973 [1857]); and therefore appearance of the social world only gives a snapshot understanding of deep “real generative mechanism at work” (Bhaskar, 2009, p.183). Exploring and identifying mechanisms that are generative for producing the tendencies for consciousness and practices and perceptions of class is crucial work for serious and sophisticated Marxist orientated realist scholarship for class struggle and praxis. It is crucial because these insights into the mechanisms provide some knowledge about the way lived conditions were generated, and also provide the potentiality of emergent alternative forces countermanding and transgressing dominant hegemony.

Hegemonic class struggle is complex in the contemporary neoliberal historical moment. In this conjecture, relations of production and social positions manifest in a multiplicity of integrated forms, for instance that of the social relations of capitalist and workers – the latter who *has* to sell their labour power to the former. These forms include: culturally, socially and economically; and the practical manifestation is that many people do not recognise themselves in class positions and society to be stratified by class relations. Alternatively, if they do, they identify with middle

classness and/or social structure as consisting of a muddle-in-the-middle, and see this in socio-cultural practices rather than in antagonistic relations necessary for the mode of production to prevail. For example for middle classness, higher education may have once been the preserve of wealthy capitalist class but is now more accessible to the working class. However, in Marxist terms, attending university does not mean that the essence of the social relations of production and creation of value have changed; nor does it change the fact that the class of people who have to sell their labour remain working class, though they may not recognise this identity. While this points to a great deal of complexity regarding sense-of-self reflexive identity and consciousness, class position as capitalist and worker are constitutively implicit in the social *being* and *activity* of humans. Rikowski (2001, p.20) effectively states:

class relations run through our personhood. It is internal to us. ... We are social beings incorporating antithetical social drivers and forces. This fact sets off contradictions within our lives.

The important point that Rikowski brings attention to, is that workers have within themselves the capacity as potential to attain critical class consciousness, meaning that the exploitation and alienation within the capitalist social relations of production, and the social practices that maintain it, become understood as contradictory to self-flourishing. "Contradiction" is therefore indicative of a rational kernel of thought that is manifested as a critical nuance to the *common sense* of, for example, fairness and equality prevailing, thus in Gramscian terms representing *good sense* about class struggle. In dialectical historical materialism

terms, this nuance of *good sense* presents *something interesting going on* because it conveys an ambiguous aspect of our social being that suggests a moment in empirical reality where *consent* is at stake, and the possibility exists for transgressing and countermanding the dominant status quo hegemony (see Layder, 1993, p.7-8; Callinicos, 1983, p.115; Ollman, 2003, p.4). Such critical nuances articulate with Gramsci's theme that class struggle in contemporary capitalist societies where concessions are given to the working class, a *war of position* is taking place; the example given earlier was of parliamentary democracy. It was also noted that Gramsci observed the crucial role of culture in creating the conditions to rule by *consent*, critical nuances represent a weakened moment in this culture-for-*consent* process. Critical nuances elucidated in explanatory critique therefore are an important reference to a Marxist quest for emancipation, where the possibility of resistance and revolution does not exist outside of the conditions of existence because there is never total domination; it is incorporated *within* the personhood and social relations that sustain the status quo. This is the interpretation being put on Marx and Engels's spirit in the *Communist Manifesto*, where they suggest that capitalism is built on class antagonism and therefore it has potential to generate "its own grave-diggers" (Marx and Engels, 1848).

In the context of the research problematic, to realise the potential energy constituted within *critical nuances*, class consciousness is necessary because it cultivates the conditions in which the individual may heuristically act upon his/her social world. The manifestation of this active engagement in a struggle by organising solidarity with fellow workers, to agitate for their own class interest and

build for an impulse of social transformation; is how the concept of *class formation* practices is deployed in this thesis.

To articulate explanatory critique and the concept of *critical nuance* in the context of this study, Sweden was chosen as critical case to explore class consciousness. In chapter 2 it was designated as a place that represented historical equality *par excellence*, and the social democratic model has been hailed as the materially feasible alternative to socialism and communism. However, with the current Swedish social democratic crisis, Sweden becomes an interesting focal point to explore cultural dynamics in relation to class struggle in this moment of neoliberal and far-Right political transition. Thus using Sweden as a critical case for fieldwork enabled insights about class, which become interesting when articulated with nuances found in lived lives that appear to be representative of *a struggle against* the dominant hegemony (Korpi and Palm, 2003). As described in chapter 2, an important element of social democracy is the way that it has historically emerged constructed as being the *most feasible* of socio-political systems; *as good as it gets* for emancipation. In such a context, *critical nuances* reported by individuals that go against this *common sense* represent possibility for hegemonic struggle, which resonates with Marx (1939 [1861]) who described the *good sense* to countermand the status quo to be “concealed in society as it is”.

Moreover, attention to critical nuances developed as part of an explanatory critique are in turn opportunities to theory-build and speculate on progressive possibilities as they can be analytically treated as data indicative of struggle (Korpi, 1980) and taken to be suggestive of the potential for “social conflict and social change”

(Wright, 1989, p.269). Theory building in this heuristic way, that emphasises the possibility of praxis, is concerned with unearthing the footing of critical nuances as *good sense* in individual's own understanding about the social world that they inhabit. This critical nuance could take the form of their narrative about general egalitarian social structure bringing into focus *criticisms* of it. As hegemony is in constant struggle, the point is that total domination is not possible, and therefore *consent* will always be nuanced, which provides the opportunity to build knowledge about the forms in which a *war of position* is taking place, and where there is speculative possibility of in service of class struggle.

Implications of Part One for the Fieldwork

To summarise this Part of the thesis, and contextualise the research strategy, chapter 2 developed the historical development of social democratic hegemony to its current crisis; chapter 3 then gave an account of how social transformations in Sweden (and Russia) did not materialise sustainably as a workers' State, thus culminating in a crisis for the prevailing positivistic historical materialist interpretation of Marxism. In relation to these crises, critical realism as philosophical underpinning and Gramscian ideas about hegemonic class struggle manifesting in cultural forms was discussed. Pertinent was the idea that *understanding* the dynamics of empirical reality that is being resisted must prefigure resistance to be effective. This provided the broad historical and theoretical context, on which to situate Sweden as an interesting place to explore the critical nuances reported as part of empirical reality, which could be used to

develop explanatory critique focussing on class struggle in Sweden. Put another way, the implication for the interest in class struggle lays with the reporting of a narrative that differs, and perhaps challenges, the established status quo *common sense* in the general account of *consent*, such a situation represents the context for possible class struggle manifesting in cultural forms in empirical reality. The specific use of the term explanatory critique is not therefore deployed to *criticise* testimony's but to see it as a discursive or narrative practice, which when analysed through explanatory critical methodology indicates emergent sites of class struggle in Gramscian historical materialist terms. It is this historical context and theoretical framework that guided the research design, utilising life history interviews within a fieldwork design that appreciates ontology. It is to these details that I now turn.

PART TWO: THE PRACTICALITIES OF THE FIELDWORK

Since Marx, the tradition of critical sociology [research] has rooted itself firmly in the 'here and now' and addressed details of the material reality directly. Marx was adamant that revealing the real state of affairs was dependent upon a thorough detailed analysis of social practices. Empirical analysis together with theoretical conjuncture was essential for a dialectical analysis of inner connections⁶⁵.

(L. Harvey, 1990)

The first Part of the thesis detailed the historical, methodological and theoretical framing, particularly drawing attention to the Marxist orientation highlighting the importance for social transformation: history, human agency, culture and focus on the lived world. Following this grounding, the second Part now explains the research strategy, design and the practical elements of the fieldwork.

Chapter 4: The Research Strategy and Design

⁶⁵ Harvey in quote uses the term "material reality" in the same way that empirical reality is used this study, and his use of "real" is a reference to the deeper mechanisms and tendencies at play to generate the conditions for that empirical reality.

I begin this chapter by detailing the specific research questions in relation to the broad research problematic, I then move on to explaining the design of the recruitment of participants, data collection research strategy in relation to life history interviews and ethnography.

Specific Research Questions

In the introduction to this thesis, I outlined the aim of the study was to investigate, report and explain social class at the level of empirical reality of 15 higher education students, and this aim was focused by exploring and reporting perspectives about class across two dimensions.

First *subjectively*, this is an account of the informant's sense-of-self as embodying a social class identity and its manifestation in everyday practices, if indeed they did recognise this to be the case. Put another way, *subjective* is deployed to infer the informant's understanding of himself or herself as living classed actors, and class apprehended in their agentic daily routine practices.

Second *objectively*, this is an account of the informant's perception of class as existing in the social world in Sweden. In other words, class is *objective* in the sense that it is empirically real and existing 'out-there' in Swedish social structure and recognisable in cultural forms. This empirical reality is independent of their direct lived experience of it, so this could be how they see and model social class as working generally and for other people in Sweden.

The deployment of *subjective* and *objective* in this way relates to the importance of ontology for Marxism to avoid, both, positivistic and reductive scientism, as well as the epistemological fallacy, discussed earlier in Part one chapter 3. It was also there that the three levels of reality were explained, and the subjective and objective dimensions are mapped to the empirical level. It is the primary focus of this study – to capture social class as it is lived and experienced, which can be reported and treated with Marxist historical materialism analysis. There were two philosophical commitments in my historical materialism underlaboured by critical realism: (i) the social world is existent and knowable, (ii) and perceptions about the empirical reality may be fallible. I now elucidate each of these in the context of the research design.

(i) = means that social class in Sweden exists and the informants can know it as embodied in themselves and their practices; and perceive it as part of society and other peoples practices. This relates to the distinction between *subjective* and *objective* dimensions of the research design and negates Humeian un-seriousness.

(ii) = means that their *subjective* and *objective* perceptions can be ambiguous, incomplete and incoherent, thereby suggesting that consent is never sealed opening the space for speculation of transformational possibilities.

Within the philosophical framework, exploring these dimensions of consciousness is valuable knowledge because informant's agentic practices are informed by, and

with, class consciousness. Consciousness and practices are not fixed in a world that is an open system, and therefore having analytical understandings of these, especially at this Swedish social democratic crises conjuncture, where the struggle for hegemony is intensified, provides the footing on which to heuristically theorise the possibility of social transformation.

At this point in the thesis it is worth briefly reiterating what has been covered. In Part one the focus was on explicating and explaining the historical and theoretical framework and importantly two crises were emphasised: i) for Swedish social democratic hegemony in the wake of neoliberalisation and far-Right political transitions, ii) and for Marxist theory for revolution after failed positivistic conceptions of historical materialism in the context of the rise of Swedish social democratic hegemony (and Stalinism in Russia), instead of communism and workers' emancipation. The intervention of critical realism underlabouring and Gramsci was preamble to setup Sweden as a critical case to explore the struggle in cultural forms for class hegemony. In Part two, I have so far laid the ground for framing the research questions that guided the study, and it is to explicating these that I now turn:

1. How does each one of the five Higher Education student informants from Sweden report social class as part of empirical reality in their own lives in Sweden; and how do they each report their perception of social class as part of the Swedish social structure?

2. How does each one of the five Higher Education non-Swedish Scandinavians report social class as part of empirical reality in their own lives in Sweden; and how do they each report their perception of social class as part of the Swedish social structure?

3. How does each one of the five Higher Education Global South informants report social class as part of empirical reality in their own lives in Sweden; and how do they each report their perception of social class as part of the Swedish social structure?

4. What are the prominent commonalities and critical nuances in the accounts of empirical reality revealed by the accounts within each of the three groups of five informants?

5. What are the prominent commonalities and critical nuances in the accounts of empirical reality revealed by comparative analysis across the three groups of informants?

Recruitment of Participants

The research strategy required recruiting different kinds of participants to enable comparison exploring diversity of perspectives, potentially bringing to light significant similarities, differences and contrasting empirical realities. The aim was to identify social and cultural mechanisms and critical nuances in identity and self

conceptions whilst exploring social class with cultural formations of 'race' in consciousness and practices. The three groups of informants were designed to be:

- A) Swedes (those who were born in Sweden)
- B) Non-Swedish Scandinavians (Norway, Denmark, Finland⁶⁶)
- C) Immigrants from the Global South

Group A and Group B consisted of informants who were either born in Sweden or from another Scandinavian country. The informants from these two groups had experience of social democratic settings, and this was designed to give representation of accounts of *Swedish* social democratic empirical reality i) as seen by Swedes and ii) as compared with other Scandinavian respondents from similar countries. The aim was to provide insights into the specific socio-cultural distinction of Swedishness and the Swedish social structure. This would in turn provide the materials for subsequent development of the explanatory critique for identifying *mechanisms* and *critical nuances* for each individual respondent and also the collective group level perspectives.

Group C were informants born outside of Sweden and also outside of Scandinavia in general. This specification enabled a diversity of views from those who were from very different contexts from the pan-Scandinavian region. The inclusion of informants from the Global South was purposeful because Sweden is a destination for exponential numbers of immigrants (see chapter 2), both economic migrants

⁶⁶ As noted in the opening section, Finland is considered as Scandinavia here and whether it is Nordic rather than Scandinavian is a question beyond this study.

and refugees, from many predominantly non-White countries and so could be used in specific reporting of the way that social class is understood to be articulated with other identities. Exploring the immigrant informants' understandings of their experiences presented opportunities to gain insights into their existences, within the political, social and cultural contexts of Sweden highlighting issues of 'race' and national identity, as potentially articulable as *class consciousness*. The descriptive analysis of consciousness and practices of class could therefore be reported at the level of the *individual* informants and also the *group level* perspective across these three groups of participants. This multi-level analysis would also provide material for the development of an explanatory critique in relation to *mechanisms* and *critical nuances*.

The three groups of informants consisted of university students. University students were primarily selected because of reasons of practicality and convenience. I had potential access to this section of society through academic links, which I could exploit for recruitment. This aspect of my research design was theoretically important, as universities are an important social institution for class cultural production. Universities therefore have an educative function in class struggle and this theme could potentially be part of this exploratory study.

The findings of the exploratory aspect of this study, would open avenues for future studies to pursue that could be broader and more focused in terms of the subject of study and also the range of participants recruited, possibility for the purpose of generalisability. The aim of this exploratory study to report *fine-textured* descriptive analysis of empirical reality was a central to concerns regarding designing the

scope and range. I recognised that doing such research would be resource intensive, and decided that therefore 15 participants would be sufficient to effectively carry out the exploratory study.

Another aspect of the recruitment design was that all the informants were enrolled on either social science or humanities courses to enable a basis for comparability. Furthermore, I did not determine specifics relating to: sex, course studied, home university, or any other aspect of character. This diversity was to enable exploration of a range of views to be collected about consciousness and practices of class that could provide the materials for an explanatory critique focussing on unearthing mechanisms to create the conditions for commonalities, and critical nuances to those commonalities about class that represent the potential for struggle⁶⁷.

Data Collection

As explained above, contemporary Sweden was selected as a compelling critical-case to explore empirical reality framed by Gramsci's emphasis on class struggle in lived cultural forms. Important for this specificity was presenting this research from the authorial voices of those who are experiencing empirical reality, and how they understand it. To develop this into a practical information collection method, life history interviews were adopted to gather research about three groups of informants (Swedes, non-Swedish Scandinavians, and Global South Immigrants)

⁶⁷ See Appendix J for the profile of informants.

five per group, with the purpose of reporting perceptions and perspective about social class *across* and *within* the different groups of informants. Five informants were specifically sought because doing life history interviews and subsequent analysis is resource intensive, and so it was a heuristic decision to include five in each group that would allow me to have a range of views while being mindful of practical limitations.

The temporal dimensions of life history interviews were particularly important contexts to account for perceptions and perspectives about social class as developed over a period of time, which would provide analytical informational materials to identify and illuminate the mechanisms involved in creating the conditions for particular forms of consciousness and practices. The methodological presupposition was that humans living in specific conditions have different consciousness; in other words, they have their own ontological and epistemological perspectives, and these are not fixed positions and their hegemony is in constant struggle in cultural formations (Van Manen, 1990). Put another way, what a person *thinks* (consciousness) and what that person *does* (practice) develops throughout their life course, which is shaped by a multiplicity of mechanisms and counter-mechanisms with their competing tendencies. On occasions, this ambiguity between consciousness and practice is recognised, and at other times it is not. Both of these are important to glean material for an explanatory critique in relation to thinking and action. In these situations of complexity, life history interviews provide valuable materials that are helpful analytically to identify emergent temporal changes to consciousness and practices, for instance in the context of and possible spatial considerations, such as a physical move to Sweden, which may be causally efficacious for the change.

Furthermore, life history interviews were epistemologically compatible with the presupposition that class is a dynamic and fluid phenomenon that is not fixed experientially or structurally in time and space conjunctures. The self-directed nature of life history interviews provided the opportunity for informants to frame their account in their own voice with the flexibility to orientate the discussion in the direction that they desired. This provided credibility to the reporting and authenticity to subsequent analysis. In this way, the life history interviews adopted in this study were flexibly structured⁶⁸ (Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst, 2001).

The pursuit of knowledge in research is driven by *political persuasions* conditioned by *personal experiences and commitments*. In relation to the former I have outlined in the introduction to this thesis that the study was conducted in the spirit of, and a contribution to, Marxism. In relation to personal experiences, in Appendix H I have provided a sketch of my *own* biography through the passage of time and space, which contributed to creating my desire to pursue a study of the lived existences of social class as a context for understanding class struggle and class formation. In a spirit of scientific ethics and transparency, part of expressing my commitments discloses my *personal-as-political* concern with class struggle. Class struggle in my own life history was a complex mix of working class identity, which was ethnographically nuanced in a dominant cultural hegemony of White middle classness during New Labour and Tony Blair's *we're all middle class now* era. The methodological point I make here is that my reflexions on the conflicted, ambiguous and also liminal aspects of my own life proved to be valuable preparation for subsequent fieldwork in Sweden, including significant and complex analogies

⁶⁸ See Appendix K for an example of the interview questions and schema.

(Mansaray, 2006). This personal biography, with my ethno-racial minoritized background and complex class position in neoliberalism, provides elucidation of the existential support drawn upon in the way that I designed and conducted the practical elements of the life history interviews, to which I now turn.

Life History Interviews: The Three Parts

The interview schema was framed by a logic comprising of three parts, with each devoted to a particular experiential dimension to explore informant's *conceptions of the world* and *common sense* as historically constructed. Part one focussed on exploring the informants *past* empirical reality and how they understood this⁶⁹. The interview questions focussed on their early childhood and youth, and included questions about: education, politics, family, relationships, and culture. For the non-Swedish interviewees, this part explored and reported on their home life and journey to Sweden. These explorations were important for the explanatory critique to be able to glean the salient consciousness creating mechanisms at play in their conditions of existence.

Part two of the interview questions schema focussed on the *present* moment in time. These questions focussed on asking the informants to report on their own lived life-worlds and perception of the objective Swedish socio-cultural formation in experiences. While all the informants were asked similar questions for the

⁶⁹ See Appendix K for an example of a life history schedule.

purposes of comparability within and between interviewees to facilitate subsequent comparative analysis, the questions did attempt to build on specific responses. This gave autonomy to the informant to report their account of empirical reality, the reporting of which facilitated wider critical analysis as development of an explanatory critique.

Part three of the interview questions schema focussed on their conceptions of the *future*. This was about how they reflexively thought about what the future held for them and Swedish society, and why they thought what they did. In this final part, the interviewees were asked to look-back over their own life history and also changes in Swedish society up to the present moment, and through this process of reflection, the interviewee was asked to speculate on what the future in Sweden may look like. Drawing from Ollman (2003, p.7-8), part three focuses on integrating perspectives in the past and probable future based on their vantage point at the present moment, which would facilitate an analysis of the possibility of transgressing the status quo to be found in their testimonies.

This interview schema using the life history approach was framed by theoretical and methodological consideration, discussed in the last Part of the thesis. To reiterate briefly: first, conceiving of social class empirical reality as *historically* situated was important because the study was theoretically designed to understand history as an *open system*, and change could be conditioned through people's conscious will to intentionally change it and within structural limitations. Theoretically conceiving history in a *temporal* way also allowed for a *contextual* variable to be introduced, where the Swedish location in its current transitional

moment is important and interesting as a case study of experiences from three different groups of informants.

Second, the study also presupposed that consciousness and practices are conditioned by the lived world. The interview schema facilitated an appreciation of consciousness as contingent on the material environment that the informant occupied, thus for the creation of tendencies for acting and thinking in particular ways. The presupposition in the life history interview questions was that hegemony is always open to be struggled over, and it is analytically important to identify the mechanisms that shape this struggle, and the forms, in which this struggle takes place⁷⁰. This focus is interesting because of Sweden's transitional crisis status regarding equality and fairness, as discussed in chapter 2.

The aim of the study has been focussed by exploring and reporting perspectives about class across two dimensions these were:

- i) Subjectively: reported as recognised in their own everyday lived life; and also,
- ii) Objectively: as reported to be part of the Swedish social structure beyond their own everyday lived life.

This study has been designed to get detailed reporting to address these two *dimensions* of empirical reality in each of the three *parts* of the life history interview

⁷⁰ This relates back to the inspiration from my Marxism and Gramscianism discussed in chapter 3, especially the conception that people have the capacity to shape history but not in conditions of their choosing.

questions; thus to analytically capture their own consciousness and understandings of class as dynamic and changeable in time and space.

The separation between the *two dimensions* of empirical reality, and also the interview schema in *three parts* carries no assumptions that the dimensions and parts existed independently of each other in the lived world. They were artificially abstracted, distinguished, separated and reconstructed for heuristic analytical purposes. It was recognised that the dimensions and parts do not operate in isolation, and they are integrated in a broad and complex totality. For example, at any one moment, each of the two dimensions may be in conjunction with any one or more combination of the parts. That is to say, consciousness is not constituted or caused by singular experiences in, for example, early life; or singular events triggered by singular mechanisms, but a multiplicity of all these experiences and events laminated as a totality (Bhaskar, 1975, p.3; Layder, 1993, p.9). In appreciating this complexity, and in line with the Gramscian inspired approach adopted, the aim was to attempt to explore and report the socio-cultural formations as reported by those experiencing them. The level of authenticity that this achieves, allows for a stronger heuristic relationship between the findings, reporting and analysis of the material. This also facilitates effective development of an explanatory critique in relation to mechanisms than types of analyses that remain at the level of description, thus this study is eschewing a simple realism, as discussed above in chapter 3.

To enrich the life history interviews data with contextual data and situate the reports of social class in Sweden, I drew upon the ethnographic method to understand

better the Swedish socio-cultural context. It is to the details of what I am calling *ethnography* that I now turn to.

Ethnography

Ethnography was employed as a broad research strategy to aid identifying the materials to help understand social class dynamics of cultural forms. This section provides the background rationale within that research strategy for connecting to life-history interviewing method. When designing the study, I appreciated that as a non-Swede and non-resident in Sweden could potentially mean that I was missing important contextual experience to interpret my information in both reporting and constructing data analysis. Although, I was not doing a study applying the ethnographic method as a primary source of gathering data, nor in its typical form, I did draw from it. This was in the context of what I below call *hanging out* to become *au fait* with Swedishness and become alert to cultural forms of class in empirical reality, which may have appeared serendipitously in my life history interviews.

The ethnographic method is conceptualised and applied in many forms (Beach and Dovemark, 2007; Burawoy, 1999; Hammersley, 2006). It is therefore it is necessary to outline the implementation of ethnographic approach in this particular study. Ethnographic approaches in scholarly research originate from cultural anthropology and social phenomenology, disciplines that are based on the principle of the “analysis of the world of everyday life” (Schutz, 1970, p.72). Two of

the founding architects of ethnographic approaches in the late 19th century, Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski, were the pioneers of methods of data collection that involved trying to understand the culture of 'primitive' tribes. One of Boas's students, Margaret Mead, in the 1930s developed a method of ethnography that emphasised the first hand data gathering *in the field of study* itself with the premise that social phenomena need to be understood in terms of its own empirical reality. Only after it has been reported in its own context with its own conditions of existence can it be appreciated in analysis (Walford, 2007). Hammersley (2006, p.4) succinctly puts this as placing an "importance of studying at first-hand what people do and say in particular contexts". From this perspective, ethnography has a methodological and theoretical compatibility with this study because it emphasises the value of doing research about the manifestation of empirical reality, thus placing an importance on social ontology and empirical realism.

To grasp the intricacies of the context in which the data was collected, for example the tacit cultural codes of social class practice, ethnographers emphasize the value of spending time in-situ (Wolcott, 1999). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p.i) state, ethnography:

In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in the people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions - in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) make it clear that being in the field is a key principle of ethnography. In this study, the notion of “extended period of time” has been flexibly implemented because of the practical constraints of having a full time job in England. I was able to visit Sweden several times annually for the purpose of “watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions” and generally being in Sweden to observe empirical reality, which I did by way of “hanging out”, this account is detailed below. Beach and Dovemark (2007, p.169) sum up the kind of ethnographic activity that I was able to deploy:

[P]ut simply, ethnographers gather and develop information about life-settings, the people in them, their expressions, their activities, the artifacts they develop and employ and the ways in which they do these things, their rituals and their traditions.

Applying broadly ethnographic principles outlined in this description, in terms of being physically present and experiencing social life in Sweden, was important for grasping of the life history data and allowed me to treat it with empathy and understanding. This is especially so in regards to searching for explanations of class consciousness of different ethno-racial groups of peoples with respect to class struggle while identifying and exploring the mechanisms at play in Swedish social hegemony. This was with the aim to present the preparation and fieldwork as consistent with the Gramscian orientation of the study and the research problematic guiding the study towards a concern for social class and potential for struggle at the level of culture and experiences.

Chapter 5: Research Design Implementation

As described above, the research design was set-up to collect data from fifteen life history interviews from three groups of informants to enable a reporting and analysis at three levels: i) at the level of the *individual*; ii) *within the* three groups of informants [Swedes, non-Swedish Scandinavian, and Global South] and; iii) also *across* the three groups for commonalities and distinctions. This arrangement aimed to glean data that would explore and report fine textured insights concerning subjective and objective empirical reality. This is their sense of class as experienced and practiced, and also their perspectives on social class at the level of Swedish social structure. However, whilst the logic of this research design and analysis was theoretically coherent, it could not be fully realised in practice because of practicality and accessibility issues. I discuss these next.

The Recruitment Challenge

I began the data collection in the summer of 2009 by asking academics and other acquaintances to advertise posters I had designed to recruit informants. This method had worked for the pilot study and it was also cost-effective as it reduced travel expenditure (I was self-funded). I also asked these academics and acquaintances to refer me to their own colleagues and their acquaintances to tap into their networks to open-up recruitment channels. Similarly, the recruited informants were in turn asked to forward invitations to people who *they* knew. The idea was to create a chain referral that tapped into social and professional

networks that continuously rolled forward to create self-perpetuating recruitment (Blaikie, 2010, p.179). This was my snowball method of recruitment.

As described earlier, the criterion for the selection of participants was open and flexible for the recruitment of the participants within the three groups of Swedes, non-Swedish Scandinavian and Global South participants. In other words, informants were essentially self-selecting within the parameters set (i.e. being a social science/humanities student in Sweden). Recruiting Swedes by this method was successful and I had secured a commitment from my five Swedish informants to be interviewed but I initially struggled to recruit Global South and non-Swedish Scandinavians. I had planned to complete the fieldwork in approximately 12 months but recruitment via my poster campaign was slower than expected, and within a year I had collected data from only nine informants, which was six short of the target⁷¹.

The recruitment challenge manifested emergently in two forms. First, I was not able to be personally present in Sweden as much as I wanted to be to promote my study to recruit informants. Second, whilst I was able to be in Sweden during university vacation periods, Sweden's teaching semester broadly ran in parallel with my own University's, and this was a problem because outside of term-time, students in Sweden became unavailable and many had returned to their country of origin. This timing clash was something I had not predicted and it became a significant challenge.

⁷¹ See Appendix J for timeline of recruitment as part of the profiling of informants.

To deal with my slower than expected recruitment of informants, I did two things. First, I redesigned my poster to specifically target the non-Swedish Scandinavians⁷² and Global South groups, as it was becoming increasingly obvious that these were hard-to-reach. I specifically targeted them through a poster campaign that appealed more widely than the original. Second, I applied for and won sabbatical-leave from my university in 2011 to spend more time in Sweden (more about this in relation to ethnography below).

The recruitment from posters, due to the self-selecting aspect of it, led to some skewing of the profile of informants. The method of recruiting by poster and snowballing yielded the following informants: Swedes – all male and mostly with academic sociology backgrounds, which gave them a noticeable theoretical toolbox and vocabulary to articulate their testimonies⁷³, and they were also all male; non-Swedish Scandinavians – who were *all* Finns (four female, one male); and for the Global South group, a mixture consisting of people from several diverse countries (two females, three male).

While the recruitment meant that the volunteers for the study did not include any Norwegians or Danes, serendipitously, this recruitment presented the opportunity to explore more comprehensively the types of class consciousness at the Finnish group-level perspectives and perceptions about social class as lived in their own experiences and also as part of the wider social structure. These accounts of empirical reality could potentially reveal antecedents of Swedish colonialism and

⁷² See Appendix I for this poster design.

⁷³ See Part 3 chapter 6 for examples of the confidence and clarity with which, for example, Martin (a sociology student) was able to express his thoughts unlike, for example, Zeynep who was an immigrant and a non-sociologist.

socio-cultural and ethno-racial histories as being lived in contemporary Sweden. These may be interesting in context of class formation for struggle. Also in relation to the recruitment, the diversity of the Global South immigrants provided a rich mix of individuals to explore and identify class in their non-Scandinavian perspectives on subjective and objective class empirical reality.

On the recruitment posters, I had requested a proficiency in English language speaking, the concern was communication and the possibility of fine textured and nuanced statements being lost in translation, especially since my own proficiency in the Swedish language was only basic. In the end, communication was not a problem – the Scandinavians spoke fluent English, as did the Global South Immigrants, albeit with more difficulty. However, some interviewees did say that they felt frustrated at times because they were unable to express their responses with sophistication. On reflection, the data may have been even more nuanced had I been able to speak the informants' language, or if they had English as a first rather than a second or even third language as with some of the Global South informants.

Ethnographic Experience

Ethnography was employed as a means to get a personal experience of Swedish empirical reality to better understand and contextualise the data collected from my respondents (Wolcott, 1999). Earlier I noted that I had been awarded a sabbatical in 2011, this was crucial for the development and completion of the study for two

reasons. First, it gave me the opportunity to travel to Sweden for my fieldwork; and second, I used it to spend two months travelling across Sweden, ethnographically *hanging out* and being immersed in Swedish culture in several places to meet different types of Swedes in a variety of circumstances. This gave me a familiarity with Swedishness that I had previously glimpsed only partially from visiting for weekends or a week at a time as I had done previously. As part of the ethnography, I arranged a series of academic presentations on my on-going study, going from the East to the West of the country at universities. Doing this, I met Swedish academics doing similar studies and others who had an interest in Marxism who welcomed my research interest in Sweden and social class, particularly with the specified three groups of informants, which was seen to be innovative and original.

Unexpectedly, the talks were a confidence boost which was needed at a time when the study began to feel a very lonely pursuit, since the fieldwork was beginning to be so challenging due to the practical and logistical problems with access and the severely restricted time that I had available. The academics I met were also useful for helping to focus my study and guide my approach. One particular instance was the way in which the importance of the role of social democracy in everyday life was represented during an informal conversation. While *social democratic* Sweden was selected as a location for this study on class precisely because it has been perceived to be a favourable place for equality and it was in transition making it compelling, I had been unfamiliar with the *extent* to which the history of social democracy was embodied as recognised to be part of the everyday contemporary Swedish cultural empirical reality. Here is an excerpt of that conversation that I recorded as part of my field notes:

Swedish academic: Alpesh, [do] you know how important we older Swedes consider Social Democracy today?

AM: Yes, very ...

Swedish academic: [interjects] no more important than that [followed by a long explanation between the connection between Bismark and Swedish Social Democracy, and his regret at its decline].

(FN 21.1.11)

These ethnographic experiences raised my awareness of what was deemed to be socio-culturally pertinent⁷⁴, and as a result, I paid more acute attention to these things during the interviews with the informants' to construct analytical capacity to understand social class in culturally manifested lived forms⁷⁵.

Dovemark and Beach (2014, p.586) state that ethnography enables “culturally rich ... descriptions of human life ... direct and constant social encounters and meetings with human subjects in their daily lives”. My two months in Sweden also allowed me extended time to *hang out* in non-academic situations to become acquainted with Swedish empirical reality and cultural manifestations outside of universities. Various locations, such as bus/train stations, pubs, cafes, restaurants, student eateries, and staff rooms provided me with experience of everyday life in Sweden. Equally interesting was meeting people and learning about *being*

⁷⁴ See Appendix D for an example of a conversation that I had with an Industrial Relations expert about the LO (Trade Union) and the historical link with the Social Democratic Party. This kind of material supplemented my ethnography and it was crucial because it was not easily found in English.

⁷⁵ See Appendix K for an example of questions put to informants related to social democracy.

Swedish or *being non-Swedish in Sweden*. I did not make a concerted effort to consciously assimilate and I tried to listen and observe situations rather than participate and disrupt them. It was my first time as an ethnographer and I soon discovered that an effective way to experience Swedishness was to sit at a bar or counter, which provided a vantage point that encapsulated most of the space and also to view interaction between different sorts of people. One method that I employed was to visibly position next to me on the counter a book called: *A Xenophobes Guide to the Swedes: A Frank and Funny Book about What Makes the Swedes Swedish*⁷⁶. The cover of this book is particularly important to note because of the illustration of the juxtaposing of striking blonde hair with trees – a very stereotypical image depicting the Swedes and the cultural expression of nature lovers. This regularly drew attention and initiated interest from bar-staff and customers. For example, in relation to the title of the book, I had many conversations about what *Swedishness* was to that person. One such example I recorded in my field note logbook was with a group of young people who were drinking heavily before going to a rock concert:

Introduced to a group of guys who were the friends with the bar steward – she’s very popular. She seemed to know everybody in the place – good gatekeeper. I had a great convo with them about immigration. After being introduced to the group they found out that I was English and atheist, one of the guys very discretely told me he feared the “Islamification” of Sweden. Interesting that he first had got to know that I was English and specially non-Muslim before revealing this. Despite

⁷⁶ See Appendix L for this book cover.

being drunk, he seemed to know that this was sensitive stuff and only said in secret to safe people.

(FN 21.1.11)

This field note was one that exposed a specific form of socio-cultural Swedishness – a public presentation of tolerance and tensions with this commitment to be elicited *only* in the safety of privacy. This experience added personal observation and my subjective *experience of* Swedish egalitarianism, which was used when it came to analysing the interviews conducted with the informants. This became salient with testimony that identified *ideals* of social egalitarianism eliding in *empirical reality* with discrimination and marginalisation emerging in interesting analytical speculative possibilities related to the problematic.

Hanging Out

As part of the ethnography described above, I have noted that I tried to observe the dynamics of situations rather than actively participate and disrupt them, and my intention by hanging out was simply to be a “lurker” and a “soaker” (Werner and Schoepfler, 1989); however, this was not straightforward. During my ethnographic fieldwork, I had observed that my interactions were mostly initiated by me (which included the book on the counter method) and Swedes were generally unwilling to make the first contact. This could be related to ethno-racial issues, which was reported in some accounts from informants who denoted differentiated experience for those who did not fit the profile of a typical Swede, for

instance being White. One consequence of initiating contact was that I was asked to *hang out*. I noticed that this was particularly the case when I was found to have an English accent and living in London, which was popularly perceived to be endearing and being from London was seen to be *cool* and a desired destination amongst younger Swedes– especially in Goteborg which is known colloquially as *Lilla London* [Little London]). The *hanging out* with my new ‘friends’ posed some fieldwork social dilemmas. Whilst I was not dishonest by not disclosing that I was a researcher observing their Swedishness, I was keen to maintain an element of discretion when talking about my study. Ultimately I did not want to be identified as spying or snooping, and using their friendship instrumentally. There was goodwill on the part of the people who had befriended me and I did not want to betray their loyalty and trust. This is a dilemma that is an affliction for studies like this as Coffey (1999, p.55) points out:

Many field researchers have written autobiographical accounts of the friendships, commitment and love that they found in the field, and where that has diminished, of feelings of hurt, betrayal and guilt.

Coffey’s comments resonate with my fieldwork experience⁷⁷. I had *appeared* and *disappeared* in the lives of these people with out explanation, and covertly used their offer of friendship for the benefit of my research, which is likely to have generated the potential for betrayal, and also guilt on my part.

⁷⁷ The formal ethical clearances and the way that these materialised in the fieldwork is accounted for in Appendix F

Much of the fieldwork notes' subject matter was not the focus of this study⁷⁸, but the observations and experiences did have two important functions. First, the observations and experiences allowed me to contextualise my findings within the society that they manifested, which was helpful for my reporting and also analysis. Moreover, the ethnography was also useful during the interviews as my experiences allowed me to relate the informants' account within the wider society and cultural dynamics and this was the impetus for deeper probing questions. Second, the ethnographic fieldwork experiences provided me with a continual sense of curiosity, inspiration and intrigue. Psychologically, this was important as it reaffirmed my motivation to do a study of an exploratory nature focussing on social class in experiential lived-world empirical reality. An example of this usefulness of doing ethnography came with being able to personally profile, understand in context, and experience heuristically forms of Swedish socio-cultural expression in everyday social intercourse.

This Swedish socialisation became prominent with the theoretically emergent findings associated with the cultural phenomenon of *lagom* and its ontological manifestation for individuals during my fieldwork. Lagom derives from the ten laws of *Jantelagen* to establish a tradition promoting a social democratic culture of *we're all the same and nobody should be different* (Daun, 1996, p.52). Jantelagen is an ancient traditional social democratic law comprised of ten rules, which is described by Daun (1996, p.52) as a mentality that promotes the notion that "you are nothing by virtue of being an individual; on the contrary you should not think you are

⁷⁸ The messiness of qualitative fieldwork is explained as part of Appendix H.

anything special". In my ethnographic experiences, I observed what I came to understand as *lagom*. On one occasion, a Swede, after seeing my *A Xenophobes Guide to the Swedes* book laying on the counter in front of me, told me that an English person would understand the Swedish mentality as an inversion of the idiom: *Keeping up with the Joneses*. To which I replied "so in Sweden it's about *keeping down with the Jonsson's*?" The response was, "absolutely" (FN 17.3.08)⁷⁹. Having these personal experiences were crucial for developing my sensitivity to the respondents' life-worlds⁸⁰ and draw my attention to the essentially complex, active and integrated nature of doing critical cultural fieldwork, subsequent analysis and integration of findings.

Being a 'Local'

As noted above, the issue of being familiar with the Swedish socio-cultural context was an important aspect of the research strategy and this was the rationale for spending time in Sweden and ethnographically *hanging out*. I became more conscious of the benefit of being informed about Swedish current affairs and news stories, which facilitated interaction by helping me to locate conversation in contemporary discourse. With this in mind, I did two things. First, I subscribed to *The Local* and *Radio Sweden*. Both of these news outlets were in English and

⁷⁹ The peculiarities of the empirical reality of *lagom*, and especially for a non-Swede, is satirized in a BBC Radio 4 production called *The Cold Swedish Winter*, which tells a fictitious story of a Brit who moves to Sweden and encounters socio-cultural Swedishness. On the BBC website, the creators of the production give their irreverent but also serious explanation of what *lagom* is and how it distinguishes the Swedes from the Brits, see Appendix M for a selected transcript of the production.

⁸⁰ *Lagom* was also analytically emergent in my reporting and subsequent development of an explanatory critique, particularly of Anders's account - see chapters 6 and 8.

provided me with an invaluable source of news about everything from current affairs to football related matters. Second, I took a short intensive Swedish language course to help me read news headlines and navigate everyday life during my time in the field. I would, for example, see a headline that I could translate and then initiate a conversation with a Swede about the article and their perspective. These were significant aspects to my practical implementation of my research strategy.

Interviewing Informants

Data collection through life history interviews involves asking informants at short notice to discuss a potentially sensitive and complex subject matter (social class) on demand. This has potentially both negative and positive implications for data collection and reliability. Negatively, asking for responses without time to reflect may have led to informants divulging accounts that may be analytically treated as lacking detail, incoherent and/or inconsistent. Sonny's account, which is reported in the next Part of the thesis, is an example of an informant who felt that her account was incomplete and after the interview emailed a further contribution detailing social class and her family's relationship to material possessions. She had seemingly needed time to reflect and felt the need to add more detail to her initial testimony. Conversely, one potential benefit of asking for spontaneous responses to questions about class may have captured the un-sanitised accounts of the informant's perception of empirical reality, and this could identify some

ambiguities between consciousness and perception, and experience of empirical reality, thus taken as critical nuances to develop explanatory critique.

In my personal biography, I referred to the issue of *belonging* and *identity* (Appendix H) and this related to some of the informants' in Sweden. Whilst there were many differences between the informants in this study and my own life history, and also there were analogous accounts of the complex relationship between 'race' and social class, something that I have reflected on as being prominent in my own life history. My racial identity of being non-White in a majority White area in Bradford became emergently important because of the connection I had with informants who gave accounts of being non-White in Sweden. This personal connection benefitted me in two ways. First, it led me to ask empathetic probing questions (Lofland and Lofland, 1995); second, it gave me sensitivity that made issues of assimilation and 'Otherness' as a researcher and analyst (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; LeCompte, Pressle and Tesch, 1993). In this way, my personal life history regarding my class and ethno-racial identity allowed me to "engage personally" with my fieldwork (Coffey, 1999, p.3)⁸¹.

There was also another way in which this personal engagement may have been influential, in perhaps a less beneficial way. It relates to an informant pseudonymously referred to as Glenn, who had said that he was "in touch with Marx" and he explicitly referred to Marxist ideas, and he had at points concluded with "you know what I mean", which was not a question, rather the "you" was seeking collusion by affirming my presupposed beliefs. Through attending one of

⁸¹ See Appendix G for an example of this as part of rapport.

my academic presentations as part of my ethnography, Glenn was aware that I had been influenced in my academic work by Marxist ideas. It could be the case that either Glenn was expressing solidarity, and that he could speak on common ground; or that he was simply parroting what he felt I wanted to hear. I dealt with this by asking about the issues in different forms, looking for consistency, corroboration or otherwise in their interviews. This was the aim with inverting questions, such as “ok, so you said that you’re middle class and not working class, what would *not* make you part of the ruling class?”.

In addition to *probing* for depth, detail and consistency, there were other interviews where *prompting* was necessary. My general approach was to let social class emerge organically as a topic in discussion but on occasions this did not happen. In general, the Finns, for instance, were very reserved and did not open-up as much as the other two groups of informants and they did not spontaneously refer to class, either directly or implicitly. When this happened, I asked *direct* questions about social class to ensure that I had gathered material, even about its absence. Lyka’s interview was an example where I was much more direct in the questioning⁸².

Revisiting the Preamble to the Study

This Part of the thesis began with the specific research questions, followed by a series of sections in chapter 4 explaining the research design and the practical

⁸² See chapter 6 below for a descriptive analysis of this.

elements of the study, including: the specific research questions, logic of the recruitment design, data collection methods, and the aligning of life history interviews supplemented by ethnography with the theoretical framework. I closed these design elements of the study with explaining the familiarising function of ethnography.

Chapter 5 in this Part two of the thesis reflected on the implementation of the original research design. I include this to illustrate the messy nature, problems and challenges associated with carrying out qualitative research. Engaging in this reflective way was itself an exercise in understanding that theory and methodology is mediated by the empirical reality in which it is applied, thus I lived my dialectical historical Marxism as part of this study.

I bring Part two of the thesis to a close by reiterating that this thesis has described and explained the Swedish context tracing the history and development of social democracy to its current crisis in hegemony in chapter 2. Significant themes were discussed pertaining to neoliberalisation and far-Right ideological and political shifts; all of which makes Sweden a compelling research field. In chapter 3, I discussed the crisis for Marxist revolutionary theory. This crisis was framed broadly in relation to three themes: i) the failure of the Leninist revolution in Russia, ii) the failure of scientific predictions of history unfolding in stages to communism, iii) WW1 that witnessed working class people turning to alternatives to communism, including social democracy in Sweden. These historical events provided the context for Gramscian focus on class struggle in cultural forms and the creation of the conditions for hegemony. I also discussed the philosophy of social science

drawing from historical materialism and its critical realism underlabouring that works in the background of this study. These have been the preamble chapters in two Parts to establish the context for reporting the fieldwork and subsequent analysis of the study, which is the focus of the next Parts of this thesis.

PART THREE: THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Once you begin to look more closely at the Nordic societies and their people ... [you see] the slow decline of social equality.

(M. Booth, 2014)

This study set out to do what the opening epigram to the thesis (abbreviated above) suggests: “to look more closely” at empirical reality and to do this in Sweden, which has historically been cited as a best-case for opportunities for human flourishing in 21st century, but more recently has been undergoing significant political, cultural, social and ethno-racial transition leading to crisis of social democratic hegemony (chapter 2). Inspired by a Gramscian concern for socio-cultural conditions as part of class struggle (chapter 3), set against this historical and theoretical background, the study aims to contribute descriptive analysis of accounts of consciousness and practices of empirical reality in social democratic Sweden, and development of subsequent analysis as explanatory critique in Gramscian-inspired Marxist mode. This is the focus in Part three of the thesis now.

Chapter 6: Presentational Structure of the Reporting and Descriptive Analysis of the Study

The chapters above have been concerned with the background framing and preamble to the study. What follows is the reporting and descriptive analysis of the fieldwork, which is presented in the following two chapters.

Chapter 6 consists of reporting on the findings of accounts of social class from the fifteen informants *individually*. Each one reports the respondent's account of their own classed life histories and lived experiences, as well as their perceptions of Swedish identity and cultural forms. These provide fine-textured insights into the informants' subjective sense of empirical reality; and also their perception of the objective Swedish social structure. This section addresses Research Question 1, 2 and 3, presented in chapter 4, to reiterate these were:

1. How does each one of the five Higher Education student informants from Sweden report social class as part of empirical reality in their own lives in Sweden; and how do they each report their perception of social class as part of the Swedish social structure?

2. How does each one of the five Higher Education non-Swedish Scandinavians report social class as part of empirical reality in their own lives in Sweden; and how do they each report their perception of social class as part of the Swedish social structure?

3. How does each one of the five Higher Education Global South informants report social class as part of empirical reality in their own lives in Sweden; and how do

they each report their perception of social class as part of the Swedish social structure?

Chapter 7 takes the descriptive analysis from the level of the *individual* to a collective level of integrated analysis exploring consciousness and practices to develop tentative typological abstractions *within* each group (Swedes, Finns and Global South informants). The aim is to provide a descriptive analysis to synthesise each group's *prominent commonalities* and *differences* of: i) what they assume to constitute Swedishness, which has been defined as the *common sense* constructions of Sweden and its socio-cultural forms ii) their collective relationship to it in each groups practices in empirical reality as related to Swedishness. This section addresses Research Question 4. *What are the prominent commonalities and critical nuances in the accounts of empirical reality revealed by the accounts within each of the three groups of five informants?*

Chapter 7 then concludes by developing tentative typological abstractions of consciousness and practices comparatively *across* the three groups of informants. The aim in reporting the findings is to: i) profile the views reported *across* the three groups for possible elements of a common framework of understanding of class and empirical reality to emerge; and thus highlighting within this analytical synthesis ii) critical nuances within this common framework *across* the participants as a whole. This section addresses Research Question 5. *What are the prominent commonalities and critical nuances in the accounts of empirical reality revealed by comparative analysis across the three groups of informants?* This is an elucidation across the informants taken as undifferentiated, the purpose is to represent

nuances in the common framework(s) of their collective sense of their subjective empirical reality, and also their collective perception of the objective Swedish social structure. Identifying these nuances within the common framework of understanding class and practices in empirical reality provides their understanding to interpret and speculatively represent what is going on in Sweden. This provides the analytical architecture for speculatively abstracting further and developing explanatory critique concerning mechanisms that are a part of struggle in Swedish consciousness and practices in Part four.

These two chapters report three levels of descriptive analysis as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *A Table Representing the Presentational Strategy Showing Sectionalising and Levels of Descriptive Analysis*

	Level of reporting
Presented in chapter	
7	i) Descriptive analysis of the accounts at the level of the <i>individual</i>
8	ii) Descriptive Analysis Synthesized for <i>Group-level</i> Prominent Commonalities and Differences: Constructs of Swedishness and Practices and Lived Relationships to Swedishness

	iii) Descriptive analysis and typological abstractions of the accounts synthesised <i>across</i> the three groups
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As explained in the introduction to this Part, chapter 7 consists of reporting all fifteen informants *individually* and their depiction of their sense-of-self and lived experiences of class, and also their perceptions of objective Swedish social structure. The accounts come from each individual informant, beginning with the Swedes, then accounts from each individual non-Swedish Scandinavian and lastly accounts from each individual Global South Immigrant. Each individual informant's report contains subheadings to guide the reader to the next theme in their account. This provides an integrative signpost and lays the basis for chapter 8, where the move is to development of an explanatory critique in relation to the fieldwork findings relating to class consciousness, Sweden and Swedishness and mechanisms that create the condition for this empirical reality.

Reporting of Findings at the Level of the Individual Informant's Own Life History: The Swedes

The Swedes were recruited to provide insights as the 'natives'⁸³. Chapter 2 documented the historical development of the Swedish commitment to providing

⁸³ Double speech marks reflect a direct quote from the informant. Single inverted commas, also known as scare quotes' denote an acknowledgement that the term/phrase is contestable and the

social and economic fairness for workers, to a contemporary nation that was haunted by a *deepening crisis for social democracy* – the very mechanism that had created its *Golden Years*. In the context of the struggle for hegemony, this historical trajectory and contemporary conjuncture generates interest in class consciousness and practices in empirical reality, and how these accounts offer heuristic theorising of the possibility of class struggle and radical transformation.

Par

Par's life history was rich and complex with many articulations in terms of breadth of experiences because although he was born and lived in Sweden as a Swedish national, his parents were second-generation Mediterranean⁸⁴ and he spent his childhood there, later returning to Sweden to study at University. The consequence of this life history was that he was unable to provide a continuous personal historical perspective of experienced reality in Sweden. However, he said that not having spent his whole life in Sweden allowed him to be confidently reflexive and recognise social norms and values in Swedish society from an informed but relatively distanced vantage point. His self-positioning allowed him to present an informed appreciation of Swedishness, he gave the following example:

meaning may be ambiguous. Scare quotes are deployed *here* to denote that this is contentious term, thus reference to the *sámi's* place as the indigenous peoples of Sweden.

⁸⁴ The real place name will not be used in some of the reporting when requested by the informant or deemed to be potentially compromising anonymity.

It's a really big taboo if you ask "how much are you earning?" They want to be fair and equal...⁸⁵ But everyone wants to have this fancy lifestyle, you know, they show-off somehow.

Here Par was showing his awareness of wider cultural distinctions in Sweden, reporting that questions about earning capacity were socially taboo because of a desire to commit to a presentation of Swedish fairness and equality. Par was reflexive about how these ideals manifested particularly in Stockholm. He perceived that there was a tension between these ideals and socially ostentatious behaviour, he elaborated on this point about his awareness of social expectations and what he considered to be antithetical desires and practices:

Everyone now wants to have this fancy lifestyle you know, to show-off somehow. ... You would see this in Stockholm. An example is, you would see an incredible amount, big amount of luxury cars, racing cars or like cars that are like costing 30 or 40,000 euros.

The nature of Par's critique was that the desire, or "want" as he put it, to be "fair and equal" was not consistent with what he observed. Par was pointing out a distinction between the ideal ("fair and equal") and empirical reality where people are demonstrating distinction and showing-off. Furthermore, there is a temporal aspect to Par's statement. The use of the word "now" is important because it points to Par's depiction that the *contemporary* Swedish empirical reality is exemplified by living "fancy lifestyles", which were socially taboo previously. The theme in play

⁸⁵ The deployment of three full stops [i.e. ...] denotes irrelevant and/or omitted speech.

in this statement is about the feasibility of people being equal, which is both practically unrealisable and ambiguous when there are numerous symbols of inequality.

“I Wouldn’t Say It’s a Classless Society; It’s Far Away From That”

Par had made several references alluding to a socio-cultural attitude that idealised equality and fairness that he perceived to prevail in Swedish society at large. But for Par, this idealism was not experienced in the contemporary social structure. This tension between socio-cultural idealism and empirical reality comes to the fore in the following statement:

I wouldn’t say it’s a classless society; it’s far away from that. If you start researching on that fact then you can really see different classes so, but I would say the majority of people are middle class let’s say. But I’m quite sure there is, now I don’t want to give percentages since I don’t know, but there is a percentage of people that are lower class [and]⁸⁶ higher class, but if you see the big picture would... the biggest amount would lie in the middle, middle class yep. Most of the people [in Sweden] are middle class. There are not, so many like, working class there are not so many. ... You have to really fight for it, but it’s, it’s really competitive, but you have a chance in Sweden [animated and gesticulating].

⁸⁶ Square brackets will be inserted to informants’ accounts to, both, enhance the sense/flow of the sentence, and include additional information, such as laughter or clarification.

Par's perception was that Sweden's social structure was stratified in a tiered hierarchy. Within this he divulged his own sense of the Swedish class structure, in which he was certain that the majority of people were located in the middle and there were a few who were working class below the middle, and few who were the elite above the middle. Allied with this objectified sense of social structure he expressed his own personally lived account of how society worked: "[y]ou have to really fight for it, but it's, it's really competitive, but you have a chance in Sweden". His gesticulation and demeanour pointed to an endorsing of this competitive context.

This statement was important for the way that he viewed the workings of Swedish society and equity, and mobility in this structure. There are two interpretations that could be made from his statement on competition, opportunities, and fighting chances. First, that it was possible for everyone and anyone to flourish. This latter point was conveyed by deploying the word "you" in the *plural* and generalising sense rather than *singular* and specific subjective, thereby conveying his own sense that the stratification and hierarchy was fair because all people had an equal chance to flourish in a competitive environment. The deployment of the suffix "in Sweden" was important too, because it pertained to his focussed specification of Sweden, thus he was suggesting his sense of equity being feasible as compared with *elsewhere*. The issue of feasibility is discussed in relation to equity in Part four of this thesis.

Second, an alternative interpretation could be made of his statement on competition and “fighting chances”. It could be that Par was expressing his perception of systematic varying of chances across the social structure. In other words, he could be conveying his perception that there are some people who have to “really fight for it” longer and harder than others but there is some ambiguity in relation to *who* has *what* chance in this statement about the Swedish social structure and equity.

Furthermore, in the context of Par’s perception of a fair chance to flourish in Sweden, he made the following statement about his own expectations:

In Sweden you get incredibly high chances of becoming someone, like having a good career, or having a good life but you have to go for it. ... I think it’s quite, they have quite a high potential here [in Sweden]. Like you come in and you, you kind of expect that you would get something really good out of life.

While “you” is again deployed as meaning everybody and anybody, Par was at the same time shifting his focus on to himself. For example, while delivering this statement Par was visibly more animated than during the rest of the interview, and he appeared to be motivating himself by the prospect of what he could achieve in Sweden. Par displayed a great deal of enthusiasm with his view that in Sweden there were “incredibly high chances”, and he was expecting to take advantage of these chances to flourish through his own application of hard work and he would be rewarded, which was the reason for his return to Sweden. Thus, Par was

suggesting his perception of feasible equity in Sweden, and this he seemingly extended to include non-native Swedes by deploying the phrase “[!]like you come in”. This could be interpreted as his presentation of Sweden’s social structure as open and accessible, rather than relatively exclusive and closed, and is thus suggestive of his perception of social equity, irrespective of background.

The Effectiveness of Swedish Education

Par’s perception that Sweden was a place of fairness and equity was a viewpoint that appeared to be directly conditioned by his own expectation and experience of Sweden and education. As mentioned above Par was born in Sweden but subsequently moved to the Mediterranean until university age, at which point he returned to study. It was in this narrative presentation that emerged his (and his family’s) *savoir-faire* and know-how with regards to using and exploiting the opportunities offered to him by returning to Sweden.

Par was clear that his intention was to accumulate as many assets, qualifications, experience and credentials as possible, which in turn he knew would enable future opportunities for membership of a highly-educated, cosmopolitan middle class. Par had specifically referred to the role of education as a means “to get a good career later on”, and to this end he had attended a fee-paying private school before returning to Sweden. The investment in a private education is something that he had recognised, valued and felt would be worthwhile and beneficial to his future. It was by this same logic – study now for gain later - that he chose to return to study in Sweden. He regarded Swedish universities to be held in high esteem, and said:

The Swedish education system is really effective. It's good. It gives you a good base let's say, to start from, and to get a good career later on. I could have stayed in the Mediterranean, there are educational institutions there, [and] there are a lot of private universities [that I could have attended].

This is an instance of where he was determined to have what he regarded as an elite education as an asset on which to "base" his future for a prosperous and flourishing life. In addition, Par was direct in his statement that he was using the chances afforded to him, for example the opportunity of a private education, to create the possibilities that would allow him to get a "good career". He even indicated that his decision to return to Sweden was decided by a cost-benefit impact evaluation of the university education he would get:

I thought, well look the [Swedish] education system is free, this is a really big advantage. ... The education system is, I think, it has its faults if you start comparing it, but I think it's one of the most competitive. ... It's free, which means that you don't hesitate. In the UK you pay a lot. After I will get a good job in the US.

Par was conveying his sense-of-self, and how his interaction with the education provision would enhance his opportunities. For example, in this statement Par seemed to be saying that he had weighed-up the financial cost, which was relatively minimal, against the relatively substantial prospective gains of a Swedish

education. Par's words reflected a calculating and prudent mind-set, which was geared to strive for an optimum return from his education, which in turn he considered to be a key aspect of his future career and life, and this was what he was referring to with the terms "competitive" and "really big advantage". Put another way, he knew what chances were afforded to him, and he worked out what was best in relation to his future goal.

These subjective practices were in-line with his perception that Sweden's social structure provided chances for everyone and anyone, in other words there was equity. The theme that emerges from Par's discussion of education and mobility is that he was conscious of a social structure, not only as part of Swedish society, but more generally and internationally. Par displayed a sense of awareness of the opportunities available to him, and reported his conscious manoeuvring to take advantage of the opportunities open to him by practicing strategic choices, particularly in education, to get a good job and a life in the US.

In summary, Par reported his perception of the tension between Swedish socio-cultural idealism, which was a commitment to equality and fairness, with an objective empirical reality that showed that there were discernable elites, hence his conclusion that Sweden was not a "classless society". Par also seemed to exhibit a perception that Swedish society had undergone a transition in which living "fancy lifestyles" were a *contemporary* Swedish social cultural manifestation that was taboo previously. This statement is about the feasibility of realising specific ideals in the contemporary moment in Swedish society, in which there were people

who wanted to present themselves as being “fair and equal” and others who wanted to “show-off” and boast.

Within this account from Par emerges the theme of *ambiguity* when there is a disjuncture by which social ideals elide with empirical reality; this will be elaborated in connection with explanatory critique in Part four. Par seemed to be very aware of his own middle class position, in a society that he perceived to have a three-tier class structure with the majority of people located in the middle. He conveyed his perception that specifically in Sweden social equity was strong and the chance to flourish was open to all. In relation to this he used a phrase - “you come in” referring to me the interviewer, conveying his perception that Sweden’s social structure is accessible for foreigners and not exclusive and closed.

Par asserted that Sweden was internationally distinctive because of relatively high social mobility, and shifting focus to his own practice he reported his conscious choices in education to take advantage of available opportunities. He said that he had strategically used private schooling and chose to attend higher education in Sweden because of the gains that he could make, and he set this against his desire and expectation of a well-paid job in the USA. Par’s discussion of equity, education and mobility suggested that he had an elaborate sense of social structure, not only as part of Swedish society, but more generally and internationally.

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Martin

Martin was a final year doctoral student preparing a thesis related to cultural sociology. This academic grounding enabled Martin to express himself with a high degree of confidence and influenced the shaping of his views.

Martin came across as being conscientious and thoughtful in his answers, and one place where this showed was his discussion of how he felt that his experience of schooling related to issues of social class and the socio-cultural principles of social democracy. Martin said that the wider Swedish socio-cultural trait of a commitment to solidarity and a sense of fairness were principles that were transmitted as part of his schooling experience. Martin explained this through the example of an animated film used in his junior school in the 1980s to cultivate the value of fairness and equitability. Martin explained that a cartoon character called *Bamse the Bear* was the hero who taught children about the virtues of a society based on sharing and altruism rather than selfishness and individualism. Martin gave an example of an episode:

Bamse didn't hesitate to face up to things when things go wrong, even though he repeatedly stated that he disliked force. But in that cartoon you can see some blatant expressions of socialist thinking, [for example] when Bamse saves a donkey from a very mean farmer. He comes to his friends [and they say] "you have a donkey". Bamse replied, "it's not MY donkey it's OUR donkey!" So this is very much about collective ownership and pro-sharing, taxing and redistribution

in society. I think you could find cultural values that are in line with its
Leftist mind set.

Martin's choice of exemplification was significant as it showed his sense of conscious understanding of the socio-cultural and political Swedish hegemony. He had specifically selected an episode of the animation with which he could demonstrate the function of education as a mechanism for reproducing the general *common sense*⁸⁷ of the egalitarian socially progressive status quo. The statement also provided an insight into what he considered to be the status quo, which were "cultural values" including "collective ownership and pro-sharing". This was his definition of "socialist thinking" and a "Leftist mind-set", which he had linked to fair distribution as opposed to unfair concentrations of wealth.

Class Consciousness in Urban/Rural Sweden

In addition to reporting his recognition of the function of education as a mechanisms to create the conditions for reproducing the status quo, Martin also said that the physical geography of Sweden and spatial experience within Sweden were important factors for whether or not consciousness of class and when and how practices of class emerged. Martin further observed that demography contributed to the obscuring of class. He explained that rural parts of Sweden were sparsely populated, and therefore life chances and material possessions would be too similar for differences to register consciously and be understood as part of

⁸⁷ To reiterate, *common sense* is used as part of a Marxist orientated framework inspired by Gramsci to mean the discourse that is dominant amongst the masses, see chapter 3.

classed social stratification and differentiation. He claimed validity for this assertion by reflecting on his own experience having once lived in a rural part of Sweden, which he said had made him “blind to social class”. Against this experience of rurality he said:

Stockholm has elites. Stockholm is more a place to show-off what you have, to show, you have capital. This was different in my experience in the south of Sweden where I lived as a youngster with my parents. Here we didn't see differences, I know why class isn't real for people in the towns in the Swedish countryside.

Martin suggested that he had used his experience to construct a perception of other peoples' perspectives, saying that he became class conscious when he moved to Stockholm, allowing for a class consciousness to be possible. He said this happened in two ways: first, he became reflexively attuned to class as a material concept in his own experiences as he had observed that Stockholm had an “elite” class saying it “is more a place to show-off what you have”; second, he explained that he used this visibility to reflect on his past, and said that this is how “I know why class isn't real for people in the towns in the Swedish countryside”. The interesting aspect of this statement is how Martin used his experiences of urban and rural life to come to seeing class himself using this as a marker of an elite stratum, and also to construct a perception about the lived world of others in terms of class consciousness. Put another way, he said that people in rural parts of Sweden do not have an elite class and that there is an absence of “showing-off”, which obscures social differences.

Modelling Social Class

As stated earlier in the introduction to Martin's account, his academic background was in cultural sociology and he used this to construct his theoretical modelling of class:

There are several overlapping dimensions of social class, what you think of social class depends on what you're asking for and what you're interested in. From a traditional Marxist sense you could create a broad category of working class that would fit into Bourdieuan notions of working class. ... Then again also grounding that, there are different kinds of middle class. The educated middle class, and middle class who are stronger in economic capital. Now I would clearly positioned myself in the first with my background with high cultural capital, though I don't come from that high economic capital even if my parents were medical doctors. ... I'm very well socialised I think [laughs].

Here Martin gave an insight into the way that he modelled social class. He said that he understood social class to be something that was complex, and that this was because it had "several dimensions" that were "overlapped", which could be moulded to fit what was being asked and sought. In other words, Martin was exhibiting an understanding of social class as being flexible and connoted that it was contingent on a multiplicity of factors, including theoretically derived definitions of class. He also reported that "there are different kinds of middle class", conveying

his perception about the differentiation *within* the middle class, and he stated two social positions: middle class with “stronger”: i) economic capital; or, ii) education. In reporting his theoretical model of the middle class fractions, he also shifted his focus onto himself and recognised himself as part of the educated middle class meaning that there was coherence in his theory and self-identification of social class positioning.

The interesting point at this juncture in his statement was his phrase: “I’m very well socialised I think”, which he said confidently and with ironic laughter. This is interesting because it conveys his sense-of-self in relation to reflexive class identity and how he had come to negate being “blind” to class. In other words, he was aware that he was conscious of being conscious of social class, and given that he disclosed his modelling of class citing specifically Marx and Bourdieu, this reflexivity could be linked to his academic grounding in sociology which provided him with the tools to be critical, and the ironic laugh indicated that he had a deeper sense of Swedish society beyond its egalitarian appearance.

The Remodelling of Class in Sweden, the Introduction of Neoliberalism

As part of conceiving of class identity at the level of the individual as complex and changeable, Martin reported his consciousness of emergent ideological changes manifest at structural and individual levels; he said:

There is widespread acceptance for neoliberal ideas about free choice and the free market, and there has been little resistance, even from the Trade

Unions. So you can see a steady turn towards neoliberal ideas.

Martin characterised contemporary Sweden as in transition and that there was a “turn to neoliberal ideas”, in which there was an “acceptance” for “free choice and the free market”. He seemed to be conveying his perception that people in Sweden were *consenting* to neoliberalisation. In addition to individuals he also stated his perception that the “*even* the Trade Unions” were acquiescing, suggesting the uncritically of “acceptance”. Here he slipped between two dimensions of abstraction: i) his perception of other individual people; and ii) a significant organisation – the Unions - in the social structure. It is also noteworthy that Martin was expressing this statement with a sense of gloom while, seemingly being dissatisfied with this “acceptance” of neoliberalisation. This interpretation of dissatisfaction becomes animated in the following statement where he expresses concern with the emergence of inequity leading to stratification:

I am very much afraid that Sweden is moving towards an even more class segregated structure. For instance, in the education system the imminent national ranking of universities could be something that could facilitate that. And also the school choice is now almost obligatory that also hands class differences in the foreseeable future. When I grew up there was never an issue ... but now I think that kids from different classes will probably increasingly cluster in different schools. Simply because their parents want their kids to be with similar kids to their own kids.

The first point he made was about his perception of social structural changes saying that Sweden will in the future have an “*even* more class segregated structure”. This suggested that Martin understood the current changes to be an intensification of a process of *existing* change, which would consolidate the structure of class stratification. Second, he pointed out that league tables and school choice would contribute to the transition to a more “segregated” society. He said that this would happen through hierarchisation, in which school choice facilitates segregation because parents would want their children to be schooled with children who were “similar” to them. He suggested that schooling would be an instrument of social segregation with parents practicing school choice in classed ways.

Martin was making the point that there would be a diminishing of equity, and that social structure would become more divided and polarised. In the context of his earlier characterisation of schooling, and particularly of *Bamse* being used as a mechanism for depicting equity, Martin here suggests his recognition that the purpose of schooling is being reconfigured from a “Leftist mind-set” to one that promotes differentiation and segregation.

“*They are not really Swedes*” and an “*inclusive rhetoric*”

In relation to the changing social structure, Martin conveyed his perception of ‘race’ relations and how these are evolving. He said:

For a very long time, Sweden has been a relatively ethnically isolated country. I mean we've always had immigration but I think when it comes to 'race' I think Swedishness is not in something that I would sympathise with because Swedishness is fairly connected to Whiteness and I recognise very much when I read Alan Pred's [book] *Even in Sweden*, I think he nailed it.

Here Martin indicates how the issue of ethno-racial Whiteness had played out in Swedish history in relation to national identity. He described his sense that the relative historical homogeneity of Sweden had conditioned Swedishness as "fairly connected to Whiteness", which was an analysis he said he did "sympathise with" and he also cited Alan Pred who wrote a seminal cultural sociology of Sweden and racism called *Even in Sweden*. In this book Martin said that the author had "nailed it". Martin elaborated on the "it" as follows:

On the one hand we're very tolerant but on the other hand there is a sense of non-White non-mainstream ethnic Swedes - that they are not really Swedes. And that's the kind of thinking of coloured people as, especially with an accent and immigrant name, not a Swedes but as belonging to the special other category - immigrants Swede. We like to think of ourselves as neutral and good to people to other countries, and to people who come here but they never really easily become one of us.

Within this narrative, Martin communicates his perception of the socio-cultural Swedish norm, which he says is characterised as Sweden being “very tolerant”, but he problematises this, presenting his perception that tolerance has its limits where “non-White non-mainstream ethnic Swedes are not really Swedes”. This statement suggested that Martin had an awareness of how tolerance and diversity in Sweden is problematised when elided with issues of untypically Swedish-sounding names and accents, which would be practically manifested in marginalisation because “they never really easily become one of us” and this is indicated in the sematic: “*immigrant Swede*”, whereby non-native swedes are considered *Swedes* but not fully so. In this scenario names and accents are pertinent mechanisms of exclusion and he went on to conclude his perceptions on this by reflexively adding that:

So it's quite exclusive in that we have a very inclusive rhetoric in many ways but intolerant rhetoric has been much less tolerated in Sweden, as compared to places like Denmark for a very long time, that might be about to change now. It's very much in line with Swedish identity to be good, and we never took part in any of the last war, although we did help the [Nazi] Germans to travel to Norway [laughter].

In this statement Martin was critically reflecting on the “exclusive ... rhetoric” of Scandinavian tolerance, and this he compared with Denmark’s, and also his perception that the “rhetoric” of “Swedish identity to be good” is changing. Martin then humorously reveals his perception of Swedish benign passivity in the next part of his statement to suggest that the rhetoric has not been practiced in empirical

reality citing the facilitation of the Nazi's invasion of Norway. In conveying his perceptions about the disjuncture between Swedish "very inclusive rhetoric" and empirical reality, and how it has historically been played out, Martin was presenting himself as being critical of the perception of equity in Swedish society, especially in relation to the experiences of immigrants.

In summary, Martin's account contained evidence that he had a distinctive sense-of-self and also awareness about Swedish society, culture and experiences of others. In relation to the former, he had a confident and articulated awareness of his own social location, which he described as "educated middle class". He also reported that "there are different kinds of middle class", indicative of differentiation *within* the middle class. In his responses to questions about Swedish social structure, Martin's account contained his awareness of how social class was flexible, open to being defined, and contingent on context. He explained his understanding that class consciousness was conditioned by geographical positioning, and that in Sweden class consciousness would be difficult to discern, especially in rural areas, because life chances and material possessions would be too similar for conspicuous differences to register.

Martin also presented his sense of consciously understanding the socio-cultural and political Swedish hegemony, in which he suggested that education was a mechanism in producing and maintaining what he considered to be dominant traits of Swedishness, including "collective ownership and pro-sharing" which he characterised as "socialist thinking" and a "Leftist mind-set". He deployed irony to reveal his perception of the problems of tolerance as played out in practice, using

it in recounting Sweden's facilitation of the Nazi's invasion of Norway, by which he was suggesting sardonically how tolerance could be a negative mechanism, in this instance working to allow Fascism.

The wider point that he was making related to Sweden's image as being egalitarian and progressive, which was problematic and historically unfeasible in practice. The analytical emergence of sardonic humour in Martin's account is discussed in Part four as critical explanation of the role of socio-cultural forms; more specifically, the way that they function to create conditions for benign passivity when social ideals are different from social practices. Martin reported his consciousness of on-going ideological changes at structural and individual levels, and revealed his perception that the neoliberalisation of Sweden's social structure was being *consented* to (in the context of his predication of expanding class stratification and diminishing equity). Using the phrase: "I'm very well socialised" he conveyed his consciousness of class and practices and he specifically recognised that he was class conscious and how he had come to negate being "blind" to class and inequality after moving to urban Sweden. He specifically recognised discrimination to be part of the immigrant experience. Noting the espoused Swedish virtues of being "neutral" and "good" and "inclusive", and elided in practice, which emerge as exposing the limits of inclusion because "they never really easily become one of us". Eliding is specified here as the coming together of two separate ideas in this case being immigrant experience with constructions of Swedish virtues, and through this synthesis emerges a practical manifestation of the limits of inclusion. He pointed out that this tension is mediated in the signifying semantics of the

phrase: “*immigrant Swede*”, whereby immigrants are considered to be *Swedish* but not *as Swedish* as the natives.

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Henning

Henning said that he was from a small-business owning family. He was the only one from his family that had taken academic employment and his brothers had taken control of the family business from their father (although he was still involved in the business), an issue that comes in to play later in his account. Henning described his main occupation as being a research assistant for an academic study about schooling, culture and elitism. He said that he had become interested in social class through being involved with that study, and it was also why he wanted to take part in this study as a respondent. The interview began by Henning responding to an open question about how he thought social class was treated as a concept in Sweden:

You don't talk about class in Sweden. It could be one of the reasons I don't reflect and talk about class. Because they didn't talk about class on telly, or they don't talk about it on the news in that way. It's very politically correct to talk about everybody being equal, it's the social democratic way.

He began the statement by confidently asserting that social class was not discussed in Sweden, thus conveying his awareness of the taboo nature of it in

society. He then switched focus onto himself stating that he also did not discuss nor reflect on class. He was suggesting that he lived his life without consciously thinking about whether his actions and practices had class connotations, which seemed to be discordant with his previous declaration of an “interest” in social class and with his job as a research assistant on a project about culture and elitism. This apparent anomaly was put to him, to which he replied “we’re not supposed to talk about it but we do”, suggesting that the socio-cultural taboo of class was tacitly known and also subverted consciously. He then explained the point about social class in wider society being taboo, giving his perception of why he thought that it was not feasible to talk about it Sweden, saying:

[W]e don’t really have the large size of the elite that you have in Britain. In Scandinavia there is such a small elite that you can say that we don’t really have it in Sweden. You [do] have an elite [in Sweden] but it’s not that visible. ... The reason that I’m researching Stockholm is because it’s the only place that you have this kind of elite. ... In small towns, where I come from, it’s not visible at all. We don’t really have that. ... Living in a small town, classes aren’t real in that way and [therefore] you’ve got to have pretty good tools to see those class differences.

While there is some ambiguity in his first sentence regarding the “large size of the elite” which seems like an oxymoron (and will be picked up in Part four), Henning’s recollection of life in his former hometown illuminated his perception of social structural composition. He said that Sweden’s relatively small, at least compared to Britain, class cleavages created the conditions for class to be obscured from

consciousness by a sense of sameness and a lack of differentiation. Henning was therefore getting at how in everyday practice social structure was not recognised and understood in such terms and how class differentials become invisible in empirical reality. Henning's explanation of social class, which was that Sweden's class divide is relatively "small" in places other than Stockholm, was a point about the lack of visibility of class in Sweden as a marker of difference.

Henning seemed to suggest that there may have been a class structure in smaller and rural towns but he said it was only visible to those persons in possession of "pretty good" analytical "tools". In recognising this conceptual capacity for class consciousness, it could be assumed that Henning considered himself to have these "tools". Henning specifically pointed out that class was evident in Stockholm, and he added that in Stockholm, class is more visible because there is an "elite" class who exemplify class differences thereby providing a point of reference. He also alluded to Stockholm having a larger population than other Swedish cities, thereby providing a bigger potential spread with which to observe class stratification. In terms of consciousness of class, Henning was conveying his awareness that class only comes into view when there is an elite stratum to use as a socially differentiating reference point. On these terms he said in general, especially in smaller towns, class is not considered to be a major factor in experience because of a lack of visibility of the elite stratum to consolidate identifiable class strata. He stated this within his own experience: "During my youth I didn't see it, since everyone else around were in the same class" and so he believed everybody was "normal", meaning relatively similar.

The interesting aspect of this passage of his account lies in his perception of social structure on three dimensions. First, he conveyed his perception that Sweden had a social structure in which social class differentials were small and this were why they were obscured; second, he rationalised this point by comparing the Swedish social structure to the British one, which he suggested renders differences to be relatively insignificant; and third, he stated his perception that Stockholm has a discernible social structure in itself with a recognisable elite.

“The worse thing in Sweden is to be a bigot”

Henning introduced the synthesis of ‘race’, class and Swedish cultural norms and taboos. He said:

It is also quite awkward to talk about the immigration issue, because it comes with a middle class problem, to talk about others in that way. So sometimes I can be quite frightened by it. It’s ignorance not knowing better, having never met people having that background. ... So it’s that kind of bigot they are in that way, but the worse thing in Sweden is to be a bigot.

He reports his perception of the wider Swedish norm that the “immigration issue” was tacitly obscured. It was his perception that middle class people did not want to talk about “others in that way”. Henning’s presentation is ambiguous but it does seem that labelling anybody as an immigrant runs up against the “middle class problem” of the person who is doing the labelling being considered a “bigot”. He

contextualised by generalising his own sense of middle class-ness into his perception of how immigration was dealt with by middle class people and that he himself was “quite frightened” of discussing immigration. But he also suggested that he viewed this situation as a result of middle class Swedes “having never met people having that [immigrant] background”.

Class Advantage, Earning a Living, and Generosity

Henning displayed a sense-of-self through a reflexive identification of his social prospects *because* of his privileged familial background. He said that he had recognised that he was fortunate because his family owned a successful small business, which meant that he had employment if he desired it. However, Henning seemed to be careful to present this situation modestly, which was congruent with a comment that he made about subscribing to a distinctly Swedish characteristic – modesty, which can be interpreted as not standing out, being ordinary, normal and average. He was keen to emphasise that he got his “hands dirty” and that he operated machinery himself like the other workers, and he said this “was real labour. ... I was making my own money in that way”. The sense of privilege he conveyed about himself seemed to come to light in this context, and it was perhaps an expression of social solidarity with the less privileged workers. This could be statement inferring that nobody should claim social superiority and that, despite privilege, one should be mindful of others who do not have that privilege. He said:

I come from a very generous family in that way, you shouldn't, and it's pretty much typically Swedish, to not blow yourself up and you should

help people, and you should not be cocky, and say that you earn something, to be moderate.

While he did not specify “in that way”, in context it was a statement about his sense of the cultural commitment in Sweden to norms of social solidarity, which takes precedent over individuality. In other words, Swedish cultural commitments to modesty and hard work negated privilege in the workplace. It is noteworthy in this statement that Henning shifted between talking about his own life-history narrative and this being in line with how he understood wider *typical* cultural dynamics in Sweden which were antithetical to boasting, and ostentatiousness, suggesting consciousness of what it meant to be conscientiously a middle class Swede.

“Two Worlds” of Empirical Reality in Sweden

Henning had outlined his perception of social solidarity being part of his and the wider socio-cultural norm in Sweden; he also conveyed his awareness that this was currently evolving and he envisioned the deepening of inequality and widening stratification and differentiation. He said that Sweden was becoming “two worlds”, and he prefigured this by saying that:

Sweden is a very strange society. The mentality is very much about solidarity, the opposite of individuality – collective. From this political point of view that the country is solidaristic.

And he said that from this present “world” characterised by a “mentality” of collectivism and solidarity was emerging a new generation of people who:

At the same time ... are quite opposite to the *lagom*⁸⁸, and they want success and want this whole other thing about managing themselves and society. I think it's a mix of those two worlds.

The issue of *lagom* is analytically emergent in Henning’s reporting of the complex relationship between social norms and values, changes at the structural dimension, and the way that this is lived in experiences in wider society. Henning’s point was about a function of *lagom*, which he perceived to be recognised as being a character-defining trait of Swedishness. He suggested that empirical reality in Sweden was complex, in terms of lived experiences that were different from the social expectation of being *lagom*. He seemed to be conveying his perception of empirical reality being layered where there was a multiplicity of forms, some of which were antithetical, or as he put it “opposite” to those expected norms and values of living a *lagom* life. He specifically pointed out that the emerging generation would be characterised as being the “opposite to the *lagom*”, and that this new Swedish objective empirical reality represented a shift from foundational Swedish social democratic solidaristic values:

I think that it's changing to a more neoliberal way of living. In some ways that kind of thinking is encouraged.

⁸⁸ Lagom was explained as a distinctive aspect of Swedishness associated with being moderate, normal and average as set against being ostentatious and striving for distinction.

What is interesting for understanding classed cultural practices is that Henning had stated his perception that the new generation of Sweden were different specifically in relation to traditional *lagom*, and he also conveyed that the changing Swedish ideological base was affecting socio-cultural ways of being Swedish. In his account, this indicated degeneration of *lagom* and presented the emergence of a type of socio-cultural formation characterised by individualism, which he implicitly hinted was becoming the new norm.

He went on to elaborate the theme of change and complexity, and in relation to the change from social democracy he specifically said:

Social democracy has *always* been very adjustable to the neoliberal point of view ... like the way you have it in the States and Thatcherism in Great Britain.

Henning made an interesting point here about the history and nature of social democracy in relation the historical antecedents emerging as part of contemporary empirical reality in Sweden. The first part of the first line conveys that of social democracy having “always” been at a point of constant conjunctions, permanently shifting and changing. Second, he specifies this by suggesting that this movement has been in the direction of neoliberalism, and again he conveys his perception of the social structure outside of Sweden and uses this as a reference point.

The use of the term “neoliberalism” seemed to be important to the description of the direction of Sweden’s changes, and so he was asked to elaborate on what he meant:

My family have a lot of neoliberal thoughts, like you should have low taxes and the government should not interfere too much with the individual freedom ... I think that also reflects the neoliberal way of thinking about managing your entrepreneurship and those kinds of things and that's challenging the social democratic point of view of *lagom* and being moderate and so on.

Here, Henning addressed the question about social structure, which was to draw on his perception of his own family’s changing consciousness. He flipped from objective empirical reality and concerns of neoliberalism to his own family’s living consciousness, demonstrating his capacity to understand that the bigger picture implicates the localised conditions and consciousness of individuals, in this case his family. In doing this, he was also conveying his own perception about his own family’s consciousness in relation to wider ranging issues, including the role and function of neoliberalism and social democracy in relation to *lagom*.

Furthermore, this statement about his own family’s “neoliberal thoughts” may be contrasted with his earlier description of his family in social solidaristic terms. Henning was pointing out a shifting attitude in his family, who once had “social democratic thoughts” but now were accommodating the emergence of neoliberalism; in other words the allegiance to social democracy was changing.

Henning gave some concrete examples of what constituted a neoliberalisation of Swedish society, including “low taxes”, deregulation, and entrepreneurialism. Henning expressed regret at this transition from virtues of being “generous”, “solidaristic”, and “moderate”, and he was asked about resistance to what he seemed to suggest was a regressive state of development. He responded with the following statement:

I think one of the reasons why this [neoliberalisation] will continue is because all other options are disqualified since they [Swedes] don't recognise that it's the capitalist way of thinking. The force of society to expand to generate more money and to work more. If you go outside of this discourse you are disqualified. It's very strange. It's not only the economists point of view of looking at society is also politically it's sustained by the government, this discourse must be prioritised.

In this statement Henning described his understanding of the way that culture operated in the wider social structure to shape the way that individuals conceived of their world. This was an expression of his perception of the way that Swedish hegemony was struggled for, and promoted by, the dominant class, specifically stating “economists” and the “government”. He said that the mass of people “don't recognise that it's the capitalist way of thinking” that they are a part of; and also that alternatives are “disqualified”, thus conveying his meaning that to conceive of anything other than the status quo, social structure is unfeasible and obscured. To get him to elaborate on his seeming developed sense of power-relations, ideology

and hegemony, he was directly asked about the possibility of radical Left alternatives, particularly Communism:

[Laughs] yeah it's been such a filthy word for 10 or 15 years. The leader of the Vänster Partiet [Left Party] talked about himself as being a Communist at the beginning, and it was terrible because everyone described him as a Stalinist It was terrible because a Communist way of seeing the world, take for example the Marxist way of thinking is very important to analyze society. ... I think it's quite annoying because if you have a Leftish point of view of things, you tend to *be* a Communist at once, and then you're disqualified from discussion. ... It's very frustrating because you can't discuss things from different kinds of views, so you have to do from the main point of view of seeing, in a capitalist way.

In response to the question itself, Henning's immediate reaction was to laugh and follow this up by stating his perception that communism is a "filthy word" in Swedish society. He suggested that to *even* ask a question about Communism in Sweden was an absurdity or embarrassingly non-expressible because it was so far-fetched, derided and beyond the realm of feasible possibility. Switching from comparing what it was like in wider society to his own view on this, he described it as "terrible" that Communism was traduced to invoke Stalinism, and Henning indicated the strength of this saying that "Leftist" analyses in general were "disqualified from discussion". He was stating his perception that there was a tacit prohibition on even the possibility of discussing alternatives to the status quo in public, and those who

merely ask questions “from different points of view” are regarded as being Communist, which he said is “very frustrating”.

Henning’s description could be understood to mean that he considered the dominant hegemony as being both *consenting* and *assenting* to the status quo, resulting in the space to discuss alternative existences being closed off, in other words class consciousness is stopped at the boundaries of “two worlds” that he described above, and the socio-cultural norm did not allow people, and including himself in this, to think beyond or outside the status quo. Henning had previously mentioned the neoliberal model of governance advanced by Margaret Thatcher, and here Henning was seemingly suggesting that her mantra of *there is no alternative* to the status quo was being played out in Sweden and in his subjective empirical reality.

In summary, Henning’s account showed his perception of social structure, his own sense-of-self, and also the way that the social structural, socio-cultural norms impinged on his own consciousness and practice, and also more widely on others in Swedish society. He conveyed his perception that Sweden had a social structure in which social class differentials were small and that therefore class differences were obscured, although he nuanced this point by referring to Stockholm, which he said had a discernible recognisable elite. It could be interpreted that it was in this context of the obscuring of class that he considered himself to have “pretty good” analytical “tools” to recognise social structure.

Furthermore, Henning expressed his perception that social class was not discussed in Sweden, thus his awareness of the taboo nature of it in wider society, suggesting an obscuring of class to maintain a presentation of equality, which he specifically linked to being “the social democratic way”. He also introduced the issue of ‘race’, in which he opened-up his own personal anxieties as a middle class Swede, and the issue of immigration, which is socially awkward because it was a discussion that may open the unwanted space for his ignorance to be unveiled. He reflexively indicated that being ignorant articulates with being a “kind of” bigot, which was the worst thing for a middle class Swede, like himself, thereby presenting his awareness of middle class cultural norms in Sweden and the complex eliding of ‘race’, class and culture in Sweden in empirical reality. For Henning, cultural commitment in Sweden to social solidarity, which takes precedent over individuality, was his sense of a typical Swedish cultural trait.

Social solidarity was keenly expressed with his conscious effort to be seen to be “earning” a living, and being generous rather than taking advantage of his privileged background. He expressed this Swedishness as part of his own conscientious practices where he modestly got on with hard work and “real labour” to negate his sense of privilege. While he considered solidarity to be part of Swedishness, he also reported that Sweden’s social structure was changing in neoliberal ways, and this marked a fundamental change in socio-cultural attitudes and practices, which he had identified in his own family and more widely in relation to *lagom*, a theme that was significantly analytically emergent and will be revisited in Part four. This shift to a neoliberal Sweden would make starker class stratification, which he described as manifesting in “two worlds” of empirical reality,

and this he noted had been uncritically emerging in social life in Sweden with radical Left-wing politics as a solution deemed to be an unfeasible alternative and “disqualified from discussion”.

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Anders

Anders was a PhD student in sociology and he began his account by talking about Swedish equality. He said that the Swedes in general were “worried” by issues of equality because the commitment to equality was bound up with *being* Swedish. Anders defined *Swedishness* by explaining that he meant norms, values and distinctive practices of Swedish culture as related to being distinctly “moderate”, thus avoiding exuberance and conspicuous symbols of distinction by one-upmanship. Anders’s definition could be interpreted as a reference to being conscientiously preoccupied and defaulting to being ordinary, normal and average in relation to everybody else. Anders’s perception that Swedishness operated specifically through *lagom*, which is an untranslatable word directly into English that captured the spirit and essence of manifesting itself as being normal, anti-boasting and moderate. He extended this perception saying: “that’s why most Swedes would say they are middle class”, thus raising the theme that national cultural middle classness is articulated with typical Swedishness. Anders was describing his perception that there was a socio-cultural affiliation to *lagom*, and that this was played out as part of a lifestyle that was characterised by being normal and moderate in practice.

After laying out his perception of the wider social-cultural norms, Anders conveyed his sense-of-self through saying that he was conscientiously *lagom* in his own life's aspirations. He said that "success" for him was not defined by distinctions such as financial remuneration and high status employment, and he considered that the kind of "life project" that fixated on money and the desire for upward mobility to be alienating. For him being a careerist would mean being disempowered, feeling "cornered" and "entangled in a web that I would not be able to manoeuvre".

For Anders, climbing up the social ladder for financial gains and social status was not a desirable personal aim for a *lagom* Swede like himself, and he was more contented with a middle class life that did not require excessive performance. For example, he stated that he was "frightened" by the cultural code that accompanied what he called, the "upper class" social events. He specifically used the example of not knowing how to dress for "fancy dinner" parties, thereby suggesting an awareness of the cultural codes manifesting in etiquette and self-presentational in social spaces where marking class distinctions appeared to be a salient factor. The interesting point about this statement was Anders's reflexive account of his own identity in relation to wider socio-cultural norms of Swedishness, middle classness and *lagom*. This represented his ability to identify himself with the norm of what constituted his perception of being Swedish and he avoided anything that threatened this social and cultural positioning.

Anders also connected his expressed sense-of-self as a *lagom* individual to the way that he was brought up. He said that the sentiment of "*lagom* was strong" in

his family', and that he had been nurtured to embody being ordinarily normal and average. Through this explanation, Anders was passing on how he understood nurturing to be a salient mechanism to have inculcated *lagom* in him. He emphasised that he was from a "very middle class Swedish family". The deployment of "very" could be significant semantically to denote his suggestion that his family were in the middle of the middle class. To elaborate on this, he was asked what would make a marker of being *upper* middle class, for example being above average, and he said:

I guess, summer house could be used as a distinctive upper middle class marker. ... You could say it is one of the ways that class plays out more in more obvious ways. [Long pause] I didn't really think of it as class when my dad got it but it certainly is a distinction between the ones that people could afford or choose to save up [to go on holiday].

In Anders's perspective summer-houses were markers of being distinctive upper middle class. The prefiguring deployment of "I guess" was interesting because it indicated his detachment from such classed practices that symbolised and differentiated the upper echelon of the middle class; it is interesting because it was his way of conveying his perspective of externalising anything other than middle of the middle class. And this statement becomes even more noteworthy because after conveying his perspective, when he then exposed a kink in his logic because his family had purchased one and he had already presented his background as ordinarily middle class, not upper middle class. This was interesting when

interpreted as indicating a tension in his subjective ideals and practices, which account for ambiguity in the testimony of empirical reality.

The 'Problem' Suburbs

The issue of equality also came in to view in Anders's discussion of racism. He said:

We have made this notion that is typically Swedish - Sweden is a more equal society, I don't see that now in how Swedishness is played out in relation to 'race' and ethnicity. The whole idea of the, we call them, 'problem suburbs' there you can see it's not a 'race' thing, or an ethnicity thing. Maybe the very opposite, they don't have the chances.

Anders conveyed his perception that the "notion of equality" was "typically Swedish", and interestingly he used the phrase "we have made this notion", which suggested his perception was that the Swedes had manufactured this national identity themselves, and that he was aware of the social construction of Swedishness by the Swedes themselves for their own benefit. He was reflexive about this national identity that "Sweden is a more equal society" and he used the geographic locations that were designated in common parlance as "problem areas" to make the point that inequality existed. Furthermore, he expressed that it was his perception that the problem suburbs was mischaracterised as being a 'race' or ethnic issue, when it was empirically an issue of unfairness in the distribution of opportunities. Here he seemed to be eliding "Sweden is a more equal society"-

which is about equality; and “they don’t have the chances”- which is about *fairness* as social inequity, which emerges here in ambiguity. Anders also relayed how he perceived the ‘race’ and ethnicity discourse to be articulated within politics in Sweden. He started by suggesting how he thought the Far-Right Sweden Democrats would respond to his position:

Of course the Swedish Democrats could answer “no” because they have ads directed towards those Swedes who are working and making their own income, so that they would agree with it. It’s hypocritical but we certainly blame lower working class ethnicities. Sometimes we just replace class with ‘race’. You could just as well to talk about that in class terms, and you should talk about like that.

Anders was referring to notorious adverts by the Sweden Democrat’s Party that he viewed to be demonising immigrants⁸⁹. It was his view that these adverts were designed to attract popularity from the working class Swedes by scapegoating the “lower working class ethnicities”. He regarded this as ambiguous and paradoxical because both groups “don’t have the chances” to flourish due to social inequality and so it was as much a working class as a ‘race’/ethnicity problem. He explicated this point by succinctly stating: “sometimes we just replace class with ‘race’”. The importance of Anders’s statement is his consciousness of class articulating with ‘race’, and the recognition of the way that ‘race’ is practically used in ways by those on the ideological far-Right to obscure class relations. In doing this, Anders

⁸⁹ See Appendix C for one particularly infamous video.

conveyed his understanding of the complexity with which objective empirical reality is played out in class and 'race'/ethnicity discourses.

Social Democracy and "Optimism"

Anders also expressed his concerns about the social structural changes emergent in Swedish society. He conveyed this perception by saying:

Sweden is becoming divided, I don't look very optimistically on [downbeat]. I like the curve with one line representing the CEOs salary, and the other, the worker's salary. This gap is widening ... and given the government we have now, they're not very concerned about that [widening gap]. That's kind of where we're heading. ... I do think there is a very strategic decision to trying to open-up lower salary sector where unqualified work can be performed to serve their middle class and upper class society.

In this quote Anders was exhibiting his perception of the class "gap" in society, which for him was evident in the "widening" income of highest and lowest earners, and he explained this as being in the servitude of the upper echelons of society. His reference to how the stratification of society will "serve" the middle and upper classes suggests that Anders had consciousness of the relationship between the classes, which was based on some level of recognition of the expropriation of labour and declining wages. Anders seemed to be conveying his perception of this exploitation, and the worsening state of this in Swedish society by specifically citing

the widening income gap, which made him pessimistic about the future, although he did not elaborate on what he would regard as being a sound basis for more optimism.

Anders discussed his perception of the Swedish class structure, and on the topic of his childhood he mentioned that up to the age of nine he lived in a “protected community”. He was asked what he meant by “protected community”, which he described as gated residences, and he went on to describe the social demography of the locale:

Well it's close to nearby a 'problem area'. My area is very much more of a, well not an upper-class area but much nicer. I mean there are houses that are nicer. My parents rented a house from someone who lived abroad. We actually⁹⁰ rented it but I know that most of our neighbours, I presume had enough money [to own such properties]... I remember one good friend from there who had money but for us it was different, my father was only a salesman at the time, he was selling TVs.

By describing the area where he lived as “not” “upper-class” but “nice” and occupied by people with “enough money”, Anders in this passage of the discussion indicated that Sweden had geographical locations stratified by class, which for him was linked to having financial affordability and income. This he exemplified by

⁹⁰ It was discussed earlier that the term “actual” in this thesis is used in critical realism mode, while in common parlance the term is often used to mean material manifestation, this is an example of the latter.

highlighting that his parents only lived there by renting, whereas his neighbours could afford to purchase the property, he suggested that in his life-world this was not an option because of his father's "occupation". By expressing this point of affordability in the way and tone that he did, he was trying to make it explicit that it was not normal for people like *himself* and his own family, who were "very middle class" and not *upper* middle class, to be in such a salubrious location, and he also made it clear that he did not feel that he belonged there. Anders was constructing an understanding of his own experiences and partially marginal sense-of-self in terms of status by comparing these to his neighbours and modelling who belonged and who did not in that residence.

To summarise, Anders had expressed a clear sense of his own identity as being in the middle of a differentiated middle class. He reported that he conscientiously attempted to live a *lagom* life, and this self-identity was nurtured through his upbringing in a family that he described being ordinarily middle class. However, this perception of his familial class identity as being *ordinary* became ambiguous when he said that summer-houses were an *upper* middle class indicator, and in tension with his self-identified social position – "very middle class" and not "*upper* middle class" – but his family owned one while renting their main residence. Anders relayed his sense of social location being related to accommodation. He used the term "problem suburbs", and he expressed this in binary terms: "problem areas" and the upper middle class "protected communities". The protection may have been against the middle class anxiety and un-Swedishness of the existence of inequality, which is a theme returned to in Part four.

In relation to social structure, he said that most Swedes would identify themselves as middle class, and stated his expectation of the class structure to widen with a concomitant increase in exploitation of workers, which made him “not optimistic” about the future. There appeared to be some ambiguity in his theoretical modelling of social structure, where he talked about Sweden being egalitarian and elided this with a statement about inequity played out as a lack of fair chances to flourish. He critically couched these views about equity in relation to his perception of how class articulated with ‘race’. Specifically, he said that ‘race’ is used by those on the Far-Right to obscure class relations in favour of ethno-racial demonising showed his understanding of the complex class and ‘race’/ethnicity discourse suggesting his critical appreciation of *common sense*.

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Glenn

Glenn was a PhD student in sociology and economics. Social class was a seminal aspect of his study and this became apparent in *what* he said and the *way* that he expressed his views about his own identity and Sweden’s social structure.

Glenn reported that it was during his time as an undergraduate that social class became existent for him in experience. He described his University as prestigious with most students being “predominantly middle class”. Glenn stated that this environment became important in accentuating his class awareness and practices because he had identified himself as being working class, and openly so. Glenn

said that he had felt that his working class roots differentiated him at University because of the prominence of middle classness around him. His reaction to this circumstance could be interpreted as being significant for class struggle because rather than attempt to assimilate middle classness, or pretend to be middle class, he had set about championing both the centrality of social class as a salient determinant for life chances and his own working class identity and consciousness. In his University seminar discussions he used to assert:

“It’s a class issue this and instead you’re talking about gender and ethnicity”. I was trying to make something with my working class identity there and I kind of made myself a spokesman [sic] for the working class at seminars.

There are two points relevant from this description of his subjective empirical reality. The first is that he was trying to assert the importance of social class in an environment that he perceived to be obscuring social class by prioritising “gender and ethnicity”. This perception suggested that Glenn was seeing it as a deliberate attempt to negate issues of class in the life-world of his peers. In other words, he could be interpreted as having a constructed perception about power dynamics in the classroom that were deliberately obscuring issues of class. Second, Glenn reported that he was not only attempting to raise social class as an issue, but that he was specifically talking about *working* class identity in an environment that he described as being characterised by its middle classness.

Glenn presented a sense in which he knew that his actions were negating what he perceived as the negation of class. In other words, Glenn was being purposefully subversive by knowingly acting against the *common sense* that prevailed in his environment, which could be interpreted as his individualised expression of class struggle.

Glenn said that his invitation to his classmates to discuss social class was met with little response; he reported:

They didn't respond. When they did [respond] it was nothing they had nothing to say ... I wasn't welcome and that's why aggressive[ness] came to me.

Glenn's first words reported that there was an absence of a response to his invitation but he immediately modified this and he said that eventually a response *did* come, but the contribution of which he judged to be "nothing". The way that Glenn framed his statement about the "nothing" response from his "middle class classmates" could be interpreted as Glenn's way of expressing his recognition of their ambivalence to a social class thematic. He was implying that class did not really register for them as a salient issue. The absence of a reaction was significant for Glenn as he perceived this to be the social manifestation of the obscuring of class differentiation, specifically of "working class issues".

As his narrative unfolded, Glenn increasingly conveyed his sense-of-self as a class activist. He explained that he had taken on the role of "spokesman [sic] for the

working class”, which could be interpreted to mean that he had become vocally critical and attempted to disrupt the hegemonic middle class status quo by negating the negation of class. He explained his motivation for this:

I started to look for class. I had got interested in class. Yeah, I was kind of following, I was in touch with Marx, I had some tools to interest me in this and I started looking at people a lot, thinking there’s a lot of middle class people at this institution. That is what you saw at this university, very visibly.

Glenn said that his attempt at being a spokesperson for working class issues was inspired by reading Marx, which had made him reflexively understand his own life-world in that environment. Glenn could be viewed to be engaging in a form of radical praxis by applying his Marxist “tools” in his subjective empirical reality to try and instigate a change by getting social class recognised in discussion. He noted that at University this was something that highlighted the middle class character of his environment and entrenched his own working class status. Glenn indicated that he had become increasingly more class aware, and that this also seemingly had an impact on his daily practice particularly in relation to the issue of social interaction:

My best friends were from the working class. That’s no coincidence that we could communicate with each other, in a specific way I think. Especially, since we were all studying sociology and that gave us the tools to interpret class, and it’s not hard to understand ourselves in the

context when you start to become aware of class. This wasn't previously the case where I could not put words on it.

Glenn conveyed his sense that his social integration - and also lack of it - was guided by social class positioning, meaning that his closest friends were also from working class roots. This sense of class solidarity helped him become more class conscious and reflect on his own identity in class terms. He described his finding of class identity in profound terms. Getting "in touch with Marx" could be interpreted as a critical moment in his development of class consciousness, and he specifically talked about being able to then "communicate" with specifically chosen friends *because* of the class allegiance he felt with them. Glenn said they were drawn to each other because they could understand, both, each other, and themselves, thus as embodiments of class against the middle class context where they were alienated from the prevailing cultural forms because of their working classness.

What's in a Name?

In addition to conveying his sense-of-self as being working class, and also having a perception of middle classness being the salient identity in Sweden, Glenn introduced the theme of his own racial and ethnic identity and how he felt this affected his own lived experiences. Glenn was White and he was born in Sweden but he had a non-Swedish surname due to his Eastern European heritage, and because of this he felt that he was regularly marked out as the '*Other*' type of Swede. He said that Swedes who were "pure", a term he deployed to mean *born in Sweden with a traditional Swedish name*, picked up on his name. They

interrogated him with loaded questions, such as “what kind of name is that?” and “where are you from?”, which he regarded as exclusionary and fuelled by ethno-racial dynamics designed to differentiate *his Swedishness* from *their “pure” Swedishness*. He went on:

I didn't like these questions because I always thought I was Swedish, I thought “why do you ask me this?”

Glenn could have interpreted the nature of the questions as benign inquisitiveness of what may seem to be ‘exotic’⁹¹, but he did not and for him it was about Swedishness; he elaborated on this point:

It's about national identity, that's a big question. I mean it's really a huge question. ... We have this kind of political system that says [ironic inflection] we can all be a part of this Swedishness.

In this statement, empirical reality for him was different from the political rhetoric that everybody had the same chances to identify as Swedish and it was an exclusive club. Here Glenn was conveying his perception that the social ideals of the “political” system became ambiguous in practice and sensed there to be a tension with what he perceived to be an ‘Othering’ of Swedish nationals with non-typical Swedish names. He went on:

⁹¹ Scare quotes here denote that *exoticos*, meaning from the outside, is a normative and normalising referent.

What Swedishness is for me is, very much in class consciousness, which group you belong to: the middle class with successful jobs running around with laptops sitting in cafes, they have got one image of Swedishness. And if you're competing with immigrants in low paid jobs in cleaning, you're for another image of Swedishness. So it's definitely a class distinction about how you define Swedishness, there is not *one* Swedishness.

Glenn expressed that Swedish national identity and its relationship to equity, especially in regards to class and 'race'/ethnicity dynamic, was a complex matter. According to him the liberal and progressive national stereotype "image" and *common sense* of Swedishness being "one" type of person who has a "successful job" and sits with "laptops in cafes" is a not a representation of the general wider socio-cultural experiences, which in his experience was articulated with dynamics of class and 'race'. More generally on Sweden's social structure, he said that the prevailing "image" of Swedishness is of middle class Swedes, but that this did not reflect empirical reality because not every Swede is, nor can be, middle class. He perceived this to be the case by articulating this point to the differentiated existence of immigrants who are in competition with working class Swedes for "low paid jobs" in the service sector. Glenn was expressing his questioning of the feasibility of equity representation in the light of the empirical reality of immigrants and working class Swedes, and their lack of opportunities beyond "low paid jobs" in Sweden's social structure.

Themes of 'race' and class continued in Glenn's narrative when he stated that his own lived experience gave rise to a different viewpoint from which to understand national identity and Swedish culture, and crucially, how his 'Othered' identity meant that his chances were not the same as White Swedish-born and people with typical sounding Swedish names. The point to which Glenn was alluding was his sense-of-self and how he would be treated with unfairness in the Swedish social structure. Glenn suggested that his own experiences, because of his non-Swedish surname, had made him critically aware of the popular construction of Sweden as being unquestionably egalitarian, saying that this is "very much about an illusion". When asked to elaborate on what he meant by "illusion" he gave the example of higher education being "very elitist" and "very competitive", concluding that "therefore people don't have the same chances, do they!". In this statement, Glenn could be interpreted as slipping focuses between his own lived experiences and using this to construct a perception about Swedish egalitarianism as mythical and merely rhetorical, thus showing his critical consciousness.

Everybody Votes Social Democrats Don't They

Glenn was explicit on the relationship between class and political affiliation:

I did have some class awareness when I was young. My father was not involved in Party politics but he said that: "we are working class" and "we should vote Social Democrats, that's the thing that working class people do".

There was little ambiguity in the point that Glenn was making. His father had imparted the consciousness that there was a beneficial allegiance between working class people like them with the Social Democrats - the Party that was seen to be defending and promoting their interests in the political system. Glenn consistently and confidently defined his class position as working class, and this statement was one of the most explicit and unambiguous moments in Glenn's account where he was exhibiting class consciousness and the relationship to his political affiliation. With this statement he distinctly indicated that it was normal, and a political duty, for working class people to vote for the Social Democrats. This message could be read as Glenn having a strong sense of obligation to his identified class, with him seemingly suggesting that voting for any Party other than the Social Democrats, as a working class person, would be contradictory to his class location and counterintuitive to class formation. Furthermore, Glenn was making the point that the Social Democrats were the most feasible Party to advance the working class cause in the existing political set-up. It is interesting for political struggles that he did not mention a socialist Party or another similar radical or revolutionary Left or Workers' Party, suggesting that he perceived no alternatives.

He went on to describe the strength of his conviction about the Social Democrats:

I was convinced that *everybody* was voting Social Democrats. ... [But] one guy I once knew voted for the Moderates⁹² ... and I was kind of surprised that he was thinking like that.

⁹²The Moderates are the equivalent to a Right-wing and Conservative Party.

Glenn's perception of the Social Democrats being the radical Left default Party of choice was challenged by recalling one person who he discovered did not follow what he considered to be the normal voting pattern. Although Glenn did not know if the "guy" was working class - but assumed he was - and was therefore "surprised" at this person's deviant voting preference, which for Glenn was a clear choice related to social class and formation for best interest practically to advance the workers' cause. In this account, Glenn had said his own political compass was guided by an obligation to his working class identity. In other words, his sense-of-self incorporated articulating class with political allegiance. Glenn conveyed his awareness of the synthesis of class and politics, and he was asked about what other people were like in Sweden:

I wouldn't say political, they just want to be average. It is Swedish to be moderate, to say you're average. I would say more average, [and] middle class, [the masses] consider themselves to be more middle class [but] that is middle class not like you have it [in England]. Swedes, they want to be average, not elite, ... they want to be seen as not sticking out. I would say striving to be lagom. ... But this isn't good, they are not angry as they're seeing themselves as the same.

Change in Sweden

Glenn had used the word “average” several times when he described how people would see themselves in the Swedish class structure. He explained “average” by saying that “more” people in Sweden would “consider themselves to be middle class” rather than working class or part of the “elite”. He explained that this form of class consciousness was manifest because being centrally positioned in their perceived social structure would mean they were “seen” to be “not sticking out” and so people in Sweden were “striving to be *lagom*” and avoid ostentation. Glenn’s perception of Swedish culture was that it promoted mass middle classness, prevented people from becoming “angry” and inoculated them against considering socially radical consciousness and activism. What is interesting understanding lived class consciousness is that Glenn was able to specify socio-cultural conditions and their particularities as a rationale for *why* there was a lack of socially radical consciousness and practice, and more broadly, class formation.

In addition to conveying his perception of the status quo and the dynamics of *consent*, Glenn also perceived Sweden to be in social structural transition. He suggested that if “anger” and activism had once been generated through the socio-cultural mechanism of collective solidarity, and he cited the Trade Union as a vehicle to fight for a common cause, this was no longer the case as Swedish society was, in his perception, emergently about individualism and selfishness, saying “we are now in a state where we don’t care about that much anymore, or we are getting there to not care”. Glenn’s testimony stated his sense of mass consciousness oscillating from critical engagement to passive acquiescent to the process of individualisation and self-interest. Glenn expressed some regret at this change saying: “I don’t know if it’s *lagom* anymore, no, not like before anyway”.

When asked to explain why he perceived this emergent status quo to be the case and he brought the narrative back to politics, showing it to be an important mechanism as part of his critical consciousness. According to Glenn, since the 1980s the Social Democratic Party had started to suffer from changes in attitude because this was the beginning of “when people considered social democracy as being very boring and kind of an old style of thinking”, but he perceived it to be more important that the Social Democrats were currently lacking a vision that would appeal to the working class. Glenn stated:

The Social Democrats now have huge problems to find their identity, which kind of voters [do] they need to attract? Who is the target group? The working class is obviously abandoning them [deflated appearance].

Glenn was shaking his head displaying regretful defeat, as he was alluding to problems for the Social Democratic Party. He exuded a sense of personal anguish with what he was describing about the political landscape. The Social Democrat’s political hegemony has been de-stabilised and this was allied with traditional voters of the Party identifying themselves with politics that were different from social solidarity, collectivism, and equality. He described his perception of a disjuncture between what the Party was offering and what the contemporary electorate wanted, and how this resulted in the Party being abandoned for alternative political preferences⁹³. This was quite different to his earlier account when he had thought

⁹³ This interview had taken place before the re-election of the Social Democratic Party in 2014.

that everybody was voting for the Social Democrats during his youth, thus showing an element of autobiographical reflexivity in his statement.

The degeneration of the Social Democrats popularity was inextricably linked to expansive neoliberalism for Glenn. He assessed his perceived empirical reality of this situation:

We still have a projection of a strong welfare State, and some kind of unique Swedish Model - it's even labelled as a "Swedish Model", but to which extent does exist after the neoliberalisation of society, and we were going towards a trend that is quite different than a strong welfare State. ... Class inequalities are huge today in comparison to 20 years ago or even 30 years ago. And the income gap is rising very much between different working class and middle class employments. In housing also there is gentrification, these processes are going on quite rapidly.

Glenn's perception was that the rapid neoliberalisation of Swedish society was representative of the political shift away from social democracy, and that this was affecting empirical reality for everyone:

I'm afraid [deflated demeanour]... there is a shift from the collective orientation, I feel. If you look at the debate [in Swedish social life it] is very much about what responsibility each individual has, rather than "we can succeed collectively".

Glenn perceived that the Swedish population had moved radically away from the social democratic society built on the ideals of collectivism to a more individualist mind-set, where equality seems to be no longer a commitment as it had been. Accordingly, he said success was no longer measured by solidarity, as this was being replaced by individualised responsibility. Glenn perceived there to be profound socio-cultural changes that were challenging the very foundations of social democracy.

In summary, Glenn's account provided insights into his subjective empirical reality, and he presented himself as being distinctly class conscious, especially when it came to politics. He also provided a glimpse into how he came to be class conscious, and the way class was practiced in cultural forms at his privileged middle class University. It was also at University that he conveyed his engagement in class struggle, which led him to be conscious of ambivalence of working class issues by the obscuring effects of ubiquitous middle classness. In relation to politics, he saw that the workers' struggle was implicit in Sweden through voting for the Social Democrats. It was because of his perception that working class issues were advanced by social democracy that he expressed regret at the turn towards neoliberalism, and specifically away from *lagom* - a key emergent issue. Glenn also expressly registered his construction of important tensions between empirical reality and Sweden's national stereotype as being an equitable and fair place.

He reported that social interaction was played out with hints of discrimination; this is important because it made interpreting his sense of Swedish empirical reality as complex, containing ambiguity, specifically in terms of the way that 'race', ethnicity and national identity are all part of the articulation between constructions of Swedishness and experience for him, and others, who are not "pure" Swedes. Glenn had reported that he was troubled by the focus on his name and how this questioning about his Swedish identity had unsettled him with feeling of being the 'Othered'. But despite this negative lived experience, Glenn was optimistic about social democracy and what it can deliver, which he seemed to regard as the most feasible of political options for benefitting the working class, people who were like him.

Reporting of Findings at the Level of the Individual Informant's Own Life History: Non-Swedish Scandinavians (The Finns)

I have reported the findings from each Swedish informant. Following the same presentational structure, I now move on to the non-Swedish Scandinavians' accounts and report on understandings of their *own* life histories and lived experiences, and also their perceptions of *objective* Swedish identity, social and cultural form.

As explained in chapter 4, the Finns potentially provide insights as the group who are *familiar* with Sweden, as they were from an adjacent Scandinavian country, and who may provide comparative statements on social democracy, culture and

identity; but that at the same time they were also *outsiders*, in that they were not *Swedish*, and so would be able to provide cross-cultural/regional comparative perspectives. Questions about Swedishness, as distinct from Finnishness, and how these were related to class structure and cultural forms were important issues to explore.

Toby

Toby was an MA student in Sweden from a remote part of Finland and he began by discussing his childhood there. He perceived where he grew up as being “middle class” and he suggested that he understood the social structure of his background in this way because, he said, “everybody was quite the same level” in his hometown. He said that there were few discernible differences, and he seemed to initially struggle to elaborate on this but he said that he remembered one particular thing:

For me, I remember that one person didn't have a diary and he said because his parents didn't find it from the shop. But he was from a poor area. So it was like some people had something missing and they got a harder time.

Here Toby indicates how class was constituted by material goods, and specifically related being “from a poor area”, having less, and also the treatment that this engendered – “they got a harder time”. On the latter he was asked to detail what he meant by “harder time”, and he said:

At the time it was almost everybody was the same level so little things made them different. ... This was 1992 and you can say that everybody was in the same level but there were little differences, which are more now I think. It is changing times.

His substantive point of “little differences” between people was accentuated because of the socio-cultural homogeneity generally, and this he elaborated by his introduction of a temporal dimension. He perceived not only what the social structure and other peoples’ lived lives at *that moment* were, but that *over time* the relationship between coming “from a poor area”, having less, and also as stated previously, the treatment that this engendered - “they got a harder time” - became reconfigured. He said:

Maybe you have heard about it, or not, but the growing of Finland’s economy was rapid I think. So everybody actually get more and more benefits.

Toby in this statement was suggesting his understanding of social structural transformation, and also how these resulted in improved living standards for the population saying it would benefit “everybody”. He then supported the statement by shifting his focus on to his own family and his experience:

And so my parents, my father actually found very good job, and then after that I haven't felt anything that I'm missing something. So I can't say that I'm being like from a poor family or something.

This consciousness of change over time after his father's promotion was also evident when it came to him expressing what he thought about his own class location:

So I can't say that I'm being, like, from a poor family or something, maybe middle class. ... He was an electrician in the factory, but actually like the usual labourer. But then he went to half-manager or something, and then now he is manager, so he was more.

Despite disjointed presentation, Toby made clear and confident points about his perception of social structure in Finland, which he seemed to suggest was stratified, and he identified two social positions. The first was what he described as the "poor", these were those who were "labourers" like his electrician father. The second position in the social structure was what he described as the "middle class", and this was itself differentiated, specifically by positions of "manager" and "half-manager". Importantly, he was able to locate his father within his own social structure schema, and furthermore, he mentioned that he had a sense of his own location *after* his father's promotion, saying: "then after [the promotion] that I haven't felt that I'm missing something", meaning that the class structure he described was experienced as part of his subjective empirical reality.

This suggested that Toby had been conscious of a class structure as a fact of Finnish society, in which class becomes as an emergent existence depicted by his father's promotion. His familial experience of social mobility opened up his own sense of no longer "missing something", by which he meant possessions, which he had earlier used to explain differentiation through symbols of material wealth.

Rich Guys, Poor Guys, And "Everybody Thinks That They're In The Middle"

At moments in the interview, Toby began to talk more generally about *Scandinavian* society rather than Swedish, and his preference seemed to be to talk about Finland. One of these moments was in relation to Toby reporting his sense of the prevailing *common sense* of Nordic people's perception of objective empirical reality. He claimed:

Nordic people, some people like to say we have three classes, rich, middle and poor. But they don't really know where they belong, because everybody thinks that they're in the middle part, so that's normal. Yeah. But a lot of people think about, "okay you're in the first, you're the rich guy", but then you think again like you're poor. So it's like you can't actually make any difference. There are some people who earn more and then they think that they're so much better than others. That's why we can, at least I can, separate between the normal people who simply earn money. They maybe earn more than the others, but still they're normal. They don't want to show it, they don't want to show off. I don't want to show it too.

Toby's statement began by describing how "some people" think about the class structure as being divided into three classes. He was referring to how he thought *others* conceived of the class structure, and that they used a model that had three strata's, these being: "rich, middle and poor". His account can be understood as Toby showing a reflexive perception of class interpretations, and that with this interpretation, he was exhibiting a consciousness of class empirical reality that was wider than his own immediate Scandinavian socio-cultural experience, and that this was antithetical to boasting and ostentation. In abstracting from his own experienced empirical reality to describe how he thought other people in the Scandinavian region perceived class empirical reality, he also identified a problem with their three class schema, and this reflection led him to say: "But they don't really know where they belong".

He explained his critical appreciation of his perception of their class categorisation, albeit in unclear language, saying that people would position themselves in the middle strata because positions of being the "rich guy" and the "poor guy" are difficult to define due to them being relative and contingent on others. He seemed to be saying that identifying with either of these positions (rich/poor) is problematic as there will always be other people who are either richer or poorer. Toby indicated a liminal and flexible sense of social positioning, presumably based on his experience of social mobility with his father's promotion, which he had reported earlier. He was also asked about his awareness of Sweden's social structure:

In Finland we're very close to Sweden, so in Finland we have very good impression about Sweden. Everything is very good, everything is very friendly. It's like not paradise but a much better place than Finland.

In this statement, Toby indicated what the Finns in general sensed Sweden to be like. He elaborated the term "very good impression" and "a much better place than Finland" by saying that "you can become someone in Sweden, go upwards and get more". This could be interpreted as Toby making a point about equity and fairness, suggesting his perception of Finns was that they expected there to be opportunities that were, perhaps, more evenly distributed for *individual* flourishing in Sweden's social structure. He was asked to detail his perception of other Finns' perceptions of Sweden's social structure:

I think it's like if you come to Sweden, then the first thing is the traffic,. Then you go back to Finland and it's a little bit different. If you walk around Stockholm, you can see like these homeless people. Actually I have been here, I know that these people they are homeless - maybe not homeless but they're like collecting the bottles, and it seems that they don't work. But in Finland you can recognise them more easily because they look homeless. So I think the impression, if you come here, then it looks very... everything is so beautiful and clean. I think people here think more about the environment and things, so it's cleaner here somehow. So that's why we think that here is much better. I think it started maybe during the Soviet time. Then it was like behind the Iron Curtain, so we had the impression that it had to be better. So I

think it started at that time. Then simply now, I think it's changing but it takes a lot of time, some generations, to recognise that we're equal.

Toby in this statement was explaining his perspective of other Finns' understanding of Sweden, which he did by referring to the environment and also to his own lived experience of Sweden. On the latter, he made points about his observations on homelessness and the unemployed, saying that he *knew* they existed, suggesting that he sensed that collecting bottles is indicative of being poor. He said in Finland homeless people "look homeless", suggesting that the perceptions of Sweden being "beautiful" and "paradise" is not what is empirical reality for everybody despite appearances. Importantly, on the issue of "we're all equal", he extended this perception explicitly to include 'race' and religion, stating:

They like it that everybody thinks that Sweden is very like equal and they accept everybody, they don't care about what colour you have, what religion you have.

This statement is important because the use of "they" as a reference to the Swedes suggested that Toby has a perception of not only the perception of the Finns about Sweden's social structure, but that he also had a perception about the Swede's sense of how their own social structure was perceived more widely, though it is not clear if Toby meant in Scandinavia or the world more generally. On the issue of equality and acceptance, he specifically contextualised this within the frame of 'race' and ethnicity, which can be interpreted as his sense that equality negates racism and religious intolerance in Sweden.

In summary, Toby's account gave an insight into his perception of the *common sense* that other Finns had of the Swedish social structure, which was that Sweden was perceived by them to be equitable and a place of equal opportunities. He also saw other Finns as having a sense of their own self-identity as one of three statuses (rich guys and poor guys, middle class). He reported that he had a critical understanding that class status was relative but he felt that Finns, Swedes, and Scandinavians were not aware that class positioning was liminal and flexible.

His testimony invited an insight into his own sense of class identity, which was not missing out on anything and was therefore similar to others, and that this reflexive identity had become emergent after his father's promotion. It is notable that Toby's account of identification of class is constituted in material goods, but class as practiced in socio-culture is not explicitly mentioned. His father's promotion was pivotal in his understanding of class stratification. His classifications were the "usual labourer" and "manager", the latter he differentiated to include "half manager" and "manager". In terms of the social structure of Sweden, Toby perceived equity in chances for individuals to flourish, and also he explicated his perception of Swedish equality. He specified Swedish equality in relation to skin "colour", which he expressed as depicting Swedish egalitarianism.

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Lyka

Lyka was from Åland, an autonomous Finnish group of approximately 6,500 islands between Sweden and Finland with a population of just 28,000. Coming from a small place with a small population was, in her word, “special”- meaning that she sensed her own uniqueness in this regard and she put this down as a reason as to why she initially struggled to talk about social class, apologising for being “a bit disoriented in my answers. ...I haven’t really spoken that much about class in my upbringing, I’m sorry”. She described her background as a place where everybody was familiar with one another and where there was little by way of obvious, visual and direct connotations of stratification or differentiation. She said:

It’s tiny and close knit, everybody knows everybody, and if you meet somebody new they ask, “wait a minute, did you go to school with, is this your parent, are you related to that one”. You can’t go anywhere without somebody knowing who you are. Safe, it’s kind of a big, fluffy bubble. ... Just because it’s so small and you know how everything works and everybody is pretty much, everybody is equal I would say.

In this statement, Lyka seemed to be aware of the context in which she had constructed her own perspectives about social structure and her experience of homogeneity. She reflected on her statement, appearing to refocus it in class terms adding that Åland was “not wealthy ... but it is well-off”. She explained her perspective that there was “no obvious [distinctions of] wealth because everybody owned their houses”, and related this to her wider perspective that everybody was therefore “pretty much ... equal”. In terms of her comment about being “well-off” she explained that:

We have a lot of ferry money, the ferries and cruise boats. There's the Viking Line, Silja Line and Eckero Linjen, those are all from Åland and they pay taxes and stuff to us, so it brings the level up a bit more than we'd have if we didn't have that, because of the tax exemption from the EU.

On Lyka's terms, wealth on the "well-off" Åland islands was evenly and equally distributed among its population and she explained that this was why she felt "everybody was the same" and "everybody is normal". On these social structural terms, she shifted focus on to her own family and said:

My mother had a normal job, quite boring actually, a librarian. My mother's taught me quite a bit because she remembers everything for some reason. I call her "mumapedia" because she knows everything, so if you ask her something, she can deliver the whole story of it. My father is different, he is a lawyer but he's really into history. [He says] "this is what you ought to know, to know how society works". It kind of makes sense as well, history makes the future kind of thing and kind of shapes the world, how people act in the world.

The use of the word "normal" is significant because it was her assertion of being the same and or similar, thus fitting in with her perception of the social structural norm in her island society. More specifically, her mother's occupation as a librarian made her ordinary to the extent that she described it as a "boring" identity. She

was asked to describe her family and her sense of their status in their society. She said:

My father worked quite high up in, not the country, but the city council sort of. I made fun of him for being big and we had a lot of talk about it, but you kind of blank off when my mum and dad talked about what was happening and everybody who was in it and the politics. Because the island's so small, dad knew everybody, he went to school with everybody, played with them as a child. I remember a few years ago one of the [political] Party's asked my father if he wanted to join them. I can't really remember talking politics that much. He was in charge of the finances, Chief of Finance of the Party, I don't know the title in English, for about 10 or 15 years.

Lyka in this extract of her account used the phrase "worked quite high up", indicating her familial experience of both occupational and social differentiation, and of potential social mobility, and the notion of intergenerational upward mobility also features in her next statement:

My grandfather was a construction worker, and my grandmother I think was a cleaning lady most of the time, when she didn't stay home with the kids. So when my father went high up it was amazing that he did it. It's a lot of hard work.

Lyka's statement, in which she said that: "everybody is pretty much, everybody is equal I would say", suggests her sense of equity with a fair distribution in life-chances prevailing. This was exhibited by her father's high social status from a humble background – a journey that she described as "amazing," thus exhibiting her sense of the reward of hard work merited with social mobility across classes. With her statements about her father's achieved high occupational position, hierarchy and social status, the issue of social class did not spontaneously emerge, so she was asked directly about it being a part of *her* own life:

No, I don't think so. I can't remember it being a factor at all growing up. Everybody was the same. ... I don't know. Maybe I should ask my friends. Maybe. Certainly it's a possibility. ... Well, it's a small society but different kinds of people maybe.

So Lyka did not contextualise her father's "high up" status in relation to originally being from a relatively humble background in class terms, nor did she relate her own sense of class location to her background. In fact she was consistent with her previous comment where she had reported that everybody was "equal", this time saying: "everybody was the same". The implication from Lyka's narrative was that she perceived there to be an equality of opportunity, and that her father was a beneficiary of this in Åland. The important point about her sense of familial identity was that she was able to talk about the social structure of her society, describing it as a place of homogeneity, but she also recognised that there were equitable opportunities for social mobility and distinction in this structure with her father having a "high-up" job.

Lyka simultaneously suggested that there was *homogeneity* and social *distinction* in Åland, meaning that was an elision between the social structure in which everybody was the same but there was also a social hierarchy meaning that people were differentially socially positioned. There is some ambiguity here in her modelling of social structure, and she continued in her next series of statements about the fictional depiction of the social structural make-up of Beverly Hills in the USA as compared with Sweden and her own social identity.

Beverly Hills is Full of Both “Rich People” and also “Homeless People”

Lyka’s sense-of-self was that she had become more aware of class after she had left Åland. After moving to Sweden she began to become more conscious of class differences:

I don’t think I thought about it at the time [in Åland], maybe since I’ve moved away [to Sweden], had some space between me and my upbringing. ... You move away, you meet other people who have different backgrounds, you see how they’ve grown up, and in comparison I think we’d be considered middle class.

Lyka’s reported her sense of her own, what could be considered, class ambivalence, in her life-world in Åland, and that she had recognised the process of moving to Sweden to be instrumental to her construction of her sense own class

identity. In extending these thoughts about the development of an awareness of social structure and class, and her place in it, she said:

I knew about it [social class] existing in other places but not at home. ... We watched TV, the news and everything. ... I can't think of anything, maybe it's the difference between Beverly Hills, where it's full of rich people and full of homeless people, and here.

Lyka provided an insight into her life history and lived experiences in relation to the way that she modelled the understanding that she had of social class, both as an aspect of her own existence, and also the class structure of society itself, by benchmarking it against familiar reference points. First, she had earlier said that she was able to understand her own identity more through the process of experiencing what Sweden was like and comparing this with her upbringing in Åland, and much of her account was based on her life in her homeland. Through this process of comparison she said that it was her sense that she was from a middle class background. Second, she also referenced her conception of social class by abstracting it and comparing it to what she thought Beverly Hills in the USA was like. She perceived Beverly Hills to be starkly stratified - full of rich and poor people - suggesting that Lyka constructed the social structure *there* as polarised. Lyka said that Beverly Hills was “full of rich people”, but added it is also “full of homeless people”. This suggests some ambiguity in her conscious class modelling.

Lyka had mentioned Beverly Hills on a number of occasions in her interview, and in a particularly notable moment she said:

I know it's not real but I've seen the sitcom. I like it that people, who shouldn't, but do become rich, the elite, but it's not, I don't like the poverty that some people who are poor. It's [the sitcom] a comedy. I think that is what the United States is like though.

Lyka's reference to the sitcom the *Beverly Hillbillies* was significant because it provided a reference point to constructing a perception of social class. The screen production was based on a poor family who accidentally strike it rich by discovering oil and subsequently lead an ostentatious life in Beverly Hills in California. It is a 'rags to riches' story, and this narrative is used by Lyka to connote significant inequality, as she saw it, that was a part of USA's social structure, which was marked by a large cleavage between the elite and those at the lowest in the social strata. She provided two perspectives on this type of social structure: first, that she approved of the social mobility saying that she liked it that people have the opportunity to flourish in the financial stakes; but that second, she disapproved of a social structure in which there are "elites" and also "poverty".

This is a notable statement because it seems to elicit Lyka's perspective of class structure, which was stratified more than Sweden's. She showed awareness of what Sweden's class structure could be like, namely a wide class divide between the richest and poorest, with little prospects and chances for the poorest to flourish, and this she disapproved of. The implication of this account is that while Lyka may

have been ambiguous in her description of her subjective classed life-world, she was conscious that there *were* chances for social mobility in, both, Sweden and Åland – which she had seen in her father's lived experiences, that the social structure was more equal, and that both of these aspects – social mobility and equality – were positive in her perspective. In other words, Sweden and Åland were favourable places compared to USA.

In summary, Lyka perceived the social structure of her home island of Åland as being homogeneous, stating that “everybody is pretty much, everybody is equal”. She also firmly said that class was not a “factor at all” in her subjective empirical reality in Åland, she explicated her perception that “everybody was the same”. After considering this further, she reflexively said that she had “never thought about it” before suggesting an ambivalence to issues of class. But ambivalence about class manifested as ambiguity when she described her father as having a “high-up” status, suggesting non-sameness.

In other words, she was describing a social structure where it was possible to ascend socially at the same time as being the same so that there was a social hierarchy without social positions. This ambiguity of levels of equality and fairness became more liminal when Lyka discussed social structure comparatively. She said that she had become more conscious of social class when she moved to Sweden; her referent was Hollywood's depiction of Beverly Hills, a society according to Lyka characterised by sharply demarcated social equality because it was “full of rich people” and also at the same time it was a society “full of homeless people”. These ambiguities in her account are significant in developing an analysis

of class as complexly theorised and lived representations of critical nuances in Part four.

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Anna-Leena

Anna-Leena at the time of the interview was two-and-half years into a Media and Communication PhD. This academic background appeared to have a direct bearing on the way that she described and explained what she considered to be the prevailing *common sense* of social equality and the mechanism of popular media that created this condition. Anna-Leena had reported the relationship between social class and the production of popular discourse by saying:

I mean you always read the press and the rankings and you take it for granted then that it's true, and that makes discussion about social class difficult because if you believe in the fact that society is equal and then you're blind to differences.

Anna-Leena's statement reports her perceptions of, first, the mass *common sense* equality in Sweden and, second, how this becomes internalised as a "fact" and "true". She specified two mechanisms, "the press" and "ranking", that she considered being salient to contributing to the popular Swedish consciousness of social structural empirical reality. For her, newspapers and league tables create the conditions to obscure knowledge that is divergent from a belief in equality being

a “fact” and “true”. She was suggesting that the press and league tables are favourable to presenting Sweden in an equitable positive light.

Anna-Leena’s statement was a testament to her belief in the power of the media. She suggested that she had an awareness that the ideological role that the media had in shaping consciousness of a stereotype of Sweden as being equal, and thus making people “blind to the difference” and this then “makes discussion about social class difficult”. The latter comment is suggestive of a perception of a prevailing sense that discussing Sweden’s social structure as anything other than egalitarian would be deviating from *common sense*. She appears to be drawing this perception from lived experience, thus showing a reflexive construction of socio-cultural Swedish norms.

“This Social Class Question Is ... Easy... [and]... Hard”

In her account of Sweden, Anna-Leena made references to the similarity and differences with her homeland of Finland. To get at her consciousness of class in transition, Anna-Leena was asked whether she felt that her class location had changed or stayed the same when she moved to Sweden from Finland, she responded by stating that:

It's hard to tell because I've never seen myself in a social class. I think it's easier for me, this social class question, because for people like me I'm in academia and my partner is not, he is a builder working on

construction site. But I do think that class is less pronounced in Sweden and, than other non-Scandinavian countries.

Anna-Leena conveyed her sense-of-self by beginning her statement stating that “it's hard to tell because I've never seen myself in a social class”, therefore suggesting that she was ambivalent towards her own class position. It seems that Anna-Leena in this statement elides her construction of the social structure with her own ambivalence to social class, which emerged in some ambiguity. While she was clear about her own ambivalence to class, she makes a point about class being relevant to her blue-collar partner and with this she was showing awareness of how others may construct class in their consciousness, and she was linking their perception with their employment. There is also some ambiguity in this statement, which concerns her perception of class because she claimed that it was “easier” for her to talk about social class as compared with her partner who would find it “harder”. She contextualised this claim in relation to her position as an academic whereas he worked on a construction site, but she does not explain *why* it is easier for herself as an academic. It seemed to be a vague rationale that amounted to an ambiguity about whether she was referring to “harder” in terms of linguistic expression, or whether it would conceptually be “harder” to define. In the context of the problematic of this study, there is some interesting exploration about the articulation of “harder” and how this operates in relation to obscuring class antagonisms.

Furthermore, there is a tension in this account because while she claimed that it was “easier” for her to talk about class (than her partner), she suggests she also

found it hard because she's "never seen" herself "in a social class" group. It is possible that this is a perception that academics in general, but not her, could talk about class while blue collar workers, like her partner, would find it difficult. She completes her statement here by abstracting beyond her own perception of her partner's consciousness of both class and sense-of-self as being classless, and then states her perception of Sweden's and the region's social structure: "But I do think that class is less pronounced in Sweden than other non-Scandinavian countries."

Taken with her previous statements in this comment, Anna-Leena appears to be showing awareness of class structure and consciousness of class on three dimensions. First, her own sense of personal class identity and her perception of her partner's consciousness of class; second, her perception of Sweden's social structure as being "less pronounced"; and third, her perception of Scandinavian countries' social structure as being "less pronounced". On these two latter points, Anna-Leena could be interpreted as making an implicit point about social democracy operating as an important mechanism for creating the conditions of social class being obscured in Finnish and Swedish popular consciousness.

While Anna-Leena reported that she did not see herself in a class position, she did identify Swedish society as having a social structure, and in this Stockholm stood out in class terms. Drawing on her experience of living in Stockholm to construct a model of social dynamics she said: "I can only speak for Stockholm, it is very segregated". She said that Stockholm was "segregated" from other parts of Sweden because:

It is only Swedes, upper class Swedes living there [in Stockholm] and then they would only mix with upper class and middle class people from abroad who can afford to live there.

There are several points about perceptions of class to draw from this statement. Anna-Leena was stating that her sense of Stockholm being different in terms of social structure as compared with the rest of Sweden but she also implies stratification by talking about the social dynamics *within* the city. Her perception was that Stockholm was a distinctive place where she could recognise a plutocratic elite, a class formation that she suggested that she would not be able to identify elsewhere in Sweden. She stated that Stockholm was an exclusive place that was the “only” place in Sweden where the “upper class” could be found, and here, “they would only mix” with other people of the same ilk. Anna-Leena was describing her perception of Swedish society where Stockholm was not only set apart from the rest of the country, but also it had its own internal differentiation. Anna-Leena explained the latter with a comment about how class formation transcended national boundaries. It was specifically the upper class that would mix with their ‘own’ kind from “abroad”. The point here is that she recognised class formation *within* the upper class, which was, in her perception, not only a plutocratic elite but it was also *international*.

The significance of Anna-Leena’s points about Stockholm is that class identity seemed to be the defining feature of i) stratification – Stockholm is different from other parts of Sweden because it has an elite; and also ii) differentiation –

Stockholm has an identifiable upper class, which is itself heterogeneous, and is segregated from other classes within Stockholm. Though she does not explicitly state it, this last point is also suggestive of Anna-Leena's perception that class obscures all other identities and becomes the salient identity with which social formation is created, specifically for the elite class. In these terms Anna-Leena conveyed her perception of class social structure both *across Sweden*, and *within Stockholm*.

In summary, Anna-Leena's account reports her sense-of-self-identity, which was not in class terms, but as an academic she said that she was able to talk about class more than her partner who was a construction worker. She explicitly said: "I've never seen myself in a social class", whereby she initiated an elision in her construction of social structure and in which she absented herself, which created an ambiguity; for instance, how could she not be part of the very social structure that she says exists for everybody else?

In relation to socio-cultural mechanisms, Anna-Leena provided insight into her perception that the media played a significant role in contributing to a *common sense* that Sweden was equal, this she suggested made people "blind to differences" meaning inequality was being obscured. She also cited her perception that the social class gap as "less pronounced" in Sweden and also in the other Scandinavian countries. The link between these countries could be social democracy, in which case social democracy was being presented as a mechanism for generating the conditions for relative equality, or at least constructing the

common sense of equality, thereby obscuring class inequality; this is a theme returned to in Part four with the analysis and explanatory critique.

In regard to Sweden's social structure, Anna-Leena reported her experience of living in Stockholm had made her aware of social stratification in Sweden. It was her perception that Stockholm was distinctive in Sweden because it was the only place where there was an identifiable upper class, and furthermore it was also distinctive because she perceived there to be marked differentiation within Stockholm itself, where the elite was a heterogeneous formation consisting of Swedish and non-Swedish plutocratic elites. It was therefore suggestive of Anna-Leena's perception that class becomes the prominent social identity in Stockholm, including 'race', ethnicity and cultural and nationality, despite her "never" having "seen" herself "in a social class".

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Sonny

Sonny had moved to Sweden from Finland to do an MA. At the outset of her account, she pointed out her perception of Finland's social structure, in which "everyone" was normal, and she said that she had arrived at this judgement based on the fact that everyone had a "basic level of income" and free education, and so the essentials, such as "food, clothing and schools books", were covered. She recalled two particular friends who were "obviously" from a poorer background, and she was asked how she could identify their social position:

Obviously I saw it when I visited them, but it wasn't a thing I thought about in that way, it just was. ... Well, they lived in a small apartment, and maybe because I knew their family background, so it wasn't very good, I knew their parents' work situation and stuff, and also maybe they couldn't buy new clothes as much as someone else could, or something like that.

Sonny conveyed her view that the obviousness of a "poorer background" was signified by visual symbols, such as a "small" apartment and a lack of "new" clothes. Her sense of social class status was based on material markers, and so she was probed about how these two friends might have viewed *her* situation to see whether she had a reflexive sense of her own identity in the perception of others:

I don't really think that [pause] because I see that our family situation was the normal level, so I don't think that in our life that they saw it in a special way because we didn't do [pause] we just went to school and hung around, so it's not like that some people did something that you needed to use money. Also, although maybe most of the families are pretty wealthy in the area, you don't usually give your children that much money, we didn't have money to use, just a little.

Sonny's description of her own sense-of-self was that she was from a "normal family" and therefore others would see her practice as no different to "most of the

families” who were also “pretty wealthy”. Therefore, it was her view that she was part of the common fabric of the life-worlds that she saw around her, and that there were no distinguishable features that made her different from other people with whom she interacted. She also understood this “normal” self-identity measured against others that she perceived as being “pretty wealthy in the area”. Sonny was therefore conveying a sense of normal as being pretty wealthy, though she added this was not ostentatiously shown - “we didn’t have [pocket] money to use, just a little”. None of this was “special” and so she constructed a sense of it being non-remarkable and class being unclear because of a general perception of equality that obscured classed differences. There were three dimensions to Sonny’s statement here: i) the way that she perceived others and perceived her own status; ii) how she herself perceived others in her neighbourhood – “pretty wealthy”; iii) and also how she perceived that her family were integrated into her context and were therefore “normal”.

Sonny had used the word “normal” on several occasions, especially to describe her sense of her own family’s status. She was asked what she meant by *normal*:

I don’t know what is normal. I have a feeling that we were average, at the average level. ... I didn’t feel like other people around me would be jealous of me because I was doing something that they didn’t. It felt very normal.

She was asked whether she connected being “average” to social class positioning:

Because I know my parents come from working class families, but our family's income is higher than their family's income were. I don't know middle class probably. ... [It] feels like most families are in the middle class in Helsinki, at least they were. ... We've been able to travel with our family. I think these are maybe things that those friends that weren't that wealthy couldn't do, so they didn't travel with their family, or that I was swimming for 8 years. Like if I wanted to start a hobby, I always got to start it, and that cost a lot of money, and then I had my brother and sister and they got to do that also. We didn't have very expensive stuff in our home, we didn't live very fancy or that, but we were always able to do the things that we wanted to, but I think that's also how my parents wanted to prioritise.

Sonny had explained her perception that being middle class was "normal" and her own family were normal because they were not "very fancy" but she did have the opportunity to do the things that she wanted to do, and this freedom was what she felt had separated her middle class family from her two poorer friends. Earlier Sonny had conveyed her sense of not being preoccupied by class in relation to her own family, thus indicating some ambivalence towards subjective class positioning, here Sonny began to show that she had some awareness of social stratification in society when she compared her own economic capital against two specified friends. Within this statement, Sonny was shifting focus between thinking about inequality in society and her own social location and she continued this thread about being middle class, extending it to talk about cultural and social practices:

I know those friends that didn't have that much money, maybe they]didn't have hobbies, or maybe they went to some clubs after school, that kind of stuff, but not so much, so I think that's a big thing. How I see it is that it's very important you have a hobby, and you go somewhere after school, when you're a child, otherwise if you don't, you have maybe a bit too much time to just hang around and do a bit more stupid stuff, because I can see at some point, like 5th / 6th grade my old friends I used to hang out with maybe they started drinking earlier, smoking, behaving more. ... Maybe hanging around in the city, not doing much. All I know is that those friends maybe started drinking earlier; it was easier probably if you weren't so wealthy, but maybe if you have some problems in the family, it might be easier to get alcohol and stuff like that. Maybe there's no-one who cares that much. But on the other hand we did do stuff with those friends too after school, like, I don't know, hang around in our neighbourhood, maybe eat something together, or something like that. There wasn't a very big gap in-between. It was still that I was everyone's friend and stuff, but maybe we did different stuff on our free time.

Sonny described in detail the social activities that she attributed to those friends that had less "money" and "wealth" than her family and she said that it was during "free time" that differences were recognisable. She had suggested that she understood how her middle class family background had provided her with the financial capacity to partake in activities and hobbies, and she said that she had

begun to understand that her own life-world was different compared to some of her friends who were poorer.

At this point Sonny had not connected these subjective experiences and recognition of differences in her youth to wider dimensions of social structure and stratification, and so she was asked a question about how she understood society to work more broadly. She used this moment to discuss the subject of political values and affiliation, which she reflectively said: “came from your background”. Sonny had declared that she was on the political Left. She raised this as part of a discussion about her participation in a political youth camp⁹⁴. She elaborated on what she learnt from this experience for understanding her empirical reality:

It’s about how you think about politics, how you vote and stuff like that.
... About politics and about the world in general, just talking about things, but they’re [the camp] more on the Left side and so on, so it comes from there and from my mum.

A theme running through this part of Sonny’s testimony was how she came to be politically conscious, which became the springboard for a discussion about social class:

I’ve been discussing politics a lot in my family. My parents are obviously on the Left side. I didn’t really start talking politics with friends that early.

⁹⁴ It is a relatively common feature of political and religious organisations in Scandinavia to have youth wings that hold summer camps. The camps are relatively popular and this informant’s engagement in one does not necessarily mean that she was actively political beyond this involvement.

My mum comes from a worker family so she's very much on the Left, but, for instance, in high school you didn't talk politics that much really. I went to this political camp it's a camp for children who don't have religion, or aren't part of the Church, so I went to these and there you talk about the world, you talk politics and stuff, so people who go there are very different from people who were in my high school, for example.

Sonny's own political education came from being involved in a political camp and she described herself as being politically conscious because she had "been discussing politics a lot" with her family.

"Obviously My Parents Were on the Left" and Social Class

In her statement, Sonny had explained the political orientation of her parents in relation to their position in the labour market. She was asked what she had meant by the phrase "*obviously* my parents were on the Left":

I don't know, or maybe not my dad. Probably both were on the Left... well, not the Left Party but Social Democrats. It's more obvious from my mum but she's been working so much, like her whole life, in Social Work and different kinds of stuff. She cares a lot about her work and she really is passionate about it. She talks a lot about it and she's seen the other side of society, other people who don't have that much so I think it comes from there. We are financially in the middle class so I think of course it affects in some way my parents also, like they're wealthier

than they used to be. ... I don't know really, probably not my mum. I don't know, I don't see it... it's not so strong like the working class that way, it's more like a big middle class, like lower middle class and higher middle class probably. I don't know, it's not in that way very obvious; it's more like ideology, that it comes from your background directly, or something like that.

In this statement Sonny articulated being on the ideological Left with being politically affiliated with the Social Democrats, and that the most relevant aspect of this articulation in terms of identifying the generative mechanism is her explanation of inequality for her mother to be on the Left. Sonny said that her mother's occupation as a Social Worker had granted her access to "the other side of society, other people who don't have that much", and this experience of empirical reality had shaped her mother's consciousness. Sonny had described "other people who don't have that much" and elided this with: "we are financially in the middle class", which resulted in the practical manifestation of what could be defined as social solidarity, which she implicitly suggested was played out in her political practice of aligning herself with the Social Democrats. Sonny also explicitly specified the Social Democrats and not the more radical Workers' Left Party, stating her perception of other peoples' class consciousness that: "people don't feel like that the working class exists anymore". Here she was suggesting that she considered the Social Democrats, presumably as the workers' Party, as the most feasible alternative for dealing with the inequality that she perceived.

Sonny's statement conveyed a construction of self-identity through a process of reflection on the social structure: she was describing her (and her mother's) sense-of-self in relation to her perception of other people who were less fortunate. A second point from this statement relates to the same extract where Sonny refers to her mother: "she's seen the other side of society, other people who don't have that much": vicariously through her mother, Sonny seemed to be conscious of a social structure that was stratified primarily by class, and less so, or not at all, by any other identity. The deployment of the term "the *other* side of society" was indicative of her perception of there being inequality, and on the other "side" from her were "*other* people who don't have that much". The uses of the term "other" in this statement showed Sonny's consciousness of a social structure in which opportunity and experience were not equitable, and this empirical reality had people who were *not* like her and had had a *different* experience suggesting her perception of inequality of chances.

Reflexively, through this experience of her mother in Finland Sonny went on to present her consciousness of the class structure of Sweden, suggesting that the working class were proportionally smaller and that more people were concentrated in the middle class. She described the social structure of Sweden, saying that: "it's more like a big middle class", giving her sense of the class structure of Swedish society in which she understood there to be "more" people located in the middle than at the top or the bottom of a hierarchy.

Interestingly, Sonny said that she could not "know" or "see it [the working class]" because she was "financially in the middle class". In this context she was able to

locate herself and her family background in class terms. With this she was also conscious that her description of the class structure was open to correction. She presumed this because she was speaking from the vantage point of being middle class and therefore the working class is, in her words, “not in that way very obvious”. Sonny was eliding her perspective on her own social position with an obscured social structure, leaving her with a conscious uncertainty in her modelling of class and consciousness of social position.

Reflecting on Social Class in Sweden

It could be analytically significant that Sonny was asked to talk about a complex subject matter (social class) and a difficult articulation (the relationship between class and her family) off-the-cuff and so did not say all the things that she wanted. After the interview Sonny had uniquely amongst the informants taken the opportunity and emailed a further contribution. In this email, Sonny was elaborating on her time in Eastern Europe, where her father had been posted as a high-status manager for a well-known telecommunications company, and the family was living in an exclusive residency with other senior company people who had also relocated their families. She said that she had reflected on this aspect of her lived experience and she could see the differences amongst the families there:

Though my family was wealthy then, we were all middle class you could say, most of my friends' families were even more wealthier or they showed it in a more obvious way, you know nice cars, and the pools and stuff, and then if you had your kid's birthday party so you were sure

to have the nicest one, with clowns, and swimming and everything possible. Because that wasn't something my family had or nevertheless wanted to do.

In the experience that Sonny describes, she was constructing her reflexive perception of her own family. By registering her experiences in this setting with similarly middle class and also “wealthier” families, she was able to develop her sense of her own family’s practices, which she considered to be less ostentatious than those of other families. She also used this experience to construct an awareness of the wider social structural and the socio-cultural nuances that emerged by way of comparison:

When being in Sweden you don't necessarily show your wealth that much, even though you would have more money. Basically the wealth differences are often quite small, and you don't have this culture of showing-off. Or maybe you have it a little bit in Stockholm or so, but otherwise not that much. This is my opinion in general on the situation, then there are people who make the exception of course. But then I also feel that with all the iPhones and new expensive electronics this might in some level be changing.

In the context of Sonny’s previous comments about her perception of the prevalence of middle classness in Sweden, in this extract of her account she was reflecting on Sweden through the lens of her experience as somebody who had lived in a very different environment. By doing this Sonny perceived that in Sweden

social class differences were relatively “quite small”, and she highlighted that being ostentatious was at odds with the socio-cultural norm. But she did nuance this by providing her perception that this socio-cultural norm was “a little bit” different in Stockholm where she stated that social differentiation, as compared with other places in Sweden, could be clearly identified. Sonny suggested that “showing-off” occurred through cultural markers, such as “iPhones and new expensive electronics”, which were markers of difference.

In summary, Sonny began her statement by reporting on her sense-of-self and she did so in a way that suggested an ambivalence concerning her self-identity in class terms. She described herself and her class background as “normal” and “average”. However, she did say that she recognised that not everybody was as wealthy as her own family, and used the example of two friends to develop her narrative about her perception of class in terms wider than her own subjective experience. She reflexively talked about how she was conscious of social inequality by “there being different sides of society” with some “people who don’t have that much” and more who, like herself, were middle class. Sonny reported that her mother had been salient in developing her views about social inequality, and said that it was her mother who had led her to be on the political Left side. Sonny also explicitly affiliated with the Social Democrats and not the more radical Workers’ Left Party, and stated her perception of other peoples’ class consciousness, that: “people don’t feel like that the working class exists anymore,” thus suggesting that she considered the Social Democrats as the most feasible alternative for dealing with the social inequality that she perceived.

The social inequality that she perceived was framed in class terms, and not any other identity, suggesting that she felt class was more significant than other identities. In this statement, she considered her social positioning with her perception of a social structure, and this elision (the coming together of lived experiences with constructions of social structure) emerged an element of self-doubt by saying that her middle classness had limited her perspective. In addition to giving her insight about stratification in Sweden, she said that her sense of her own family's social status, and also the social structure of Sweden, became acute when she relocated with her family to Eastern Europe. It was this experience that she said gave her an experiential and lived perspective of her own family practicing modesty in relation to other middle class families. Sonny was suggesting that she was recognising a differentiated middle class, and her sense was that her family was not, and did not want to be, ostentatious. This experience also allowed her to reflect on her perception of Sweden's social structure. She reported that she became aware that, in comparison, "showing-off" was not part Sweden's socio-cultural code, although this was different in Stockholm where it was visibly transgressed by the wealthy.

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Millie

Millie was a final year Master's student in Languages. She said that she had expected Sweden to be familiar to her home country of Finland, reasoning that in

both countries social structure was underpinned by social democracy, and they had a shared history.

Her account was mainly an attempt to differentiate and describe her perception of Swedishness and its particular socio-cultural traits. She did this specifically in relation to her lived experiences; for example, a specific point that she made related to her experience of dinner parties, which for her were a representation of how a tacit socio-cultural code amongst the Swedes promulgated a distinctive character of Sweden being a “perfect little bubble”. This was an example of her using her own experience of Sweden and making judgements about its distinctiveness. Millie was conveying her perception of Swedish people’s conscious effort to “really trying to make everything look really sweet and lovely”. She appeared to have a conscious critical appreciation of the way that aspects of Swedishness was presented by the Swedes, who were also aware of doing so. To delve deeper, she was asked what she meant, and she immediately responded with ironic laughter before stating:

I don’t know, I guess it’s just the people living this perfect little Swedish life. I don’t know. I remember I was living with this Swedish friend, this Swedish girl, and she invited some friends over, and they make a nice dinner and they were drinking nice wine and it was reaaally [elongated] *like sophisticated*. And I talked with my mum, like if I go out with my friends in Finland, we just make a pizza and the boys drink beer and it’s just like listening to music. And it’s more like, I don’t know. And then I thought like, yes, really cool, like these people are so like... it’s not like

these Finnish guys and girls just getting drunk, it's really like cool, sophisticated people. But afterwards, I get really irritated that they are just trying to be so, I don't know, pretentious maybe.

Millie had deployed sardonic humour by initially laughing and then elongating the word *really*, and then using an ironic tone of voice to describe pejoratively her example of what a "perfect little Swedish life" was. She had used a tone of voice to express the idea that her perception was that Swedishness was framed with pretention, especially when she compared it with a similar scenario back in Finland. In this statement, Millie made comments about specifically Swedishness and socio-cultural norms that she had experienced, so she was asked to describe and elaborate on these, and she did this by comparing to Finland:

Oh I don't know, I guess the biggest difference is just the people I would say. And just, I don't know, traditions and stuff that you have [in Finland and then]. I feel like in Sweden sometimes, it's like when I talk to my friends, it feels like we live in a little bubble here in Sweden. It's like this perfect little bubble in Sweden. ... They are really... I don't know, not perfect but they are really like trying to make everything look really sweet and lovely, I guess.

Millie's description of what she perceives as distinguishing Swedes from Finns was about a representation of Sweden as "perfect" rather than steeped in "traditions", suggesting a distinction that lay in Sweden's contemporary pretension: she used the example of "political correctness" saying that an attempt to be vegetarian was

all part of the façade. She was sceptical and effectively summarised her feelings, “you know it’s really, really false”.

It is also noteworthy that Millie used the word “perfect” several times in describing Swedishness, for example she said that they wanted to project a particularly distinctive image of Swedish culture, which was embodied by a “perfect welfare state”, but her use of the term “perfect” was always ironic. In the context of her saying that representations of Sweden were “really, really false”, the deployment of sardonic humour on more than one occasion in her account was a way that Millie was indirectly being critical of the *common sense*. Bound up in what she said was an underlying tension between what was, for example, “perfect” and her perception of empirical reality. Millie was applying a critical gaze to her experience of the projected socio-cultural forms manifest in Swedish empirical reality. The way that Millie was framing her account was suggestive of her critical reflexion on Swedishness and the way that the Swedes themselves generate this.

The Real Life Working Class

Millie suggested how and why she might have been critical of the projected *common sense* of Swedishness. Her conscious criticality emerged explicitly when she discussed her experience of working in the service sector in Sweden:

When I was working in a hotel I was like... I don’t know, at that time we were maybe ten from Finland and then someone from Norway was working in the same hotel, and then also the foreigner workers. So we

were always hanging out together. So I didn't really get to know any Swedish people back then, because we were just in the same group who was working and stuff. But the difference, you know the difference was clear, for me it was them [foreigner workers] who were *just* working, we were working, but they were only working harder because they foreigner workers had no other jobs. ... But most of them [foreign workers] are not studying, they are *just* working. Like real life working class.

As a service sector worker in a hotel she said that she was exposed to the “real life working class” in Sweden. These were the “foreigner workers” who were non-Swedish or non-Scandinavians, who she considered to constitute the layer of the workforce who were most exploited. She thought that the non-Scandinavians had little prospects in the Swedish jobs markets and they were not working in the hotel sector to supplement their education like she was, she said that the job was their career, hence her phrase “just working”. It was with this experience of social stratification - service sector workers, and differentiation (the “real working class” foreigners) - in the labour market that she was beginning to become aware of the inequality around her in her daily life in Sweden. She pointed out that this experience was a key factor in her development of scepticism about the perfection that Swedes were, in her experience, projecting. In this statement Millie could be interpreted as identifying a social structure through experiences and coming to terms with the way that strata are in themselves differentiated.

The term “foreign workers” in Millie’s statement is ambiguous but it is plausible that she was getting at a differentiation between service sector workers and “real working” as a reference to either non-Scandinavians or non-White, or both, as a fraction of the working class, and on these terms there is an inference to national identity and pertaining to ‘race’ and ethnicity. On these terms Millie appeared to have a complex understanding of the make-up of the social hierarchy: at the upper echelon were Swedes; all the rest were non-Swedes. The latter strata were differentiated itself with the “real working class” who were permanently in this social position, and the remaining were the students who, like her, were working to *supplement* their income.

In summary, Millie’s expressed a perception of Sweden by reflexively recounting her own lived experience of social presentation in Sweden, in which Swedishness was operating through socio-cultural forms that she believed cultivated Sweden to appear as “perfect”, she presented this with irony suggesting her critical appreciation of how it conditioned social life. She also alluded to the strength of these social-cultural forms manifesting in social situations, such as dinner parties, of which she was highly critical describing them as being mere pretence, while she used her experience working in the hotel industry to assert that classed and ‘raced’ social experiences were not perfect, and that inequalities were obscured by Swedishness. Millie explained her perception that the egalitarian stereotype of Sweden’s social structure was “false” through personal experience in the service sector where she reflexively identified a working class, which itself was differentiated and included what she called the, “*real* life working class”, who are strata of the working class who were working permanently in low paid jobs.

Millie's testimony was suggestive of having an awareness of social inequity where life chances are unevenly distributed. She specified these people as non-Scandinavians or non-Whites, or both, a fraction of the service sector class, thus demonstrating elision in her consciousness of class and 'race' inequity, and the socio-cultural presentation of Sweden as "perfect" which generated her critical appreciation of socio-cultural form in creating perceptions. Elision particularly occurs here as the coming together of two separate ideas (racialised class fractions with constructions of Swedish *perfection*), and through this synthesis emerges something different, which in this case was a critical consciousness of socio-cultural forms. In these terms, Millie appeared to have a complex understanding of the social hierarchy, which she had arrived at through focussing on how her own lived experienced of how class stratification also had a 'race', ethnicity and nationalistic element, and she used this to understand critically the Swedish social structure, and her place in this.

Reporting of Findings at the Level of the Individual Informant's Own Life History: Global South Immigrants

I have reported the descriptive analysis of each of the Swedish and Finnish accounts and I now move on to the Global South Immigrants' accounts and report on understandings of their *own* life histories and lived experiences, and also their perceptions of objective Swedish identity, social and cultural form.

Being from the *Global South* these informants were significantly different from the Swedes and Finns especially in terms of ethno-racial and regional identity, and they also had intra-group diversity⁹⁵. This difference and diversity allowed for an exploration of the outsider's (meaning not Scandinavian) perspectives, focussed as experiences of Sweden, Swedish Swedishness, and also their perceptions of Finnish/Swedish comparisons. The reports addressing these would be important to extrapolate an analysis of the lived dynamic between class and culture, and pan-Scandinavianism, as well as ethno-racial and national identity.

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Precious

Precious had arrived in Sweden to study at University. Although her home country was amidst an on-going war, she had described her background in North Africa⁹⁶ as economically comfortable and her decision to come to Sweden was driven by the opportunity to get a perceived good education. She gave a narrative of her family life as she was growing up:

My social life before I went to Sweden was very family orientated. I was very good. I went to a Catholic school, girls' school. My parents were very strict, especially for girls. So that's why they sent me to a Catholic school it was private. ... I went to a Catholic Girls' school it was a very

⁹⁵ The initial research design and subsequent implementation are discussed in Part 2.

⁹⁶ This informant's home country has not been specified for the reason of anonymity.

good school academically. So that's why when I came to Sweden I just entered immediately to University. I just need the language. Academically, the nuns were very strict so we were having to be very good students. We had lots of guidelines we couldn't talk to boys, our parents were very strict, and they were very overprotective of the girls. They interfere with everything [laughs].

In this statement Precious described her social and educational experience, and through this conveyed her sense that she was, as a girl, “overprotected” and treated strictly. In this statement she was suggesting that she had a perception of the social structure through her lived experience, in which females were differentially treated as compared to boys. She elaborated on her schooling saying:

It was private, fee paying. I don't know that it was expensive - just my parents paid but I know not everyone could go. We were half of the two warring factions, so that kind of protected us. For people from different backgrounds in that school so we would just, it was very multicultural. Although some were very nationalist.

She suggested her sense-of-self as being differentiated in two ways. She first alluded to her awareness that her education was “private” and “fee paying”, suggesting that she had a sense of privilege by stating that “I know not everyone could go”. She also said that her school was multicultural, which suggested her perception of the wider society being ethnically divided.

Precious was asked about her sense of personal identity. She said:

My social class is middle-class. My father was working he had a very good job. He was a manager for driving instructors for the government. We were middle class because, just our big house. The area had very big houses. My father worked very hard. He's working but by definition, he had a good position. He had another house too. He worked hard when he was young also. At that time, you know, if you worked hard then it was easy, there was social mobility there, it was very easy. But not now, it's very difficult because of the war.

Precious's sense-of-self was based on her perception that her family home was "big" and that equated to a middle class identity. She suggested that the middle class social positioning was about having a distinction, such "big" house in an "area" that had other big houses. In other words, middle classness for Precious was not about being moderate and average, it was a marker of being distinctive. There was a second theme - *hard work* - that runs through Precious's statement. She suggested her sense that hard work was what had made her father middle class, and that he had been rewarded for his endeavours with a "good position" and a second house. Here hard work was being elided with middle class positioning, and in this emerged her perception of just rewards. To extend the eliding of hard work, middle classness and merited social status, Precious was asked why she did not think she was *upper class*. She said:

[Laughing] Oh I don't know. I don't think about that. I don't know I just. Yeah, yeah, I don't know. Even now when I'm studying people who knew my father, because my father is well known, because of his position, they see as I came from very rich family. I don't know how people see it. I don't want people to see that, analyse that. But there also are very, very poor people. In it's a tribal thing.

It is noteworthy that Precious's ironic laughter suggested that she was uncomfortable with this question using the phrase "I don't" in a dismissive way and she delivered her statement with a tone of annoyance at this line of questioning. This is noteworthy because it suggested that she had not thought about her lived experience in this reflexive way before and had not seen her self-identity as being privileged as compared to the "very, very poor people" and preferred to frame her privileged social position as merited. She suggested the "very, very poor people" were in such a position in the social structure because of tribalism and not because of anything else, suggesting her perception of the composition of social hierarchies. Alternatively this could be interpreted as an attempt to deflect attention from social class to tribalism, because social class was uncomfortable, as she had recognised her own privilege in a social structure in which there was profound inequality.

"Everyone is Equal. For Me It's True"

In relation to Sweden, Precious stated her perception in social egalitarianism terms. She described Sweden as being a place with abundant chances to flourish,

and this theme of Swedish equity ran consistently throughout her account. The strength of this can be seen in the following comment:

[E]veryone is equal, so no need for classification. Everyone is equal.

For me it's true, you know.

Precious directly conveyed her sense of equity when she said that everybody was “equal”, and with this she seemed to be suggesting her perspective that there was no unfairness related to social hierarchy in Sweden. On these terms, according to Precious, class was meaningless as a “classification” in Sweden, and she underscored this by stating that “hard work” would be merited with a “good job” and rewarded with a “good house”. In other words, Precious perceived that rewards of social status were fairly distributed because they were the result of individual endeavour:

In Sweden, you know, there is no such thing as social class. No. In Sweden because you have free education, and if you pass your exams ... if you do your education properly, then it's not different between someone who is from a rich family. That makes it equal. I never think in terms of social classness. It's only in England that there are all divisions, it's classist [there]. In England it's so obsessed about social class. ... I never think about class.

Precious was suggesting both assenting and identifying with a strong sense of equality discourse in the form of Sweden being a place where universal equity of

chances to succeed existed. In other words, there was fairness in the way that some people flourished and others did not, the explanation was that the ones who did not succeed did not heed the opportunity that the system afforded to them. Such was the strength of her sense of conviction that class differentials were a non-issue in her consciousness, and she added: "I never think in terms of social classness". She rounded-off this statement about her perception of Swedish social structure by stating that the question was more appropriate elsewhere, such as in England, where she suggested class is part of empirical reality, and she derided this as an obsession, again in a dismissive way.

In terms of her social structural modelling she was seemingly suggesting that she had two perspectives: first, the fair distribution of chances to flourish made Sweden a material realisation of the social ideal of egalitarianism. Second, she also conveyed her perception about the wider social structure in which she believed that the distribution of chances to flourish in Sweden was as good as it could feasibly be, given the alternatives. Feasibility is the perception of the material possibility of a social ideal and here Precious makes a judgment about feasibility of flourishing, and this being *as good as it could be* comparatively. She constructed this statement against her perception of England's "classist" social structure, thus showing Precious's ideas about social structure in Sweden, as well as more widely particularly in England, which she used as a benchmark for shaping her views.

"So They Don't Favour Specific Groups That's The Swedish System"

Precious had been granted a Swedish higher education scholarship and she related this award as a demonstration of Swedish fairness, as an example of recognising merit. She asserted that anybody and everybody, irrespective of background, could flourish in Sweden:

In Sweden when you apply for [an educational] scholarship, or anything, they don't care if you are black or yellow. If you meet all the criteria, you are entitled to that. So they don't discriminate on your background. So they don't favour specific groups, that's the Swedish system. ... I don't see any division, there is no pyramid, but this is my experience.

Her perspective on the theme of Swedish fairness, in which reward was based on merit, was also a focus in her conveying her perspective of education. She gave the example that scholarships were the result of meeting the criteria and entitlement, and there was no evident discrimination based on national identity and "background" in this process. The important theme on which to focus here is that equality and assumed fairness negate class, 'race' and any other identity formation. She said that there was no favouritism, and that she does not believe that there is any form of stratification – "I don't see any division, there is no pyramid". But interestingly for analysing her class modelling, after conveying these unequivocal statements, Precious added a caveat – "but this is my experience". This is important because she had previously stated that Swedish equity was an unconditional objective empirical reality of society, but with this caveat, she shifts focus and states that her perception is drawn from her personal lived experience

only, suggesting that other people may experience Sweden and Swedishness differently. This account of Sweden's social structural formation could be interpreted as Precious being reflexive about her own perspective. The use of "but" appeared to be a self-recognition moment of her own perspective being grounded in her subjective experience and that this may not be universal.

Precious commented that the absence of "discrimination" was characteristic of "the Swedish system". She conveyed her lack of consciousness of the issue of 'race' in North Africa:

When I was in home [in the Global South before Sweden] I didn't know the word 'race', but when I came to Sweden I found out that I was part of the Black 'race'. Back home I never even thought I was even Black! But in Sweden 'Svart' (Black) is what I was part of. I was starting to think about my 'race' here.

So Precious reported her sense of development in regards to becoming conscious of 'race' in Sweden, where she started "think about it". But she went on to say:

In Sweden there is no 'race' but, foreigners and non-Swedes is one group, and Swedish is another. But in Sweden (in education) you do a lot of group work, that gives you an opportunity to interact and you go to the student union bar together. It's individuals, you know. If you are at university then you'll have friends from university. I found it easy in Sweden to find likeminded people regardless of 'race' or class.

Although we were non-native speakers, they never treated us like different. So like any other person, if you don't get 50 [pass mark] you've failed.

Precious began this statement conveying her perception that "there is no 'race' in Sweden", suggesting that Sweden was a place where racial background does not feature in experiences of empirical reality, but she then went on to say that "foreigners find it more difficult" in Sweden, "of course", she added. This ambiguity is discussed in Part four below as indicative of how class inequality is obscured.

In summary, Precious presented her perception of Sweden as an equal society where the spoils are shared out fairly and where hard work is justifiably merited, and the mass of middle class people had earned this positioning. Her own class consciousness differentiates three perceptions of the Swedish social structure: i) the fair distribution of chances to flourish made Sweden *idealistic*; ii) her perception about the social structure comparing to England, subsequently concluding that the distribution of chances to flourish in Sweden was *as good as it could feasibly be*; iii) she was deploying both i and ii together. In Part Four, these three perceptions are used to develop an explanatory critique whereby there is an oscillation between idealist constructions of Sweden, and more complex, nuanced articulations of the material feasibility of this equality idealism.

Moreover, she also said that she was critical of the "obsession" on social class, particularly in England, and she conveyed her sense that equity as experienced by her in Sweden, where she perceived that her hard work would result in her

flourishing. This epitomised, she said, “the Swedish system”, suggesting her own contentment and perception of fairness prevailing.

However, she also suggested that she was reflexively aware that her own Swedish experience might not be the same for others. She stated that, given her background where: girls were “overprotected”, she was treated strictly, and there were “very, very poor people”; her positive perception of Swedish empirical reality. This positive perception was in terms of social equity (for girls) and equality (an absence of “very, very poor” people), which meant that Sweden, in her own life-world, becomes relatively positively experienced. She went on to suggest that she had recognised this this perception as subjectively framed - “but this is my experience”. This nuance could be interpreted as Precious’s conscious obscuring of Swedish class inequality because she perceived a comparative increase in her chances of flourishing. In these terms, there is an eliding of inequality (as understood comparatively, and also in respect to the non-Swedes who find it difficult in Sweden) with fairness (chances to flourish); which emerges in some ambiguity in her account.

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Raj

Raj was in Sweden to study. He had arrived from a rapidly developing country in Asia⁹⁷ where he had enjoyed a comfortable life benefitting from an “expensive”

⁹⁷ For the purpose of anonymity the exact place name will not be used.

education in an “English school where diplomats sent their boys”. He recognised this privilege and said that there were very many more poor people for whom the “bad” State education was the only option. He also described a strata of people who were “backwards” and illiterate, and in this context of his description of stark inequality he reflectively said that he was privileged in that society, thus showing his sense of his own relative social standing. He used this understanding of his subjective empirical reality and his perception of others in his home country as a reference point to understand the social structure in Sweden. His background experience seemed to be a context for his description of Sweden as “a socialist country”. He said:

You won't see any homeless people here, right. Very few homeless people because the government supports the unemployed people in Sweden, and the government highly taxes the rich people so it's a very equal society actually.

He said that his perception of Sweden as “socialist” was based on the social support available in Sweden, and he used his perception that there are “very few homelessness people” to substantiate his assertion that “it's a very equal society actually”. Raj appeared to be eliding his awareness of the empirical reality of his background life with his perception of social structure in Sweden through which emerged a consciousness of socialism prevailing in Sweden. Raj was demonstrating elision, which particularly occurs here as the coming together of two separate ideas (comparative empirical reality with constructions of Swedish social

structure), and through this synthesis emerges a new idea (socialism).

He also made a point about his perception of how wealth was distributed through taxation, which gave insight into his impression of fairness in the social structure. Raj perceived that the social structure in Sweden was such that social mobility was open for everybody and anybody, which could be interpreted as his understanding of an equitable distribution of chances to flourish. He said:

I think that if someone is qualified, has good qualifications and works very hard, and has good English speaking skills, then his social class won't be a problem here. Everybody knows this.

To Raj, in Sweden class background was not “a problem”, only an ability to speak English, having qualifications, and the drive to “work hard” would count towards the opportunity to flourish. There was an explicit assumption that social class was irrelevant in Sweden because the application of “hard work” reaped justly-earned rewards. Here Raj was seemingly eliding having basic personal and professional assets *with* working hard. This elision, for instance the coming together of these ideas (assets with working hard), emerged in his belief of social class being irrelevant. He perceived that his position was the dominant *common sense*, asserting: “everybody knows this”; Raj could therefore be understood to be suggesting that there was an internalised consciousness amongst the mass of peoples that the objective empirical reality in Sweden was that human flourishing was possible. In showing this perception of the consciousness of others, Raj was

revealing an insight into what he considered to be the Swedish dominant hegemony: he was describing his perception that Swedish equality is reflected in the narrow social stratification. He went on to elaborate on this point:

I think Sweden's one of the most equal and liberal class structures in the *world*; this is why I think it's such a socialist country. This is what I perceive when I talk to my Swedish friends, that there are not a lot of people who are very rich and not a lot of people who are very poor; everyone is very much equal.

In this statement Raj offered more detail about his thinking behind his Swedish socialism assessment, but the interesting point here is his framing of Sweden as being "one of the most equal and liberal class structures in the *world*". This could be interpreted as Raj suggesting that he considered Swedish equality and liberalism as being the most favourable comparatively. The theme in play here is Raj's suggestion of what was feasibly possible, as distinct from other countries in the "*world*", and in this frame Sweden, for him, was the "most" favourable possible social form. In addition, Raj gave his perception of the Swedish class structure composition: a small "very rich" strata, a small "very poor" and the majority of people occupying the middle. Raj's perspective of Swedish equality could be interpreted against his judgement of what was possible using the benchmark of other countries, and also his perception of there being a class structure in which the majority of people were located in the middle suggesting a generalised sense of egalitarianisms prevailing.

Equality and “There is a Lot of Discrimination In Sweden”

Raj went on to comment on his perception of equality encompassing the issue of ‘race’. He said:

I personally haven’t faced any racial discrimination here in Sweden, [long pause] not really. But I talked to some people and, for example, I was talking to a Swedish psychologist and he told me that there is a lot of discrimination in Sweden against the people who come from Muslim countries and especially Muslims. So because there are a lot of Muslim migrants here in Sweden, a lot of migrants from Iran and from Pakistan, and Swedes don’t think very highly of Muslims. So if you have a Muslim name, then you will be discriminated against.

Raj began this extract by stating that he himself had not experienced “any racial discrimination”, but revises this statement after reflecting on it and he suffixed “not really”, and went on to convey his perception of the treatment of Muslims whom he considered to have a different and negative experience. What was interesting in this statement was Raj’s shifting between focuses to arrive at a perception of empirical reality in Sweden’s social structure. Initially he addressed the question by invoking his own experience, and he then reflexively elided his own experience of empirical reality with his perception of others’. Through this elision (lived experience and construction of abstracted existences), his emergent consciousness was of differentiated experiences of equality.

Furthermore, this statement about his perception of Muslims' experiences of "discrimination" based on the "Muslim name" seems to sit uneasily with his previous comments about equality. It could be interpreted that Raj was perceiving Sweden to be a place where there was a general equality; thus he had earlier indicated an extensive middle class, but he now deciphers a differentiated experience for Muslims. This might suggest that Raj used the concept of *fairness* flexibly and applied it compartmentally and nominally, which created an impression of ambiguity in his account.

In summary, Raj described his sense-of-self as privileged, asserted against the background in which he grew up, which he described a social structure consisting of privileged people like himself in expensive "private" schools and many more who were either poor or part of a "backward caste". He deployed this understanding of empirical reality in his home country to understand the social structure in Sweden, which in his view was an "equal" and "liberal" country. For Raj the social structure in Sweden was one in which social mobility prevailed through individual endeavour, and also that there was a welfare system making it "a very equal society actually", which was his impression in the context of reporting his perception on fairness in Sweden with his background country where he described inequality in education.

Raj suggested that his perspective about Sweden was based on the feasibility of flourishing in Sweden, and in this frame Sweden, for him, was the "most" favourable for equality in comparison to other countries. Raj had come to this perception by eliding his sense of having attained assets with working hard, which

had emerged in and normalised his perception that class did not matter as reward was based on diligent application. Raj also stated his perception of the Swedish class structure composition, comprised of a small “very rich” stratum, a small “very poor” stratum and the majority of people occupying the middle. Raj’s perspective of Swedish equality could be interpreted against his judgement of what was possible using the benchmark of other countries, and also his perception of there being a class structure in which the majority of people were located in the middle suggesting a relatively, or in his words, “very much”, equal society.

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Zlatan

Zlatan was a sociology PhD student. He had had been naturalised as a Swedish national⁹⁸ after arrival in Sweden with his parents from Iraq via a series of Eastern European countries as a political refugee fleeing from the persecution of an oppressive regime. His father was a lawyer and his mother a pharmacist, and in class terms he said: “So you could say they were middle class”, which he connected with the social and political background in his home country:

Obviously the people who become immigrants are the people who have the possibility, economic possibility from going from the country so the poorest are always those who are left behind in a [warring] country. So there is always a portion of it that you can ascribe to the social position

⁹⁸ Naturalisation means that Zlatan was legally a *Swedish* citizen.

in a society. But the thing is in Iraq when the Baath Party came to power ... it was against the monarchy. But the thing is, what I'm trying to say is that those who were in the Ba'ath Party and those who were in the Communist Party were equally in the distribution in the sense of where they came from in terms of social position.

Zlatan conveyed his perception of complexity of the social structure in his birth country, which was complicated and included conditioning mechanisms, particularly social position, politics and religion. In his understanding, social positioning was contingent on a multiplicity of mechanisms and dynamics. More specifically, he perceived that the Ba'ath Party revolution was related to class as it was about an overthrow of the monarchical class rule, in which the Ba'ath Party and the Communists were allies in the revolution but also engaged each other in a power struggle. He pointed out that Iraqis who became immigrants did so because they had the economic capital to flee. In this account there is the consciousness of the role of economic capital for opportunities to leave the country, which relates to his own understanding of social positioning and ultimately his own existence as an immigrant in Sweden.

Immigrant Identity in Sweden

In relation to his account of class structure and his parent's social position (with economic capital) in Iraq, an attempt to get at how he understood his sense-of-self-identity and any conversion that he felt took place after moving to Sweden, he was asked an open question about how he identified himself in Sweden:

I don't have, some have an identity crisis. I haven't had that in the same sense. Of course I am thinking about what I'm doing and so on. For some people, I would say it's especially true, for both, the original Swedes, and some of the immigrants who are coming to Sweden. They want to be something. I mean, everybody wants to defend something, related to something but you can see it the discourse of immigrants and Swedes it's important to be something. Maybe it's especially true for the immigrant coming to a new place – “what am I”. And it's always, “if I do not get a job as an immigrant”, it's easy to say “it's a problem of the [Swedish] system. I'm an immigrant and that's the reason I am not getting a job” and just saying that “I'm an immigrant” is saying that I am something else, an Iranian and Iraqi and Indian or something like that.

In this statement Zlatan reported his sense-of-self-identity and absence of “identity crisis”. He conveyed this by spontaneously reflexively comparing his own thinking against his perception of how other non-Swedes perceived the label of *immigrant*. In doing this, Zlatan was bringing into focus in his narrative issues of ‘race’ and ethnicity. He said that his perception was that immigrants had a “problem” with finding their identity in Sweden, and he said this in the context of his own contentment, although he did “of course” think about it. He specified his perception of other immigrants in two ways. First, he seemed to suggest that other immigrants had a sense that they did not belong and found it difficult to settle. And he extended this to include how he felt they expressed this lack of *belonging*, which was through taking the “easy” option by saying “it's a problem of the [Swedish] system”. This

was in the context that he had, in his words, “made it” with being a PhD student, and he had represented himself as an immigrant who had been successful and with this evidence, underachievement was not a *systemic* problem.

Second, with conveying these perceptions about other immigrants, Zlatan reflexively perceived *their* consciousness of inequity and *their* feeling of how their immigrant identity obscured equality. Furthermore, his deployment of the word “easy” could be suggestive of his intuition of their perception of inequity in the Swedish “system”, which he synthesised with his understanding of his own personal success. There is an elision between his perception of *theirs* and *his own lived experiences*, which emerged in his conscious judgement that *they* were taking the “easy” option and blaming the system.

The presentational semantics of this eliding became noticeable during the interview. Zlatan was adopting a critical, objectivised stance in relation to his perception of how he felt other immigrants perceived their own empirical reality in Sweden, and in this context he was asked to explain the way he was presenting his answers: *I’ve noticed you kept saying ‘what other people think’, do you not agree with them?*; to which he responded:

Yeah yeah, exactly. I think you choose the right analysis [laughter]. I’m not sure what I’m thinking actually [laughter] because as an academic you have to be critical of your own thought and it has imprinted on me. But I mean, I think, I’m sure that people throughout the course of my life see me as somebody else. People don’t see me as a Swede.

Here Zlatan reports his sense-of-self-identity as reflected in Swedish eyes and his reflexion on this. His phrase “I think you choose the right analysis” which was followed by ironic laughter that seemed to be a reaction indicating his sense of a multiplicity of dynamics at play in his present consciousness: he was reflexive about his conscious identity, including being an immigrant himself, being successful, and also being an academic. A particular instance where he displayed this reflexive consciousness was when he said: “because as an academic you have to be critical of your own thought”, which gave an insight into his sense-of-self as, both, i) an academic and his construction of this role as being self-critical, and ii) as an immigrant, and how both of these related to subjective empirical reality in Sweden. He seemed to be relaying a conscious emergent ambiguity in this self-identity with: “I’m not sure what I’m thinking actually [laughter]”. The tension seemed to be instantiated in a reflexion on his own criticism of his perception of other immigrants’ criticism of lived life in Sweden, and this came into focus in the following statement where he seemed to align himself with other immigrants’ criticisms:

The example I give is the question “where are you from?” poses it. I mean you don’t say to a Swede “where are you from?”. If you don’t mean where if you don’t come from Sweden of course if you have a dialect [accent], a special dialect, but you always get that feeling. And it’s especially interesting if you go to conferences abroad and you say you’re from Sweden, but you get this where are you *really* from. You

don't look like a Swede. So what I'm saying is it's important for others.

Studying sociology we know why it's important for *in* and *out* groups.

In this statement of his subjective experiences, the deployment of "it" in the first line seemed to be indicative of his awareness of the tension that he sensed in his own identity as an immigrant himself, and his sociological practices to be critically reflexive of his own perception that other immigrants were "taking the easy option and blaming the system". Similarly, his deployment of the word "*that*" in the use of the phrase "you always get that feeling" could be interpreted as expressive of his feeling of being an "outsider". He perceived that other people from "abroad" may have stereotyped the typical Swede, and he was aware that he did not fit into this categorisation. He said he realised it was "important for others" and he explained this by suggesting his awareness of power relations, whereby the *outsider* and legitimate *insider* identity is constructed.

In this statement Zlatan seemed to be grappling with his own sense-of-self-identity as a naturalised Swede and related to objective Swedish national identity construction more widely, and how this played out with his own experience of being an immigrant himself, while criticising his own perception of other immigrants' consciousness of being *outsiders* and legitimate Swedes. The main point to draw out here is that Zlatan referred to mechanisms other than social class in his own experience and perceptions of other immigrants and their perceptions of inequality. Nevertheless, he did include class in his perception of Sweden's social structure:

I would say, and to some degree it's the same in Britain, it's more based on, it's kind of meritocratic way of doing things. So in that sense you give people the same chance, but the same chance? It's really an idealistic way of viewing it because you don't have opportunities from the beginning. So I mean discrimination comes in that way as well. I mean you're an immigrant you come to Sweden when your 10, I mean you're 10 years behind or 10 years of difference which maybe hinders you in some way. So the rules of the game are discriminatory not necessarily people. You see they're saying, "we're giving the people the same chance", but the point is that you're behind from the beginning. It's nothing new but it highlights some of the class things we are discussing here.

Zlatan was describing his perception that Sweden is committed to meritocracy, in which he said theoretically people had the equality of opportunity. But he conveyed his awareness that this was idealistic and unfeasible. He explained that the distribution of chances were not equitable, and he gave the example of immigrants arriving in Sweden who do not have the same experiences or money and so had a deficit in the capital and assets needed to compete on equitable terms. In a reference to the supposed egalitarianism through the mechanism of social democracy he said, "so the rules of the game are discriminatory", indicating his perception of the importance of the structure of society as determining people's life chances.

The point that can be interpreted from Zlatan's statement was the theme of feasibility and what is potentially realisable. He had perceived there to be a Swedish commitment to equality, but he also shifted focus on to lived lives to where he perceived that the distribution of chances were not equitable and he focuses on immigrants, suggesting that he had recognised that although the ideal of meritocracy was attainable, it was not currently a part of the lived world of everybody. At the end of his statement, he brought into focus his sense that this situation where immigrants are unequal "highlights some of the class things we are discussing here", which can be interpreted as Zlatan's articulation of social class and immigration as intertwined in complex relationship.

In summary, Zlatan's statement gave an account beginning by presenting himself as a contented new Swede. He said this against his perception of other immigrants' problems with their identity in Sweden, and also his perception of the way that they obscured social equity by blaming the "system", which was suggestive of his feeling that they had not taken the chances that were available to them. He was explicitly critical of *other* immigrants and his perception of their attitude, but at a pivotal moment in the interview where he was asked a question about a seeming deliberate distancing the immigrant experience when he *himself* was one, he said: "I think you choose the right analysis" and he began to unveil what he presented as his deeper and more critical consciousness about objective empirical reality in Sweden. Another plausible interpretation is that, as the interview progressed, he worked out what he thought were the predilections of me - the interviewer, and in doing this he revised his testimony to suit these presupposed needs. This is

indicative of the complex nature of fine textured qualitative research and descriptive analysis.

Zlatan's sense-of-self-identity and the way this is ethno-racialised by others and not considered to be *Swedish*, suggested his sense of being reflexive and less than fully comfortable with about his own complex identity in Sweden. This identity consisted of being: i) an academic, which he said should make him critical; ii) also being an immigrant, who did not feel fully Swedish; but, iii) also critical of other immigrants who did not take the chances that were available to them. He conveyed his critical perception of the Swedish social democratic commitment to equality and social mobility, which he explained was not feasible because of his perception that Sweden's social structure was stratified, namely by national status and class and therefore, people did not have equitable chances; he added: "so the rules of the game are discriminatory". This was a highly complex account that represented his subjective contentment with what he had achieved, and he also displayed his awareness of inequality prevailing in the social structure.

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Haj

Haj was born in a country⁹⁹ that had endured more than a decade of war. He had arrived in Sweden as a political refugee fleeing from a dictatorial regime in that

⁹⁹ For the purpose of anonymity the exact place name will not be used.

country. Now in his mid-thirties, he had experienced life in Sweden as a teenager and he was studying for a PhD in Sociology. This life history, encompassing fifteen years' experience in Sweden, and his academic discipline, seemed to have provided resources that have made him critically aware of his Swedish life-world.

One such example of his expressed criticality was his perception of the popular stereotype of Sweden as being egalitarian. Haj said that his own experience of Sweden had made him critical of the normalised perception that there is social equality in Sweden. He gave an insight into what he considered to be a pivotal moment in his life history, which was being taught by a schoolteacher who had now become a mentor because she had been "honest" about his chances in Sweden. He said:

That teacher told me you can decide to come in to Sweden and be just a working class immigrant boy or you could become something else. She told me that and I never forget that. In my ear it sounded so bad being a working class immigrant boy.

Haj appreciated this "honesty" because it made him recognise that in Swedish society, his identity consisted of *working class* and *immigrant*, two identities that combined to make the chances of flourishing more difficult as compared with somebody who was non-immigrant and/or in a high strata of the class structure. Haj was conveying his perception of the chances that he himself had in Sweden. In coming to this consciousness, he suggested that his experience of the hardships of being a political refugee had hardened his resolve and rather than accept being

“just another immigrant boy working in a pizzeria,” he strived to become socially mobile. Haj was conveying his consciousness of two dimensions: on the social structural dimension where Sweden was different to the *common sense* stereotype of Swedish equality and fairness; and that his own lived experience would be difficult because of both his identity as an immigrant and also somebody who was working class.

The point here is that Haj had stated his consciousness of class, ‘race’/ethnicity as articulated in his lived experiences in Sweden’s social structure and the practical manifestation of this. After coming to this consciousness Haj said: “[t]hat’s why I always make jokes we live in another society”. This joke was suggestive of his being adept at using sardonic humour to deal with the *common sense* stereotype of Swedish social equality. He dismissed the notion of Sweden being either classless or a middle class society, and critically said that these were “romantic [and] idealised” stereotypes of Sweden, which were not, in his perception lived in empirical reality.

“Class Became Much More Clear” at a Prestigious University

Whilst he conveyed his criticism of what he considered to be the idealised stereotype of Sweden, he also nuanced this with a caveat: “in Sweden you *do* get chances”. This could be interpreted as Haj presenting his perception that, while Sweden did not have absolute social equity, it was still feasible for some, but not all, non-Swedes to flourish. He contextualised this general perception of feasibility into his own lived experiences in which he had the opportunity to attend a

prestigious University. This was an example of how he slipped focuses between conveying his perception of equity in Sweden, and how he himself had experienced it. In the context of his statement above, it could also be interpreted as Haj perceiving that equality was a “joke” because of the empirical reality of immigrants and the working class who do not have a fair share of the chances, but they do “still” have *some* chances to be socially upwardly mobile; thus he was eliding the Swedish construction of equality with the experiences of inequity, which manifested as his presented strategy in sardonic humour (metaphorically a “joke”).

Haj described his experience at University as pivotal in his life story for generating his reflexive consciousness of class and class practice. In relation to his own sense-of-self-identity he said:

I started to hang around with people from different kind of backgrounds. Most of them were from the working class background. Suddenly I had become something [that was] in common with them based on class not based on ethnicity.

In this statement Haj conveyed his awareness of his own development of a more complex awareness of the *inter*-relations of class and ethnicity in his consciousness; he was reporting an emergent class consciousness and also ‘race’ consciousness and the articulation of these in his University experiences. The deployment of the words “started” and “suddenly” were a temporal dimension in the account, meaning that he perceived his ethnicity to have been the salient factor with which he was more widely identified in society generally, then at University his

class obscured his racial identity as he began to use his sense of his own minorities' working class identity to make particular and specific friends. This is a complex account where 'race' and (working) class identities are understood by Haj to intersect in different ways, in different spaces and in different times.

Haj followed up his statement about his friendships by saying:

And there were other students in my class, they came from middle class: academic background, former teachers or engineers or doctors. And I learned the differences ... you know when you study in university class becomes much more clear - in the way they handle their study, the way they [the middle class] take care of life as a student, [and] the whole concept of being a student: the way you read your books, the way you write, the way you enter the classroom, which places you sit, what kind of questions you ask and so on.

This was a statement in which Haj conveyed his reflexive understanding of how he had become aware of *being* and capacity for deploying a *savoir-faire* associated with middle classness. He reported that he was becoming aware of *who* was acting in *which* way and this he was beginning to understand as classed practice in socio-cultural forms. He specified a development in his own practices, and this was when "he had learned the differences" between his working class immigrant identity and those of the middle class students. Haj was describing a situation in which he was becoming aware of other students practicing middle classness in his everyday experience. Haj said these were instances that brought class formation and

consciousness to the fore, saying this experience made “class become much more clear” for him, which could be interpreted as class beginning to obscure his ethno-racial, national and immigrant identity, in the context of his sense-of-self, and of his perception of how others identified him.

“Wow, I Do That Middle Class Experiences Every Day”

Haj had described his sense-of-self changed significantly in class terms over time. He had reflected and recognised that his life in Sweden began as a “poor working class immigrant boy” but he had worked towards becoming socially mobile in class terms. More specifically, Haj reflected a sense-of-self and identity as a PhD student at a prestigious University and with a particular lifestyle, which he expressed by way of a middle class symbolic checklist:

I had my list: wife, children, house, car - and you just, check, check, check, check, check. ... And then suddenly you realise, you live a very privileged life. ... Then suddenly you know that, wow, I do that middle class experiences every day.

Haj’s checklist indicated two points about the way that consciousness of his own class practices socio-culturally and materially became lived for him. The first is that he conceived of middle class to be constituted in material objects (house and car) and as a way of life (getting married and having children) and therefore it was his socio-cultural perceptions of what determined symbols of social class status. The way that he self-assuredly verbalised these thoughts could also be a result of his

academic experience and confidence gained as a flourishing person from a working class immigrant background, which was a long journey in social mobility terms. Second, his checklist had given him a sense of a “very privileged” social positioning, and this could be interpreted against his comment at the beginning of the interview in which he said that he did not want to be “just another immigrant boy working in a pizzeria”. He had therefore a reflexive sense-of-self-identity and he had constructed this against two measurements: i) where he had come from (working class immigrant boy); and, ii) what he perceived his chances to have been when he had moved to Sweden. This indicated Haj’s sense of his own identity, and also what he had deemed to be feasible as part of his subjective empirical reality.

In summary, Haj conveyed his consciousness of social class in several ways. He talked about being aware of class as apprehended in his subjective empirical reality, particularly in the form of his life course from a working class immigrant to PhD student at a prestigious University who had ticked his checklist of middle class credentials. Haj conveyed his reflexivity by shifting between his own experiences and his perception of others in the Swedish social structure. He said sarcastically that equality was akin to a “joke” because of the experiences of immigrants and the working class who do not have a fair share of chances, but he added they do “still” have *some* chances to be socially mobile. The theme here was about feasibility with Haj reporting his perception that it was feasible for some, though not all, non-Swedes to flourish, and he contextualised this general claim into his own lived experiences in which he had the opportunity to attend a prestigious University.

The issues of equality and inequity presented as personal experience were very much in focus in Haj's account. He also conveyed his reflexive perception of how he had become aware of class practice through observing how class was culturally manifested by way of how middle class students handled themselves; this experience emergently became a reference point of class for him. Haj also made important reflexive comments about the dynamic relationship between class and 'race' and how this was contingent on different spaces and moments in his life history. In other words, Haj conveyed class to be articulated in complex ways between intra-relations with a multiplicity of identities which were flexibly manifested over time.

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Zeynep

Zeynep was a Masters student in International Relations and also a political refugee who had arrived in Sweden from Kurdistan, a disputed territory bordering several countries in the Middle East¹⁰⁰. She reported that she felt that her Kurdish culture, language, and ethnic identity played a significant role in her life, and she was keen to articulate this heritage throughout.

¹⁰⁰ This interviewee was keen for me not to anonymise her ethnic and national background. The interview took place before the beginning of the Syrian conflict, a country where Kurds have reported to have been marginalised and persecuted. The marginalisation of, and the war against, Kurds were common themes covered in this interview and Zeynep might have produced an evidence based account citing Syria, which may or may not have impacted on class consciousness in her account and made her ethnic identity more prominent.

To draw out Zeynep's understanding of class, she was prompted to "talk about social class":

It was interesting to hear about this study because it's not something new to be a minority in a society for Kurds. It was like that way in our home countries. ... The main theme is that I come from a group who has always been the 'Other' in society. And I don't know how it is to come from other classes ... I can only talk about classes [in terms of] out-countries.

This was an interesting response, as she seemed to shift focus several times in addressing the question. There was an integration of three aspects. First, describing her own sense-of-self ["I can only"]; second with a reflection on the status of Kurds as an ethno-racial group ["society for Kurds"]; and third a wider level of nation-states ["out-countries"], meaning those that were marginalised, such as Kurdistan. In responding to a direct question about social class in this way, Zeynep was conveying the way in which class was complex because of her view of social structure and sense of her own identity in this. It was complex because she said that she felt her ethno-racial identity as a Kurd was a strong part of her everyday identity, and she felt that this was also the case for all other Kurds too. So the issue of social structure on Zeynep's terms involves an articulation of ethno-racial concerns and the treatment of Kurds in different countries, as well as social class, and majority and minority groups at that time.

Humanitarianism, "You Know the Whole Social Democratic Thing"

Zeynep explained that persecution “got ugly” in the Kurdish region where her family lived, and that they had to flee ending up in Sweden illegally. When asked what she expected of Sweden, she responded:

Many politically active people came to Sweden because Sweden was known for humanitarianism, you know the whole social democratic thing. They are like, people know, they have a reputation that they will help.

However, despite the “social democratic thing”, by which she explained that she meant welfare and social security, the first three years in Sweden were different from what she had expected. In particular, the emergence of Zeynep’s disappointment comes when she reflected on her experience, which she elided with her construction of Swedish egalitarianism.

When we came to Sweden it took three years for us to get permission to stay, and for a while we were refugees underground. And many things affected the way that I thought about my role as a citizen. I reflected a lot. Later when we got permission to stay ... the transition into society shook the family.

The expectations of Sweden did not materialise and she described her family’s experience as refugees in Sweden in a negative way - “the transition” that “shook the family”:

I had to shut it off the first years. The fear, the insecurity, the non-safety, not belonging. It was like this dream world. Nobody explained anything and people looked at you with suspicion and there were times you were hungry and [other] times when you had food.

Zeynep's description of a bad "dream" was an interplay between her perception of the Swedish humanitarianism and her family's negative experience of Sweden, and she then elided this with her own subjective and personal feelings of "not belonging" and feelings of being viewed with "suspicion", thus showing an emergent reflexive understanding of objective idealism (humanitarianism) and of her own lived experience. When asked what she wanted to *belong* to, and why she may have been viewed in such a way, she responded by saying "because we were political refugees" and she abstracted her own experience and generalised it saying:

I think most of them [political refugees] got a shock. I asked my dad whether he would have done the same thing again and come to Sweden, and he doesn't know, actually, he says "no". He says "I wish I was more mature and more conscious about my expectation and what our roles were in the new society and new culture".

This was a response in which she compared her own experience and how she felt these chimed with other people's experiences. The complexities that Zeynep expressed in her and her family's living in Sweden highlighted differences in its

reputation and what she had in mind before getting to Sweden. Zeynep pointed to her subjective empirical reality that had been shaped by many factors, including her ethno-racial and political identity, and indicating that this made her life-world more complicated than simply an experience of humanitarianism and tolerance. While she considered herself to be in a minoritised stratum of society, she did not frame this in class terms or even economic terms, seemingly prioritising her ethno-racial and political identity as being salient in live experiences in Sweden.

“The More Different You Are, The Harder It Is”

Zeynep highlighted her subjective empirical reality as framed by her ethno-racial and political identity, and this she felt generated her identity as an “outsider”. Her own marginalisation and lack of belonging were important indicators for Zeynep’s characterisation of Swedishness and measure of wider social inequity, and she offered her modelling of the social structure of Swedish society as:

The more different you are, the harder it is. The closer you are to the culture, to the Swedish or the western culture, the easier you have it. ...I know about the Finnish. They [the Swedes and the Finns] have this old thing together because they have a war together and stuff like that. They’re [the Finns] the largest minority group. At the end of the day they have an easier time, I think. They [the Swedes and the Finns] share the same culture. I think the Finn would have an easier time [than non-Scandinavians] because they’re more alike.

This was an important insight into the way that Zeynep perceived social inequality to be part of the Swedish experience, and intertwined in complex articulation of national identity, regional identity and socio-cultural forms. More concretely, it pointed to her consciousness of disadvantages that existed in the social structure of Sweden. By deploying the phrase “the largest minority group”, she suggested that she was in one of a minority of minorities in the social structure because she had a *more different* culture to the Swedes than, particularly, the Finns. Put another way, she indicated that not everybody had the same chances to flourish, and those who were closest to the “Swedish or the western culture” would have more access to social equity. In relation to her feeling of not belonging and of being marginalised, she explicitly conveyed her own perception of social relationships, indicting a model consisting of a hierarchy based on degrees of similarity and difference. She felt the cultural homogeneity amongst the Scandinavians citing the relationship between the Swedes and the Finns, rendered the Finns to be relatively less disadvantaged compared to non-Scandinavians.

Zeynep attempted to offer a reflexive explanation about why she felt her experiences were negative, and how this related to changes to the wider Swedish social structure. Zeynep perceived that contemporary Sweden was going through a difficult transition with the increase in immigration. To explain this, she used the metaphor of a “violent river that was crashing through a wall” to depict the way in which she perceived the stability of Swedish society was being challenged by the impact of immigration. This was her way of describing the intensity of the destabilisation of social democratic hegemony, and Zeynep viewed this as

exposing some difficult empirical realities about fairness and opportunities in Sweden.

Immigrant Experiences

Zeynep's narrative about changes to the social structure and empirical realities for immigrants made for some critical assertions about Sweden's approach to integration:

So the integration model is supposed to include, both the majority society and the minority outsiders. But I feel that the State points the finger at minorities and says: "they want to [self] segregation", people like me.

Here Zeynep was making a political statement about the Swedish approach of integrating immigrants, suggesting that immigrants were being demonised in Sweden, and people in minorities, such as those in her own situation, were being blamed for not taking the onus to integrate. This was suggestive of Zeynep's awareness of a tacit social contract and obligations: that it was incumbent on the newcomer to become more Swedish, rather than Swedish society having to adjust, accommodate to, or embrace cultural difference. It was in this context that her statement about assimilation could be understood: "it is okay for you if you [as an immigrant] adapt yourself, but if you come in and try to change values" that was problematic. And she reinforced this point on what can be interpreted to be about the discourse of Swedish mono-culturalism by saying:

Immigrants have strict requirements too, they have more duties, and responsibilities are given over to them to become like the Swedes to get a good job.

Zeynep suggested her understanding of the immigrants' perceptions of coercion to assimilate and thus to flourish, represented by employment. Accordingly, she stated that all immigrants experienced similar difficulties, and she herself found kinship and solidarity in this struggle:

What brings immigrants together is foreignership. The way they have been met by the host society makes you feel the same experience, so you feel like a group. We stick together.

In this statement Zeynep was slipping between focuses on her own subjective experience, by deploying the collective noun "we" and at the same time describing her sense of how others are experiencing their empirical realities – "The way *they* have been met". In this statement the theme of "we stick together" and solidarity in the face of adversity is also important. It is important because it is not class consciousness that is salient, but rather ethno-racial and political status awareness that is brought to light at two dimensions: in her reflexive sense of her own experience, and in how she felt others experienced their lived lives in Sweden. Her statement suggests that class is either integrated as part of her description of her own and others' sense of inequality and unfairness, or it is absent. For Zeynep

then, class was secondary in understanding her experiences and her perspective of Sweden in general.

Zeynep had maintained a salience on the issues of ethno-racial and cultural formation, but this becomes ambiguous when the following question was put to her: *So you do think culture is related to social class?:*

Yeah, [very long pause] I think it is, I can't believe I'm saying this about culture, social class is more important! I usually have a more economical way of looking at society. I can see how economics can change people. And that we are living in a system where we just search for things that we can have a use for. ... This [is a] utilitarian way of seeing stuff. So if you're useful, you're good.

This statement reconfigured her testimony significantly because now she was prioritising social class as the “most important identity” in Sweden rather than ethnicity, ‘race’ and national and cultural identity. She framed this response with a clear sense of surprise at herself with what she was saying about social class being “more important”. This could be a pivotal moment in interpreting her perceptions and the complex articulation of class to other identities, and these were flexibly and ambiguously understood in her perception of her life-world in Sweden. Or the statement could be pivotal in another way, in that she demonstrates that these relations could be in very unstable dynamics at constant liminal conjunctures, which invite possibilities to analytically appreciate that her consciousness is open to new, perhaps more radical Left, opportunities of understanding herself and the

world that she inhabits. Such heuristic theory-building is the focus of Part Four of the thesis.

In summary, Zeynep conveyed her perception of the importance of identities other than class in her own and also in others immigrants' lived world in Sweden throughout. In her own life-world, Zeynep was a new citizen in Sweden and presented herself as being very disappointed and discontented because of her experience of perceived Swedish inequality and unfairness in the distribution of chances to flourish. Zeynep was explicating her sense of issues of ethno-racial, political identity and immigrant status as being pivotal to her own experiences, and it was her perception that other immigrants felt this too. It could be interpreted that these issues obscured class in her perception of her lived world. Zeynep oscillated between focussing on: i) perception of the texture of everyday experiences of immigrants, and the struggles they faced in Swedish society, ii) her own subjective lived experience. She revealed her sense of degrees of belonging, the first based on her perceived cultural homogeneity amongst the Scandinavians citing the relationship between the Swedes and the Finns; and the second on cultural differences of the non-Scandinavians that provided for a different experience, one that was less favourable in terms of social equity.

This signalled the seeming importance with which she regarded ethno-racial, cultural and national identity for social relations, integration and settlement. However, she also reported some ambiguity with this perception and stated that it was her sense that "...culture, social class is more important!" to experiences in Sweden. This could be interpreted as meaning that her articulation of class with

other identities was unstable and liminal. This invites analytical speculation of what she may be able to conceive of, as radical possibilities of a new world.

Summary of Chapter 6

Chapter 6 has delivered descriptive analysis of the each informant's account. Each one reported the respondent's account of their own classed life histories and their own lived experiences, as well as their perceptions of Swedish identity and cultural forms. These provided fine-textured insights into the informants' subjective sense of their empirical reality and also their perception of the objective Swedish social structure, which lays the basis for *group-level reporting* now.

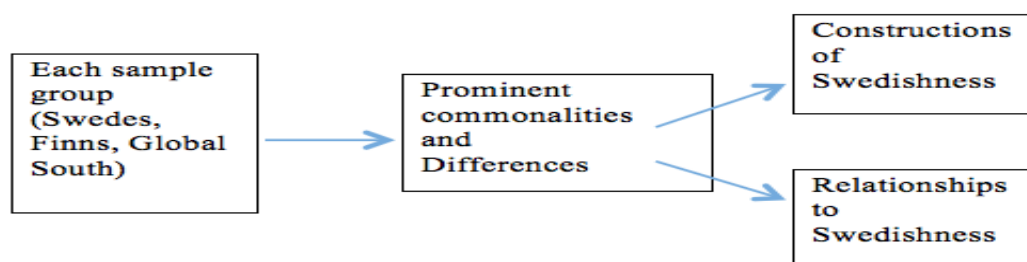
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Chapter 7: Descriptive Analysis Synthesized for Each of the Three Groups of informants

Chapter 7 now takes the descriptive analysis from each of the *individuals* to consolidating their accounts at the *group* level¹⁰¹. The aim is to provide a descriptive analysis to synthesise each group's *prominent commonalities* and *differences* of: i) what they assume to constitute Swedishness, defined earlier and deployed here as the *common sense* dominant constructions of Sweden and its socio-cultural forms ii) each group's collective relationship as practices *in empirical reality* to Swedishness. This focus is depicted below [Figure 3]:

¹⁰¹ For ease of reference, a table depicting a summary of the reported findings for each individual informant is provided in Appendix N.

Figure 3: *Group Level Descriptive Analysis of Prominent Commonalities and Differences to Swedishness and Relationships to it*



Through reporting in this way, a framework outlining a tentative typology of common understandings of Swedish class empirical reality can emerge for each group, and subsequently abstracted and reported at the level of the three groups as a whole. This section addresses Research Question 4: *What are the prominent commonalities and critical nuances in the accounts of empirical reality revealed by the accounts within each of the three groups of five informants?* The differences focus will be elaborated as critical nuances and contributing to explanatory critique following in Part four.

Swedish Group Prominent Commonalities and Differences: Constructs of Swedishness, and Practices and Lived Relationships to Swedishness

The Swedes exhibited knowledge of Swedishness, both in what they assumed to constitute Swedishness as part of the objective Swedish cultural formation and

social structure; and as part of their subjective relationships to Swedishness in their life-world as a group of Swedes – *Swedish Swedishness*. Both of these dimensions are presented as part of a series of themes that captures their group-level collective reports.

Swedishness Constructed as Middle Classness

There was a shared reflexive perception of the Swedes as a group of people having a tendency to self-identify as middle class, meaning to be in the middle of a three-tier social structure. Par couched this in terms of Swedishness being about maintaining modesty by avoiding the socio-cultural taboo of income differentiation. Par said that an important aspect of Swedishness was to maintain appearance of social equality and avoid exalted self-positioning. He suggested that a presentation of equality is preserved through socio-cultural mechanisms of avoidance and taboos, which generated a tendency for class formation and structure to be emergently obscured in public life. Anders echoed Par's perception of assumed middle class prominence as in objective empirical reality, and he explicated the socio-cultural norm of *moderation* as being typically Swedish. Distinctive within this group of Swedes was Martin because of the way he reported his perception of an expansive and differentiated middle class in Sweden's social structure. This construct indicated that not only was middle classness constituted in cultural and economic dynamics, but he also provided a personal account of how middle classness was built into identity via markers of education, and he located his own social position as "educated middle class".

Consistent with this common perception of middle classness prevailing in *Swedish society* were Anders and Henning, both of whom conveyed their subjective empirical reality as middle class. They did this by presenting themselves as being *ordinary, normal and average*, which is important in the dynamics that emergently obscure class stratification. Anders did this by making a specific reference to dinner parties, which he said he tried to avoid because he considered them to be the practice of the “upper class”, and therefore he did not want to be part of such occasions. Similarly, Henning reported his sense-of-self as middleingly ordinarily and normal like average by stating his commitment to “earn” his own living by being engaged in “real labour”, seemingly conscious of obscuring his privileged status as the son of the company owner at which he worked. Henning could be interpreted as somebody who was aware of his class advantage, which he dealt with by practices of obscuring his different and privileged subjective empirical reality from other workers by being “generous”, in order to be middle class.

Glenn was distinct within this group in terms of relationship to Swedishness specified as middle classness. He did not self-identify as being middle class, and he recognised that this was discordant with the typical perceptions and the general *common sense* of Swedishness being about middle class social positioning, which was the case with the other four informants with Swedish backgrounds in this study. Glenn uniquely stated his sense-of-self-identity as explicitly *working*, not middle, class. He reflected on his time at University where he said that he “was in touch with Marx” for the first time, and he reported this as instrumental for his understanding of himself as working class, and leading to subsequent activism trying to invigorate a debate about class whilst at University. He reported that his

activism was driven by his belief that social class, and particularly working class issues of identity, consciousness and formation were being obscured by a general sense of *middle* class Swedishness that prevailed in the classroom amongst his peers. This, he said, led him to become directly involved with attempting to raise consciousness of others – “I kind of made myself a spokesman for the working class at [my University] seminars”. None of the others within this group of Swedish informants reported this kind of attempt at organic leadership or activism for working class formation and resistance work. Glenn therefore stood out within this group, and indicated that the Swedes were not homogenous *as a group* in their conscious class self-reflexion and practice. The point here is that all the Swedish informants’ recognised Swedish middle classed socio-cultural empirical reality, providing some indication of a common Swedish Swedishness as a stratified and ‘classed’ national cultural formation, while Glenn provided testimony as a kind of exception that demonstrates *good sense* in terms of working class struggle in empirical reality.

Socio-Political Swedishness

Socio-politically, Glenn was consistent with the other four informants with respect to their perception of changes emerging in Sweden. In terms of political hegemony, Glenn stated his perception that there was a transition away from social democracy. He accounted the transition as entailing struggle for maintaining progressive and liberal politics expressed in Sweden through voting for the Social Democrats. More so than the other Swedes however, he regretted the shift away from the social democratic hegemony of social solidarity towards neoliberal

individualisation. Glenn was committed to the social democratic status quo, which he seemed to regard as the most feasible of political options for benefitting the working class, and expressed the strength of his conviction by accounting for a sense of disbelief, when in his youth he discovered that an acquaintance did not vote for the Party. While Glenn was different to Anders by his self-proclaimed working class identity (Anders identified with middle class identity), they did however share a common anxiety about changes to social structure away from social democracy. Anders was “not optimistic” about the emerging non-middle class Swedishness in objective socio-cultural empirical reality, and he conceived of the future to be marked by an increase in exploitation of workers, which he considered to be un-Swedish. Martin also explicated this point about an emerging widening stratification in the social structure, in which education would play a role to segregate children from privileged families to reproduce advantage. He perceived a retrenchment of the “socialist thinking” and a “Leftist mind-set” in education and more widely in the wake of a neoliberalisation of Sweden’s social structure, which he felt would continue the trend of diminishing equality.

Martin and Glenn made the point that they viewed this change towards neoliberalisation as emerging without “resistance” and “anger”, particularly citing the trade unions that have been traditionally strong advocates of egalitarianism. The trade unions and education were depicted as the mechanisms for class formation historically. The link between progressive class politics and its institutions was being redefined and this point was echoed by Henning who conveyed his perception of changes by citing his own family, to express how attitudes were becoming assenting of neoliberalism. This was expression of the

typical Swedish traits of social solidarity and *lagom* being replaced by self-conscious individuality and a social acceptance of ostentatiousness. Henning also said that the possibility of radical Left politics were unfeasible and “disqualified from discussion”, suggesting his awareness of hegemony shifting towards embedding neoliberalism as the dominant *common sense*. While not identifying change in terms of neoliberalism, Par expressed his thoughts that Swedish society had undergone a social cultural transition in which Swedishness could now be associated with living exuberant “fancy lifestyles”.

Crucially, Par provided a significant account in his relationship to socio-political Swedishness and like the other Swedes, he recognised this as changing, but unlike them he did not indicate negativity towards this transition. While, Glenn, Anders, Henning, and Martin were reported as expressing a mixture of negativity, anxiety and regret at the changing socio-cultural political nature of Swedishness, Par viewed the emergence of competition and striving, even with unfair chances, as a positive aspect of the new Swedish empirical reality. Therefore, Par represented a response that was nuancing the common view, which was within this group of Swedes depicting change in Swedish socio-cultural and political as negative.

Class as Part of Swedish Empirical Reality

Taking all five Swedish accounts together, there was a tendency in this group to perceive class stratification and inequity as largely obscured. Henning said that it was “very politically correct to talk about everybody being equal”. Henning and Martin described class being “invisible”, and like Anders they identified the lack of

obviously discernable differences between houses within residential areas as being a pivotal mechanism that underpinned the general *common sense* of Sweden being egalitarian. Anders had used his own lived experience of living in an upper middle class district that was a gated community to understand social structural inequality, which he expressed in binary terms: “problem areas” and the upper middle class “protected communities”. Anders could be interpreted as saying that *within* Swedish cities, inequality was obscured by urban design and physical separation of significantly different classed residencies. To Martin, while there may be inequality within Swedish cities, the population movements related to class cleavages were too small and/or obscured for sharp differences to register consciously and plausibly negated in common sense perceptions of Sweden. Martin used his own experience of living in urban and rural Sweden to explain how he had come to understand class as manifested in empirical reality. He suggested his belief that unless there are clearly evident elites and poorer people, then differences were difficult for people in Sweden to discern. Martin stated that it was his experience of moving from rural Sweden to Stockholm that had raised his consciousness of class inequality. Therefore, while Anders was telling of his perception of class stratification *within* cities, Martin was reporting his perception of class stratification *across* Swedish society as a whole, in which Stockholm stood out because of the visibility of elites that were located there. Together, Martin and Anders provide a consolidated higher-level account of significant class structure dynamics integrating issues of rural and urban living and the emergent obscuring of social class.

Henning also made similar points to Martin that Sweden had a social structure in which social class differentials were small and thus negated and obscured, and he substantiated this by comparing the Swedish social structure to the British one, where he suggested differences to be more evident with the latter. He stated that in Sweden only Stockholm was notable in terms of inequality because the city had a discernible social structure that represented a recognisable elite, which did not exist in other Swedish cities. In addition to demography, Martin and Henning also indicated two other mechanisms that contributed to constructing a general Swedish egalitarian *common sense* that obscured inequality and stratification. Henning specifically relayed his view that the *media* played a pivotal role in generating a silence about class: “they didn’t talk about class on telly, or they don’t talk about it on the news in that way”. Martin highlighted a second mechanism, the role of *education* that created the conditions to reproduce the status quo of a *common sense* of equity and fairness. Martin focussed on an aspect of his schooling that he considered to be cultivating a very specific sense of Swedishness, which was about equality through “collective ownership and pro-sharing” but he reported that contemporary education was increasingly a mechanism for stratification, class reproduction and consolidation.

Par’s account of the obscuring of class was consistent with the other Swedes, in that he believed that it was a tacit feature of Swedishness, and there is a socio-cultural prohibition on discussing class-based advantage/disadvantage, which he suggested would be a space in which to reveal uncomfortable truths about popular and hegemonic representation of egalitarianism. These uncomfortable truths included what he perceived to be the ambiguities in contemporary empirical reality,

which was that Swedes desired showing-off and acting in ostentatious ways. Par was giving an insight about differences between the commonly held belief about Swedishness being about egalitarianism and the empirical reality of it. His relationship to Swedishness was therefore consisting of a consciousness of the fallibility of the rhetoric about Swedish class egalitarianism. This was an important critical nuance to punctuate the *common sense* that he described as prevailing.

It has been discussed above that Glenn thought about class as being largely obscured in Sweden, especially *working* class issues, which was similar to the others in this group. In contrast to them though, he was more critical and regretful, attributing this to the decline of the social democratic movement with which he believed came a general national cultural ambivalence to social class. The point here with Par and then Glenn's perspectives, is that while there was a common group-level consciousness that class is obscured in Swedishness, their accounts provided insight into the different ways in which this common theme was constructed and manifested in empirical reality indicative of complexities in cultural dynamics.

Ethno-Racial Difference and Swedishness

For Martin, inequity exists in Sweden's social structure. He expressed his awareness of Sweden's prevailing cultural idealism of being inclusive but this he said was mainly rhetorical. He specifically conveyed inequity to be part of the immigrant experience, saying "that they are not really [considered to be] Swedes" and he theorised this through his sense of a dominating discourse of Whiteness,

in which Swedes are only considered *legitimately Swedish* if they are White skinned. Martin was showing his reflexive perception recognising differences between rhetoric and the empirical realities of Swedish social structure and how non-Swedish immigrant 'Others' experience this.

Glenn also identified important tensions between lived experiences for some people and the Swedes own construction of national identity as being equitable and fair. He reported that social interaction was played out with hints of discrimination. This is important because it made interpreting his sense of objective empirical reality complicated in terms of the way that ethno-racial and nationalistic issues are all part of the nexus that shapes experience for him and other people. More specifically, Glenn conveyed being troubled by questions regarding his non-typical Swedish surname, which for him problematized the prevailing construction of Swedishness as open to, and tolerant of, difference. On the issue of social equality, Henning stated his assumption that Swedishness was related to not being ignorant. He testified to his own personal anxieties as a Swede discussing the "awkward" issue of immigration, because it was a discussion potentially opening the unwanted space for "ignorance" to emerge. He reflexively observed that being ignorant slides into being a "kind of" bigot, which was the worst thing for, especially a middle class Swede like himself. He was showing his awareness of middle class cultural norms and the complexity of the 'race', class, and Swedish cultural forms as articulating in constructions of Swedishness in, and as, empirical reality.

In the different ways discussed above, Henning, Glenn and Martin all recognised the Swedishness was about social equity and fairness however, they all perceived

that ethno-racial issues problematised this assumed Swedish cultural egalitarianism with Glenn having personally a negative experience. An exception to this construction of Swedishness in this group of Swedes was Par. Par assumed the view that Swedishness was about a prevailing relatively fair distribution of chances for *everybody* to flourish irrespective of ethno-racial identity, and he constructed Swedishness to be about a commitment to egalitarianism facilitating social mobility. His own relationship to this construction was positive and assenting, where he had perceived the emergent competitive spirit with opportunities to be virtues of Swedishness that were available to everybody.

In summary, within this group of Swedish informants four common themes were presented as constructing socio-cultural forms of Swedishness: *Middle Classness Swedishness*; *Socio-Political Swedishness*; *Class as Part of Swedish Empirical Reality*; and *Ethno-Racial Difference and Swedishness*. Using these themes to capture the general analysis contained in this group, the Swedes could be typologised as *passively critical* with practices manifesting as *acquiescent*. This will be further discussed in the final section of this chapter that synthesises analysis across the three groups. I now move on the Finnish group reporting common themes and critical nuances in relation to the way they perceived Swedishness, and how they related to it in their own account of empirical reality.

Finnish Group Prominent Commonalities and Differences: Constructs of Swedishness and Practices and Lived Relationships to Swedishness

The five Finns that made up the non-Swedish Scandinavians for this study expressed Swedishness both, in what they assumed to be the objective Swedish cultural formation and social structure; and also as part of their common/nuanced relationships to Swedishness in their life-world as a group. The fact that they were from an adjacent Scandinavian country sharing a distinct colonial and socio-cultural and ethno-racial history, provided an opportunity to explore a particularly Finnish understanding of Swedishness and its forms in empirical reality.

Social Equality and Fairness

Social equality and fairness were salient themes that were reported within this group of Finnish informants. The Finns all mainly reported class as something that was not conspicuous, and did not observe it to be significant in Scandinavian empirical reality, more specifically in Swedish culture and society.

Toby and Anna-Leena most explicitly in this group reported social class in terms that can be interpreted to mean in Scandinavia the structure was constituted by a large mass in the middle, this is they reported as the prevailing general *common sense*. Toby specifically talked about this manifesting in consciousness as a 3-tier class structure where the middle ground contains the masses. Toby was confident and clear on this position asserting, “everybody thinks they’re in the middle part, so that’s normal”. The issue of middling as being “normal” was explained by Anna-Leena as manifesting in media constructions of Swedishness. Anna-Leena said that the Swedish *common sense* construction of equality in general in Swedish society obscured class inequality. In relation to the socio-cultural mechanisms that

contributed to constructing this *common sense*, she gave an insight into her perception that the media (the “press” and positive “rankings”) played a significant role in generating this, as did social democracy, in which “class is [for the masses] less pronounced” in consciousness. Lyka and Millie both used the word “bubble” to describe this prevailing *common sense* of what constituted Swedishness. They indicated that Swedishness characterised by egalitarianism was part of public discourse, and for them it was a “bubble” that was a self-perpetuating cultural formation generated from the mechanisms of social democracy and media representation.

In relation to middle class homogeneity projected as prevailing in consciousness in Sweden, Sonny went even further than the other Finnish informants theorising that Swedish egalitarianism may be a manifestation of post-working classness, stating “people don’t feel like that the working class exists anymore”. All the Finns suggested that one way in which the *common sense* prevalence of homogeneity and middle classness as characteristics of Swedishness is by the socio-cultural taboo of ostentatiousness. This was succinctly and effectively conveyed in Sonny’s account, “When being in Sweden you don’t necessarily show your wealth that much, even though you would have more money. Basically the wealth differences are often quite small, and you don’t have this culture of showing-off”. The implication of such practice is that social class is obscured and people plausibly do not conceive it as being an issue in Sweden.

The Finns construction of Swedishness related to an absence of “showing-off” manifested as a sort of homogeneity and prevailing middleclass, this definition of

Swedishness was also related to the Finn's reports of their subjective empirical reality too. Toby specifically talked about a prevailing general homogeneity in Scandinavian societies meaning that class differences were difficult to observe, which he also observed in his own experiences. In relation to her own experience of coming from a family with significant disposable income, Sonny had said that in Sweden being "not very fancy" was the norm. The other Finns also claimed this manifestation of absence of class differences to be part of their own daily experiences of Swedishness too.

Social Class Positioning

The Finnish informants indicated that in Swedish social forms, there was a general invisibility of class or a general middleing, and they themselves related to this by expressing an intra-group ambivalence to self-identifying with a class position. Anna-Leena exhibited this reporting by saying that in Sweden she had not been conscious of herself as part of a social structure stating: "I've never seen myself in a social class". Sonny uniquely in this group of informants provided a positive, direct and expressive account of class conscious self-identification. She couched her sense-of-self identity in terms of political affiliation, which was in her phraseologies of "on the Left" and "social democratic", and this she said was because she perceived of an empirical reality on the "other side of society" to be characterised by inequity. This recognition seemed to reveal her contrasting criticality of the egalitarianism associated with Sweden and Swedishness, for example in relation to Toby's account where he perceived fairness in chances for individuals to flourish in Sweden.

A significant critical voice, distinctly more than Sonny, was Millie. She conveyed her critical reflexion of Swedishness by her perception of a normalised attempt by Swedes to construct Sweden as the “perfect” and ideal society, and she explained this Swedish Swedishness with sardonic humour. This was played out in social-cultural forms, and she was highly critical of these constructions because they were not the empirical reality for everyone. She described these representations as mere pretension, obscuring classed and ‘raced’ empirical realities. Echoing these sentiments about stratification and in terms of intra-city class differentiation, Sonny and Anna-Leena reported that it was their experience of Stockholm, where distinctively in Sweden, there was an identifiable upper class. Anna-Leena specifically said that a Stockholm cosmopolitan elite existed who were a heterogeneous formation consisting of Swedish *and* non-Swedish elements of plutocratic elites. Both Sonny and Anna-Leena were also sceptical about Swedishness being characterised by egalitarianism given that these significant wealth gaps existed in empirical reality.

Millie provided an account where she felt ethno-racial, cultural and national identity were pivotal for talking about equity in Sweden. Millie was strongly critical of the Swedish national self-identification with the stereotype of Swedish empirical reality as being “perfect”, and she specifically identified the dominant socio-cultural hegemony to be contributing to this stereotype. Millie explained her perception, which was that the default egalitarian stereotype of Sweden’s social structure was “false”. It was through personal experience in the service sector where she reflexively identified a “*real* working class” who were the strata of the working class

permanently in low paid jobs and were themselves stratified based on 'race'. The egalitarian character of Swedishness perceived by Toby to be the *common sense* was, according to Millie, a misleading depiction of Swedish objective empirical reality. This ethno-racial, cultural and national identity reporting of empirical reality could be related to the residue of the history of Swedish xeno-racism towards Finns, which is now re-contextualised with a new set of dominant/inferior relationships but still involving class in contemporary Sweden.

In summary, within this group of Finns, two common themes were identified as prevalent characterising Swedishness and its classed cultural forms, which were the *Social Equity and Fairness*; and also, *Class Positioning*. Using these themes to capture the general analysis contained in this group, the Finn's could be typologised as *contented and generally assenting* to the Swedish egalitarianism construct. This will be further discussed in the final section of this chapter that synthesises analysis across the three groups. I now move on the Global South Informants group reporting common themes and critical nuances in relation to the way they perceived Swedishness, and how they related to it in their account of subjective empirical reality as a group.

Global South Group Prominent Commonalities and Differences: Constructs of Swedishness and Practices and Lived Relationships to Swedishness

As explained in Part two earlier, while the non-Swedish Scandinavian were a nationally homogenous group as all five were Finnish, within the Global South Immigrants' group, there was more cultural diversity as the five respondents in this group came from a very wide variety of national backgrounds with different personal circumstances. This presented an opportunity to explore a diversity of non-Scandinavian opinions about what they assumed to constitute Swedishness as part of the wider Swedish cultural formation and social structure; and also as part of their own relationships to Swedishness in their life-world as a group.

Empirical Reality of the Social Ideal of Egalitarianism

The group's characterisation of Swedishness encompassing social egalitarianism was perhaps most effectively vocalised by Raj. He explicitly and directly conveyed his perception of Sweden as a "socialist country" where opportunities were open to everybody and anybody to move up the social ladder. He asserted that flourishing was attained through individual endeavour, hence he said social class, as a barrier, "is kind of like non-existent". In explicating Swedishness in terms of unconditional equality, Raj could be interpreted as accounting for the negation of the relevance of class, because it was inadequate in the light of prevailing equity. Social equity was realised in terms of delivering mobility and he suggested that hard-work would be merited in Sweden, deploying superlatives to support his position saying that it was "one of the most equal and liberal class structures in the world" where "everyone is very much equal". Raj suggested that his perspective about Sweden was based on what was possible in the Swedish context in terms of the feasibility of individuals having the opportunity to flourish, and in this frame

it was, for him, the “most” favourable for equality in comparison to other countries. These sentiments about Sweden’s equal social structure having social equity were echoed across the group. Precious conveyed her perception that class was inadequate to use as a “classification” in Sweden because “hard work” would be merited with a “good job” and rewarded with a “good house”. Like Raj, Precious conveyed her very positive perception of Sweden as an unambiguously egalitarian society, in which she personally felt that she could flourish and be rewarded with due rewards. In this way, both Raj and Precious were expressive about their feelings of personal responsibility for successes and failures.

Ethno-Racial Identity and Social Equity

Consistent with demonstrating a group-level common theme of egalitarianism, but indicating a different perspective as compared with the contentment of Raj and Precious, were three other informants in this group who articulated social equity with ‘race’ and immigration. One was Haj, who had indicated that immigrants did not have the same chances as Swedes, but that it was still feasible for some non-Swedes to flourish. He contextualised this perception of social equity with his own experience of having the opportunity to attend a prestigious University. While others in this group suggested this sentiment, Haj had explicitly said that Sweden was not equal since he himself had to try *harder* than a Swede in order to get where he was, but nevertheless he was still an immigrant leading a “middle class lifestyle”. He expressed this experience as illustrative of a positive level of social equity that negated inequality, and through which emerged an unambiguous critical appreciation of constructions of Swedish egalitarianism.

In a similar vein to Haj on the issue of immigrants and equity, Zlatan conveyed his opinion that some immigrants blamed “the system” for an unfair distribution of chances when they should be reflecting on their *own* lack of individual effort. This was in the context of the fact that he had, in his words, “made it” with being a PhD student, and if he had made it, then it was evidence that underachievement was not a systemic problem and that social equity existed. Amongst these two informants, was an implicit sense of externalising issues of inequity to problems related the individual lack of agency of other immigrants, who unlike themselves, had not grasped the opportunities available to them. In this way, Haj and Zlatan were expressing their socialised assimilation to idealised Swedishness as part of their subjective empirical reality, which was work hard and be rewarded, even if it meant working *harder* than Swedes.

While there was a general agreement that can be extracted in the testimonies from Raj, Precious, Haj and Zlatan that it was possible for anybody to flourish in Sweden, this expression of egalitarianism was nuanced with caveats. These informants had stated that working class immigrants, Muslims, and foreigners were all in some way disadvantaged in Sweden. This group-level perspective was effectively captured by Zlatan, who indicated his critical perception of the Swedish social democratic commitment to equality and social mobility, which he explained was not always feasible because Sweden’s social structure was stratified, namely by national status and class and therefore people did not have equitable chances; he said: “therefore the rules of the game are discriminatory”. Zlatan offered his awareness of differences between Swedishness as proffered by the Swedes and

experiences of non-Swedes, which Zeynep also reflected in her personalised account of how immigrants are demonised in Sweden.

On the issue of egalitarianism, distinct within this group was Zeynep. As a Kurdish political refugee she provided an explicit and personal statement about the extent to which she felt that her own ethno-racial background manifested in her experience entailing inequality and inequity in Sweden. Being a political refugee meant that when she had arrived in Sweden, she was materially and economically poor. She felt this lack of capital exacerbated her ethno-racial disadvantage, as she did not fit the norm of being White and from the Global North in Swedish society. She expressed her perception of a differentiation in experiences, which were framed by negativity because of her feeling of being marginalised and the 'Other'. Her account was very different to the tendency of contentment expressed in this group, for example with Haj. Haj was also a political refugee who was poor when he had arrived in Sweden but his subjective empirical reality, in relation to equity, was differently perceived to that of Zeynep. Haj had reported his recognition that his poor immigrant background would work against him, and to struggle against this, he determinedly used education as a tool for social mobility into the Swedish middle class. Unlike Haj, Zeynep had recalled her subjective Swedish empirical reality in a different and less positive way. She strongly stated that her ethno-racial, political and cultural identity socially positioned her as the disempowered minority in society with an absence of chances to flourish. Haj and Zeynep had both perceived the inequitable distribution of chances in Sweden, but their life courses had been significantly different, with Haj being contented and

reporting empirical reality characterised by social mobility and Zeynep being alienated and very discontented with her negative experience.

In summary, against the wide and diverse backgrounds of the informants within this group, a framework of common perceptions may be abstracted across four of the accounts within this group consisting of Precious, Raj, Zlatan and Haj. In relation to the material realisation of the social ideal of egalitarianism they conveyed a largely unambiguous perception that the Swedish social structure was one in which personal flourishing was possible, and this was through hard work, and which would be merited with social mobility. Within this abstracted common framework, the informants provided personalised relationships to these themes and general assenting, materialising in empirical reality as *consent*. Haj presented a clear testimony of his perception of meritocracy, which he had lived in his own experience. In relation to ethno-racial identity and social equity, it was the case that the informants had identified disparities, specifically that: working class immigrants, Muslims, and foreigners; had to work *harder* than Swedes to flourish. Zeynep was an informant whose account was notably distinctive within this group because she had reported her subjective empirical reality as being very negative, and therefore her perception and lived experiences of social mobility, equity and meritocracy was different compared to the general common perception within this group. She was the informant in this group that most strongly withheld *consent*, offering an opportunity to theorise the possibility of praxis.

In terms of abstracting to typologies the general analysis contained in this group, the Global South Informants could be said to be *assenters* to the Swedish

egalitarianism construct. This will now be discussed further in the final section of this chapter that synthesises analysis across the three groups.

Descriptive analysis and typological abstractions of the accounts synthesised across the three groups

At this point in the thesis, much has been covered in relation to the reporting and subsequent descriptive analysis. To take this to another level of abstraction integrating what has been covered so far in this Part three of the thesis, I now synthesise the descriptive analyses from chapter 6, which was at the level of the *individual*, with *group*-level reporting in this chapter 7. This is done by comparing and contrasting materials within and across *all* three groups to produce a tentative heuristic typology in relation to the research problematic.

Table 1: *Tentative Heuristic Group-level Typology Abstraction in Relation to the Research Problematic*

	Objective Constructions of Swedishness	Subjective Relationships to Swedishness	Typological Description
Swedes	<p><u>Swedishness Constructed as Middle Classness</u></p> <p><i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Middle class identification ❖ Being in the middle of social structure ❖ Modesty and moderation ❖ Lagom - Ordinary, normal and average <p><i>No Prominent Group Differences</i></p>	<p><u>Swedishness Constructed as Middle Classness</u></p> <p><i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Self identification as working class</i> ❖ Earning money ❖ Avoiding ostentation and hierarchical social practice ❖ Middle class identification <p><i>Group Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Glenn: working class activist 	<p><i>Passively critical, manifesting as acquiescent to the status quo with little impetus for class struggle and formation. However, there was concern at the decline in social democracy and widening class</i></p>

	<p><u>Socio-Political Swedishness</u></p> <p><i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Swedes as Social Democrats ❖ Social Democracy in transition to individualisation and neoliberalisation ❖ Insignificant resistance to changes ❖ Widening class stratification ❖ Demise of lagom lifestyles <p><i>No Prominent Group Differences</i></p>	<p><u>Socio-Political Swedishness</u></p> <p><i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Increasing individualisation witnessed in close relationships and communication ❖ Personal feelings of negativity, anxiety and regretting changes to social democracy <p><i>Group Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Par: increased competition and striving is positive 	<p>stratification, which was also <i>ethno-racialised</i>.</p> <p>Swedishness socio-cultural formations and self-conscious practices relating to middle classness.</p>
	<p><u>Class as Part of Swedish Empirical Reality</u></p> <p><i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Class stratification and inequity as largely obscured ❖ Ostentation and wealth more prominent in Stockholm ❖ Media and education obscure class and promote Swedishness as characterised by solidarity and egalitarianism <p><i>Group Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Par: Swedes desired showing-off and acting in ostentatious ways 	<p><u>Class as Part of Swedish Empirical Reality</u></p> <p><i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Urban/rural and residential context within cities important for class consciousness ❖ Sweden's class structure less visible as compared with England <p><i>Group Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Glenn: regretful of decline of social democracy related to obscuring of particularly working class issues 	
	<p><u>Ethno-Racial Difference and Swedishness</u></p> <p><i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Swedishness about social equity and fairness ❖ Swedishness related to White skin <p><i>No Prominent Group Differences</i></p>	<p><u>Ethno-Racial Difference and Swedishness</u></p> <p><i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Non-typical Swedish characteristic, e.g. surname, problematises the assumed tolerance and openness of Swedishness ❖ Ethno-racial discrimination existed in the class structure ❖ Anxiety of discussing issues of 'race' and immigration for the fear of negative characterisation <p><i>Group Differences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Par: assumed the view that Swedishness was about a 	

		prevailing relatively fair distribution of chances for <i>everybody</i> to flourish, irrespective of ethno-racial characteristics, and he constructed Swedishness to be about a commitment to egalitarianism facilitating social mobility	
Finns	<u>Social Equality and Fairness</u> <i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i> ❖ Large mass of people in the middle class ❖ In social democracy, class is less pronounced ❖ Middle classness prevails by socio-cultural taboo of ostentatiousness <i>No Prominent Group Differences</i>	<u>Social Equality and Fairness</u> <i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i> ❖ Swedishness was a self-perpetuating, through media and public discourses ❖ Class homogeneity was part of their own lives and experiences of Swedishness <i>Group Differences</i> ❖ Sonny: Swedish egalitarianism was related to post-working classness	<i>Contented</i> and generally <i>assenting</i> to the status quo. While there was little appetite for social change, the difference between empirical reality and the rhetoric of <i>Swedish social egalitarianism</i> was a point of tension for the prevailing dominant hegemony. Swedishness socio-cultural formations relating to a general invisibility of class. Group level consciousness and practice relating to a general mass-in-the middle.
	<u>Social Class Positioning</u> <i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i> ❖ In Sweden a general invisibility of class or a general middleing prevailed ❖ Stockholm was a place where an intra-city class differentiation could be identified <i>Group Differences</i> ❖ Sonny: Egalitarianisms associated with Swedishness was too simplistic ❖ Millie: Swedish egalitarian practices mere pretension, obscuring the ethno-racial “real” working class and their social experiences	<u>Social Class Positioning</u> <i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i> ❖ Indifference to class identification <i>Group Differences</i> ❖ Sonny: “On the Left” conscious consciousness ❖ Millie: Critical of Swedes construction of Swedishness in terms of the “perfect” and ideal society	

Global South	<u>Empirical Reality of the Social Ideal of Egalitarianism</u> <i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i> ❖ Swedishness encompassing social egalitarianism <i>No Prominent Group Differences</i>	<u>Empirical Reality of the Social Ideal of Egalitarianism</u> <i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i> ❖ A sense of personal responsibility of successes and failures <i>No Prominent Group Differences</i>	<i>Assimilating Swedishness and Strongly assenting to the Swedish egalitarianism construct. While there was no desire to change what was reported to be an ideal social system, there were ambiguities about the unfair distribution of chances and social tensions experienced by immigrants.</i> Consciousness of the insignificance of social class in objective empirical realities. Personal experience of social equity, thus any inequality that exists perceived to be fair.
	<u>Ethno-Racial Identity and Social Equity</u> <i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i> ❖ Anybody could flourish in Sweden but immigrants had to work <i>harder</i> than Swedes to attain the same rewards <i>No Prominent Group Differences</i>	<u>Ethno-Racial Identity and Social Equity</u> <i>Group Prominent Commonalities</i> ❖ Swedishness was about giving more/better chances to Swedes <i>Group Differences</i> ❖ Zeynep: Swedishness did not offer opportunities for personal flourishing to her. Wholly critical of the idea of Swedish egalitarianism	

Table 1 is a summary of the descriptive analysis of the group level accounts. In relation to the Swedes, the table shows considerable prominent commonalities in perspectives within the group, mainly in relation to social egalitarianism being a core value of Swedishness and Swedish social democracy. The group also stated an awareness of changes from solidarity to individualization, lagom to ostentatiousness, and a widening of class stratification. The views ranged from Par, who assented to the transitioning status quo, to Glenn who had positioned

himself as a working class activist, concerned with the decline of social democracy and emerging neoliberalism. The other Swedes in this group, while also concerned with these changes, were critical but passive in their resistance, therefore could be typologised as *acquiescent*. The acquiescence was generated as part of a tendential perception that Swedishness continued to be about an assumed *common sense* and practice of equity prevailing in the social structure, irrespective of some unfairness related to ethno-racial identity that was not White Swedish. This means that they were *consenting* to an account of the dominant hegemony with perceptions of fairness prevailing, and while they were concerned about class inequality, they were not, nor desired to be, organised as a class struggling *in* and *against* the prevailing hegemony.

The Finns held a collective perception that Swedishness was assumed to be about class homogeneity, characterised by prevailing middle classness. There was particular criticality of Swedish Swedishness that represented an idealistic social egalitarianism in empirical reality. This was a form of Swedish Swedishness that the Swedes themselves did not report, which constituted a difference of recognition of class cultural forms between the Swedes and the Finns. While Sonny and Millie expressed their class consciousness in relation to, what the latter called, the existence of “real” working class, there was considerable agreement in this Finnish group that class was insignificant objectively in empirical reality and also in their personal experience of Sweden. They largely saw themselves as part of the norm, which was that class was invisible or expressed as middle classness. Unlike the Swedes, there was little discussion and discontent about the changes to the Swedish model amongst the Finns and they could be abstracted and typologised

as generally being *contented*, and while they were not as positive as one Swede - Par, they were generally *assenting* with *consent* to the status quo.

The Global South presented Swedishness and their experience of Sweden in the most social egalitarian terms from the three groups. The views expressed a general tendency to perceive class unproblematically in Sweden. They indicated this in relation to an equitable distribution of chances to flourish, meaning that inequality was fair. Analytically, this could be interpreted as an oxymoron (i.e. juxtaposing social ideas that appear to be contradictory) - to think of inequality as being *fair* rather than unjust. However this *assenting* typological perspective was not shared by one Global South informant, who expressed significant criticality to the *common sense* of egalitarianism within this group. Zeynep had reported considerable personal hardship in Sweden, which she framed in ethno-racial terms, suggesting inequality was linked to discrimination in chances available to poor immigrants. This account was a significant contrasting nuance to the otherwise unanimous general group *consent* to the Swedish status quo. However, despite Zeynep's critical positioning, she did not report *actively* engaging in resisting and struggling against what she considered was unfair inequality in the status quo and seemingly could be assimilated into the general *as-good-as-it-feasibly-gets* perspective on Swedish empirical reality.

Overall, the Swede's have been typologised as *passively critical* with practices manifesting as *acquiescent*, and the Finn's were *contented and generally assenting*; and the Global South Informants were mostly strongly *assenting to the Swedish egalitarianism construct*. Using these tentative abstracted typologies, the

following statements can be plausibly made.

First, the Global South Immigrants were the most contented and reported Swedish social structure and their experience in the most positive terms. This was characterised by a strong sense of equity prevailing. Second, in contrast to the Global South group, the Swedes were relatively acquiescent rather than assenting. This was in the context of the changes in Swedish society arising from destabilisation of social democracy, which they viewed to be changing the character of the Swedish social structure and would be emergently marked by intensification of stratification. Third, the Finns had a tendency to converge in-between the Swedes and the Global South Immigrants, reporting a general ambivalence manifesting as practices assenting to the status quo.

It must be emphasised that these typologies are *tentatively* abstracted as each of the groups had significant complexity reporting Swedish empirical reality. For example, whilst the Global South group have been typologised as the *most contented*, within this group from across the range of all fifteen respondents was also the *most critical* individual testimony about Swedish society and cultural forms concerning promotion of a *common sense* of Swedish egalitarianism.

Furthermore, in the context of class struggle, the descriptive analysis did not report perspectives that could be straightforwardly construed as indicative of outright, direct, insurrectionary class struggle. More common across the accounts were individualised and subtle forms of criticality and scepticism of Swedishness and Swedish egalitarianism in empirical reality. As such, expressions of criticality of Swedish egalitarianism came in the form of fiction, irony and sarcasm. These forms

were analytically important as sites of class struggle in Sweden where the hegemonic representation of egalitarianism is seemingly strong. Moreover, I demonstrated that such was the cultural socialisation of Swedishness, such as in the form of *lagom*, that informants who did not subscribe to Swedish egalitarianism felt the need to conscientiously position themselves *covertly* in opposition to the status quo when they disagreed with it. It is therefore plausible that inequality is a taboo in Sweden according to the informants.

The accounts from across all the three groups represented a complex picture of the way life histories featured with: '*race*', *ethnicity*, *social democracy*, and *equality* and *fairness* in the distribution of chances, which too, shaped their perception of *common sense* and conception of Swedish society. While these complexities make it difficult to reliably abstract general types, the complexity offers an opportunity for the possibility of class struggle. The materials derived through a descriptive comparative analysis at the level of the *individual* (chapter 6), *within each of the three groups* (chapter 7) and synthesised *across the three groups* above, have opened up issues concerning how informants *acquiesce*, *assent* and *give consent* because of a conscious construction of Swedish social structures and practices encompassing equality and fairness. However, there were also issues raised in relation to the decline in social democracy resulting in significant inequality levels and also the unfair distribution of chances for non-Swedes particularly from the Global South. In the next Part, these discussions are abstracted further as part of developing an explanatory critique, focussing on the mechanisms emergent in ambiguities and critical nuances at play in the accounts, and the possibilities of their relations to class struggle.

PART FOUR: MAKING SENSE OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND PRACTICES OF SOCIAL CLASS IN SWEDEN

Chapter 8: Developing an Explanatory Critique from Accounts of Empirical Reality

Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point however is to change it.

(Marx, 1969 [1845])

In this chapter¹⁰², the aim is to develop an exploratory analysis at the level of speculative critical overview emergent from the descriptive analysis taking the form of explanatory critique (Danermark, 2002). This is in line with the methodological commitment to eschew a simple realism by attempting to explain and critique¹⁰³ and heuristically speculate on possibilities for social transformation.

The move from descriptive analysis to explanatory critique is subtle, and it represents a creative moment in the thesis by abstracting from the description of the fieldwork findings as cultural forms aiming to explicate *mechanisms* in play in the on-going present historical materiality of contemporary Swedish social and

¹⁰² Appendix A is a glossary of terms to have quick reference to definitions in which they are deployed in the main text.

¹⁰³ Explanatory critique was detailed earlier in the section entitled *Historical Materialism and Critical Realism*.

cultural formation as observed during information gathering. These contexts create the conditions (*tendencies*) for social class empirical reality, and crucially for the research problematic in play, provide opportunities for theorising the possibility of class consciousness and practices that could negate and countermand the status quo, what I call *critical nuances* in the accounts. The thesis here is presented in Marxist critical realist mode and this chapter is focussed on elaborating the things (mechanisms) that can make events happen as reported findings in the form of *tendencies*; and simultaneously as critique giving rise to the speculative class struggle possibilities that can be elucidated in this context. The analysis focuses on the social world as *common sense* theory and cultural practices that makes representations of egalitarianism credible and partially explained in empirical reality, all the while retaining criticisms. These *common senses* seem to manifest as practices by the respondents, reifying the status quo by making it continually tolerated and at least acquiesced. This in turn generates explanation for why it seems plausible, and for making the circumstances tolerable while simultaneously offering potential for negation. Thus explanatory critique moves beyond the respondents reports of empirical reality into theory building and may in some respects differ from, and as such be *critical of* the respondents' perspectives and practices while providing tentative movement towards explaining them as plausible actions.

Chapter 9, brings the thesis to a close by making some concluding remarks about the consciousness of class reported as empirical reality, the possibilities of class struggle and class formation in social democratic Sweden. The exploratory

analysis as explanatory critique builds the impetus for future studies, for which a programme is then outlined.

Inequality and Equity, Eliding and Obscuring

In terms of developing an explanatory critique of the reports of empirical reality, the mechanisms of inequality and equity were salient as generative for creating tendencies for consciousness and practices in Sweden. These mechanisms were expressed as part of a perception of Sweden as being egalitarian, or at least *relatively* egalitarian. This was manifested as part of a *common sense* tendency that opportunities in Sweden were available for most people to access and subsequently flourish, meaning that meritocracy, due deserts and just rewards were pivotal ideas that were carried in consciousness about Swedish empirical reality. The sense of fairness was part of consciousness of class and practices. At the actual level of reality, there was a socio-cultural tendency generated from the mechanism of equity to think that there was a fair distribution of chances to *make it* in Sweden – Swedishness was about a *fair day's pay for a fair day's work*, and working harder pays better. These cultural conditions hold the explanatory power to understand class and ethno-racial or any other identity as being *obscured*, and therefore it would be plausible that failure to flourish was a consequence resulting from individualised actions rather than systemic inequality. Obscuring is important in creating the conditions for explaining perceptions of emergent empirical reality to be characterised by contentment and assenting to the status quo.

However, in open systems, the structurational dialectics of emergent social structures and their cultural forms do not work linearly and the reports in Part three provided evidence of critical nuances to the general Swedish egalitarian narrative. While *consent* may be part of the dominant hegemony in the *current* moment it was also shown that structural *inequality* is recognisable as part of empirical reality. Specifically, the structural inequality that emerged as part of neoliberalism was analytically highlighted in the descriptive analysis as contributing a critical nuance to perceptions of egalitarianism shaping consciousness and practices in empirical reality. In these terms, the articulation of inequalities expressed as social structural stratification and fairness become interesting in the context of the present research problematic because as *consent* becomes weakened opportunities are presented for class struggle.

Figure 4: *Modelling of the relation between Inequality and Equality*

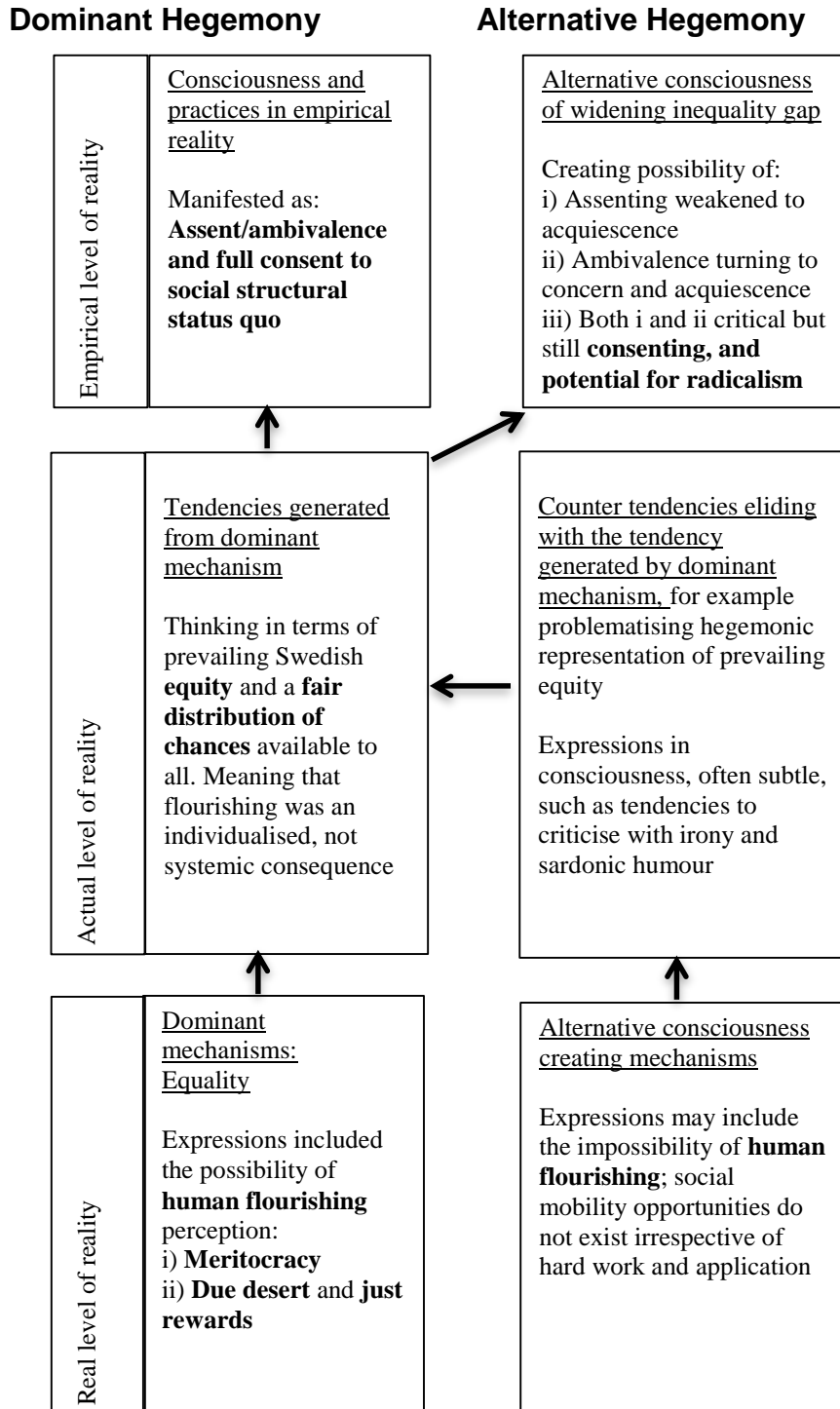


Figure 4 depicts the tangential relationship between the dominant equality mechanism and the emergent empirical reality framed by consent/assent to the status quo. The right side depicts criticality that elide with the dominant mechanisms and related tendencies, for example problematising of equity in empirical reality. These critical forces are significant because they provide the possibility of counter-tendencies as potentially negating the dominant mechanism that may emerge as alternative consciousness and practices. Real level alternative mechanisms work against dominant tendencies. Figure 4 depicts an expression of this manifesting in tendencies to think in terms of the human flourishing as impossible and social mobility opportunities not existing irrespective of hard work and application. The critical nuance in accounts of empirical reality may be conveyed as part of the recognition of *unfair* distribution of opportunities to flourish. This may be in the observation that, for example, poorer immigrants having to work *harder* than middle class White Swedes to achieve the same or comparable recognition and merits. This counter tendency may emerge in empirical reality with significant critical consciousness, creating the possibility of negating the negation of inequality.

Furthermore, fine-textured analysis of interviews identified socio-cultural tendencies whereby critical nuances are expressed in indirect and subtle forms, for example differential chances being expressed with irony and sardonic humour. Such critical nuances have the emergent power of possible weakening of consent to the status quo. This weakening may bring about the possibility for those people who were assenting, now to be more critical. A similar movement to *good sense* from *common sense* may occur in people who were seemingly ambivalent about

equity and may become more critically aware, for example of widening inequity, which is racialised. The important point in these critical nuances is that *full consent* is never achievable. The critical tendencies work within the spaces where consent is weakest, and therein lays the speculative possibility of practices constitutive of class struggle.

It has been reported and described that consent is derived from hegemonic presentation and experience of Sweden as being relatively egalitarian. In empirical reality terms this means that while there is some inequality recognised there is also a perception of feasible opportunities to flourish, even though one may need to work harder and longer than others. This is a context in which consent prevails with some criticism of the status quo. In Gramscian historical materialism mode where history is always open to new conjunctures, recognition of inequality shows that there is a kernel of critical consciousness and *good sense* that exists with the mechanism of equity itself. Expressions of both, inequality expressed in class stratification, and also fairness, are part of the same complex social world experience. They partially constitute a relationship that explains tendencies for *consent*, and also the possibility of emergent criticality that holds the potential to negate the status quo. In terms of the *critical* aspect of explanatory critique, for Marxist theory building, the withholding of full consent suggests equity is a focus and space for the possibility of *good sense* for class struggle. This possibility of *good sense* becomes emergent as part of a consciousness that could be generated from empirical reality being different to that of the hegemonic representation of egalitarianism, for example as part of racialised empirical reality. Such cultural struggle over equity is a part of the ongoing *war of position* and it is

where radical transformative class consciousness could be emergent for conceiving of socialism as a feasible alternative.

Furthermore, and more speculatively, in Swedishness socio-cultural forms there was a tendency to be solidaristic when inequality is recognised. This resonates somewhat with Marxism's quest for organisation, the latter being about the emergence of a *class* struggling together for its own interests, whereas solidarity without the class emphasis is emptied of revolutionary capacity. However, in the context of the research problematic and speculatively theorizing, working with this sense of togetherness may be the basis for *building* working class formation for struggle. The personal practices and consciousness of a commitment to fairness, for example the references to equal opportunities being constituted in Swedishness, is a focus that could be channelled as part of a revolutionary strategy to grow into class solidarity and struggle when opportunities for all *do not* manifest in empirical reality.

Perceptions of Feasibility

In the explanations above, *elision* (between inequality and equity) and *obscuring* (of inequality) have been important as conceptual ideas. While they are analytically distinctive processes, the functional connection they have emerges in a tendency for a practice that manifests as a *consenting* to the status quo through a consciousness of feasible equity for individuals to flourish. Furthermore, feasibility

also provides a conceptual tool to explain, despite recognition of inequality, the broad commitment to social democracy. Feasibility therefore mediates the consciousness of inequality and the subsequent practices that amount to tacit and/or passive *consent*, what can be called acquiescence.

Feasibility was effective in providing an analysis and account of the current *common sense* that Sweden is as *good-as-it-could-be*, or that the return to the historical form of social democracy, presents this hypostatic social idealism in the imaginary of practical possibility. In addition to the *good-as-it-could-be* consciousness, there was an absence of imagining any alternative to be feasible at this juncture. This explains a passive consenting to the status quo as there was no conception of a feasible alternative available, which would improve what was existent.

In this context of passive consent, Swedish social democracy could be extracted as a focal point where struggle could be manifested. Swedish social democracy was analysed as practically significant in consciousness in two embedded forms. First, the vestiges of its former *Golden Days can be restored* as described in chapter 2. In this study, the Swedes, particularly Glenn, provided effective testimony for an analysis of *hope, nostalgia* of old Sweden and habituated *regret* at the Social Democratic Party losing its hegemony and traditional principles, and decaying in socio-cultural empirical reality. This was evidence of a holding on to a *common sense*, and having faith in social democracy returning progressive politics and principles. Second, feasibility is part of a consciousness that Swedish social democracy is *the best possible alternative*. These statements are made with

comparative references, which are used to suggest that, whilst the status quo was not ideal, the chances of human flourishing could be worse as exemplified by perceived empirical reality in other countries (England/USA). In the context of the problematic and as *critique*, it seems that the struggle for a social transformation is being mediated and negated by the mechanism of feasible equity. Feasible equity functions as part of social democracy, which is holding constant a precarious situation in which significant negatives of expanding inequality, is in consciousness in empirical reality obscured by a *common sense* comprising an absence of a feasible alternative being possible. This absence means that it is necessary for Left activists to work with critical tendencies against the dominant tendencies.

Figure 5: Modelling of the relation between Feasibility and Social Democracy

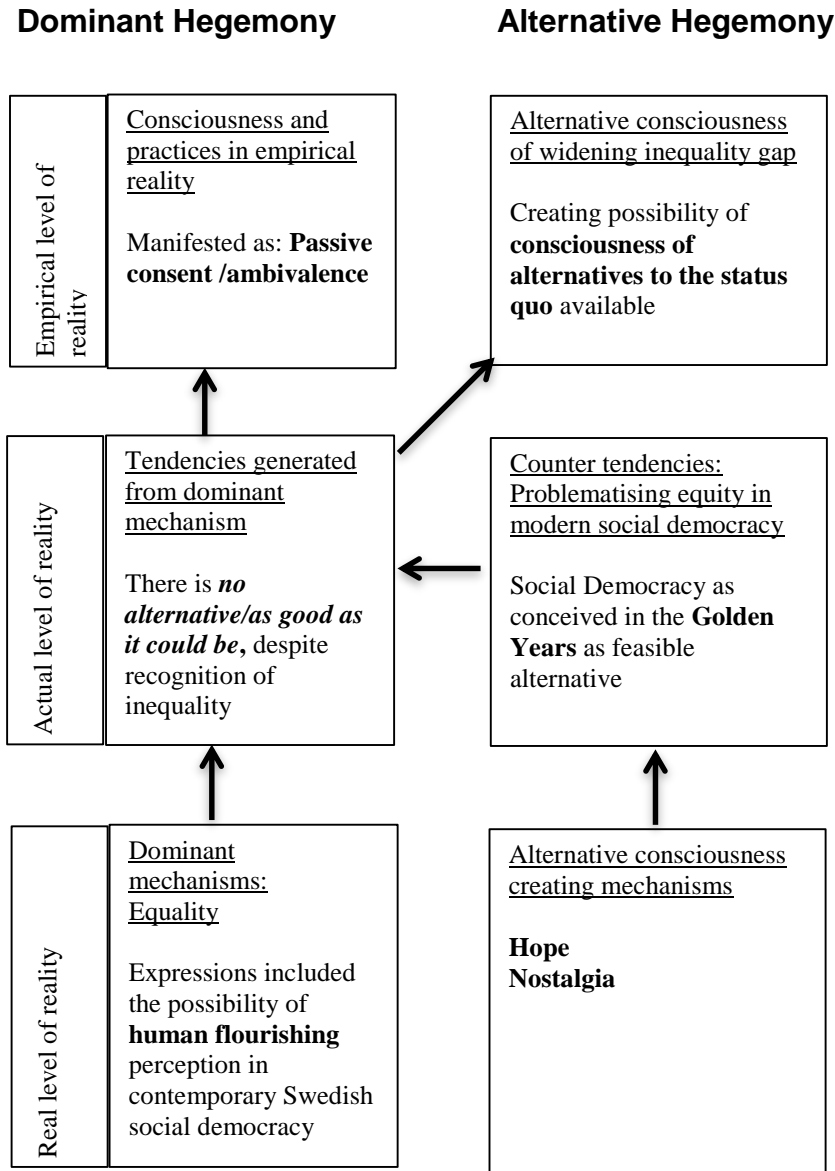


Figure 5, building on figure 4 above, depicts the *possibility* of alternative and critical consciousness for class struggle. The salient key issues being highlighted here, in dialectical historical materialism mode, is that the feasible equity tendency, is just that – a *tendency* not a definite determination. The alternative featured as *hope* for a return to Golden Years social democracy, is always available in the status quo. The point is that as a *tendency* it only provides an inclination towards a particular empirical reality. Therefore, dominant tendencies are ineffective in *totally* obscuring inequality and resolving the contradictions. Without full consent to the status quo, there are opportunities available for critical class consciousness to be emergent. This is depicted as part of the counter-tendency that creates the potentiality of an emergent alternative consciousness and one that is critically conscious of unfair inequality and the availability of transgressing the status quo. Feasibility is itself implicitly unstable in the current Swedish conjuncture. Sweden is undergoing neoliberalisation and this is bringing into light *unfeasibility* and problematising equity in consciousness and practices, especially ethno-racialised class stratification. In addition to social democracy, there are also other institutions that had historically held together Swedish society, such as religion, which are being reconfigured. This context in which stability and the dominant hegemony of the status quo is weakened, potentially provides the footing for intensification of the class struggle in this conjuncture from below as part of peoples negative experiences as well as from above by Left activists and leaders. The interest for the problematic comes if, when, and how, the masses are losing their consciousness of equity as a feasible possibility and gaining a perception of growing ethno-racialised class inequality. This is an available opportunity for the possibility of class struggle and activism that includes critical articulation of class

and 'race', and possibility other forms of solidarity, perhaps including religiosity/secularism.

The explanatory critique in relation to feasible equity lies in the treatment of the accounts as immanently containing criticism of the status quo, in which there are latent counter-tendencies for the possibility for SIFA (socialism is a feasible alternative), and as opposed to more of the status quo being the only alternative. There were critical nuances related to consciousness of inequality and racialised inequity that provided glimpses of the desire for a radically different more socially just Sweden, Glenn provided a nostalgic account of a socialist social democracy that pointed to such a desire. Put another way, the dominant hegemonic narrative is always nuanced with the possibility of *good sense* and the space and energy to struggle resides in these nuances. The cultural construct and practice of lagom demonstrates this by prohibiting ostentatiousness and individualism by promoting being ordinary and normal, however critiquing lagom upon these very virtues that it espouses reveals its limitations. Not only is it very difficult to maintain lagom in neoliberalism, moreover lagom becomes paradoxical when lagom was exercised excessively manifesting in competition for who was more moderate and normal (see Anders's account). The relevance for the research problematic is that, while lagom was a binding feature of Swedishness and generative of *consent* to the status quo, it also had within its own practical function the capacity to turn against itself. This Marxist critique represents the potential to use it for negation of the negation through hegemonic struggle against dominant narrative of Swedishness being egalitarian.

In conclusion, in this study, the theoretical framework enabled a contribution demonstrating Swedish empirical reality to contain:

i) *consent*, which allowed for the dominant hegemony to be maintained through mechanisms of: *equity, feasibility, obscuring and eliding*; but in open systems these are unable to get full consent to the status quo.

ii) critical nuances, such as experiences and perceptions of: widening inequality and class stratification as part of neoliberalisation, and also ethno-racial inequity; these render implausible the representation of fairness and expose inequality, and this offers the opportunities to speculate on the possibility, and counter-tendencies, providing the footing for class struggle.

The *consent* that took the form of acquiescence was particularly important, as it represented the ruling class as unable to hermetically seal *commitment* to the Swedish egalitarianism narrative dominant hegemony. The practical function of *feasibility* has been particularly highlighted in relation to it being an open and flexible boundary mediating conceptual construct providing a speculative opportunity to develop an explanatory critique of the liminal nature of class hegemony (see Mansaray, 2006). In such circumstances, in dialectical historical materialist terms, the potential for a Swedish revolutionary conjuncture remains constantly available as a possibility. This complexity was demonstrative of the sophisticated *war of position* that was taking place in the hegemonic class struggle in Sweden. A contribution that this analysis makes is to draw attention to some aspects of the nature and operation of neoliberalism manifesting in socio-cultural

forms and national identity formations through Gramscian inspired analysis. It is in this way that I have begun to explore and identify the complexities, subtleties and nuances of the modern capitalist Swedish State's hegemony in empirical realities, and crucially the opening of opportunities for class struggle in cultural forms. This non-violent socio-cultural focus is not an *alternative* to the Leninist revolutionary strategy that I described in Chapter 3 but adds strength to it.

I now turn my attention to a chapter that tentatively draws this thesis to a concluding focus.

Chapter 9: Taking Stock and Moving On

This study can contribute the finding that a lived consciousness of feasible equity prevails simultaneously with obscured inequality within each group and across the participants. This obscuring effect makes it difficult for class to be readily conceived in consciousness or perceived in social practices as a lived problematic. In such a scenario, class antagonisms are absent in practical consciousness, and the possibility of class formation and struggling for class interests is effectively negated most of the time for most of the people. However, the explanatory critique highlighting mechanisms and critical nuances also offers potential pivotal moments in cultural formations where the obscuring of inequality is itself negated or ambiguous, which opens the window for critical consciousness to emerge for struggle.

I now progress to reflect on the critical theoretical framework of the study, which lays the ground to consider the possible directions for a future research programme in relation to the findings from this study.

Reflecting on the Critical Theoretical Framework and Contemporary Sweden

As its primary contribution to, and in the spirit of Marxist concerns for class struggle, this study has reported class consciousness and practices in empirical reality. This was specified in the context of the research questions about class consciousness as i) constructions of and ii) relations to Swedishness as lived and perceptions of Swedish socio-cultural formations. The development of an explanatory critique identified that class consciousness is significantly obscured, either directly or through the process of eliding inequality with equity. It could be tentatively concluded that class in contemporary Sweden was largely absent in reports of experiences as a social antagonistic category. This has implications for the 19th century conceptions of Marxism that theorised social democracy as an evolutionary step to socialism/communism, as discussed in chapter 3. In the contemporary moment, the evolution appears not to be towards socialism but neoliberalism and popular far-Right nationalism. The scientific form of Marxism and positivistic historical materialism schools of thought have now moved further on and widely seen to be theoretically as untenable, as class consciousness for class formation for struggle is historically both complex and not evolving linearly, as documented in this thesis focusing on Sweden.

In chapter 3, I discussed Gramsci's contribution to Marxism and a focal point was the theory that everybody had the capacity for *good sense*, which created the possibility for social transformation. However, for this to be the case class antagonisms need to be recognised, but that is largely absent in consciousness and practices. While the social democratic model has been transformed in *contemporary* Sweden as compared with its *Golden Years*, *consent* continues to prevail, which in turn is negating possibilities for radical Left praxis. The continued triumph of social democracy over the far-Left alternative has seemingly created a Swedish conjuncture contending with an emergent far-Right. Radical Left social transformation in Sweden is in a prolonged *war of position*. There are lessons for revolutionary strategy to be learnt from the Swedish experience of the history of social democracy, possibly for Venezuela and Greece where social democratic reforms, similar to the *Golden Years* under Branting, are being implemented in both countries by socialist governments.

While conditions in Sweden continue to keep intact broad *consent*, or at least passive and critical acquiescence, the unprecedented polarising social stratification and diminishing of the feasibility of equity, which featured as part of the accounts in this study, suggests that a new conjuncture is always potentially possible. In the wake of the crisis in the dominance of social democratic hegemony, social formations have emerged in relation to which there are three events to specify here in relation to class struggle.

The first was in 2013 when Sweden experienced its first and major 'race' riot in close to half a century, which involved people from working class backgrounds, but mainly Global South Immigrants who rebelled against their perceived inequity of chances, and unfeasibility of human flourishing in Sweden (Adman, 2013; McLaughlin, 2013). Informants in this study had reported their perception that while opportunity to flourish existed, some people had to work harder to have similar chances to that of White middle class Swedes. The 'race' riot may be an expression of the emergent critical consciousness that Swedish egalitarianism is not plausible in the context of inequity, and this could subsequently explain social resistance formations consisting of White *and* Global South Immigrant people rising-up against the status quo. Equity has been found to be a salient cultural mechanism, and the situation can be focussed in two ways: i) equity can appease the masses when there is a perceived fair enough distribution of chances to flourish ii) equity can be the engine of critical consciousness and struggle when experiences do not reflect fairness in chances. These two focuses are not mutually exclusive and are parts of the same empirical reality simultaneously, thus explaining consent and also resistance to be existent at the same time in the status quo.

Second, a national debate emerged about rising class inequality in Sweden. This debate was initiated by a bus tour called the *överklassafari* (upper class Safari) arranged by a radical organisation called *Alltåtalla* (Everything for Everyone)¹⁰⁴ with the motto *Odladitt klass hat* (Grow Your Class Hatred), aiming to show the extent to which Sweden in 2013 was segregated by class inequality by touring

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix O for a link to a short video of the tour.

through different neighbourhoods. The bus tour drove through Stockholm's most exclusive and salubrious areas and then through the most working class and poverty stricken suburbs to expose the myth of social democratic egalitarianism in contemporary Sweden (see Frank, 2012; The Local, 2012a; b). The critical consciousness that was being generated resonates with that of particularly the Swedes in this study who had sense of widening inequality. The widening inequality represents a moment when *consent* may be further withdrawn. The consequences of anger and discontent provide the speculative possibility of people reconsidering their assent and acquiescent to the status quo. This study discussed Swedishness as constructed as being about fairness and middle classness, which was subjectivised in accounts of empirical reality, especially with the Swedes who seemed to characterise themselves as practicing lagom. The *Alltåalla* suggests that this construction of Swedishness is being reconfigured, and inequality could be observed within shorter geographical distances. The *Alltåalla* objective to expose inequality and is a social movement for critically rethinking Swedishness and its hegemonic representation of egalitarianism, and how its cultural form constructs a different empirical reality to that which is in existence. The bus tour is a mechanism generating critical tendencies working against the status quo of neoliberalisation.

Third, the recent destabilisation of the status quo because of a perception of growing inequality has also had practical political manifestations (Bengtsson, Berglund and Oskarson, 2013). White working class Swedes, who have felt that their chances to flourish have declined, have voted for the far-Right Sweden Democrats in the 2014 General elections where they recorded a historic 13% of

the votes. These political results suggest that there is the emergence of disenfranchisement of White working class Swedes, and this is also with the Global South Immigrants in this study reporting experiences of unfairness. In this context, it seems that the ruling class is losing its grip dominating hegemony. While the far-Right appear to have gained ground in this political conjuncture, it represents the constant availability of opportunities for the far-Left radical possibilities.

There is no suggestion here that these three emergent events were necessarily linked directly, but they show that struggle is on-going. A dialectical historical materialist perspective elaborates the potential of critical nuances that emerge in the practice of everyday experiences offering possibilities for manifesting as praxis. These possibilities offer hope for the critical generative potential for *good sense*. Furthermore, these three emergent events are demonstrative of a rising tide of discontentment with widening social structural stratification where it is becoming recognisably unfeasible for both, poor Swedes and non-Swedes to flourish. On these speculative terms, the obscuring of inequality may be wearing thin, and the possibility arises for formation for class struggle to emerge. In this context, it is poignant to reiterate that the possibility of revolutionary class struggle and formation is within, not outside of, the interstices of the dominant hegemony and the cultural form of class struggle is crucial for consent. It was in this dialectical vein that chapter 2 – the history of social democracy - began with the quote from Marx and Engels: *all that is solid melts into air* (Marx and Engels, 1848).

I now suggest the opening for further development to this study in relation to the findings from this thesis and the discussions above.

Further Development: Possibilities and Limitations

Throughout the course of the thesis, particular limitations have been highlighted in respect to the design of the study and the subsequent contribution it could claim to make. The limitations could be addressed in future studies in two specific types of research projects.

Firstly, particularly in Parts two and three, the theoretical, methodological and philosophical aspects of this thesis were discussed. As part of the distinctive research strategy of this study, I provided an account of critical realist underlabouring of dialectical historical materialism. To contribute to debates on developing Marxism as a science, more intellectual work needs to go into the possibility and limitations of the compatibility of the philosophical underlabourer role that critical realism can have for Marxism, and the negation of class struggle. The focus could be a Gramscian framed exegesis focused at the *real* level for cultural production, and the way this can emerge in an empirical reality of obscuring inequality and perceptions about feasibility in other contexts in the field of education, and social science more generally. The life history approach in this methodological and philosophical framework is effective to identify causally efficacious tendencies and generative mechanisms, as exemplified in this study. Bringing together critical realism and life history in Marxist research on class consciousness, practices and struggle has been fruitful for this exploratory study and needs more attention to elaborate on the contributions of this study.

Secondly, as the introduction to the thesis stated, the study has been a reporting on, *exploration* of consciousness and practices providing *some* understanding of the dynamics of social class in contemporary Sweden. This was a statement to indicate that more fieldwork work needs to be done after this study, to develop the Marxist emancipatory project. The specific mechanisms identified in this study as having created the conditions for the current conjuncture in Sweden's history need more intensive and extensive attention (described below) in the context of strategizing to build for class struggle for social transformation. Lagom, social solidarity and irony/sarcasm are examples of cultural forms that have been highlighted as emergent from salient mechanisms in creating the conditions for the masses to *consent*, or at least remain passive, to the status quo. They are worthy of much more attention, contextualized as part of class struggle in cultural forms as they might also hold the potential of *negation* and constitute contexts for building critical consciousness.

This study has been exploratory with tentative and speculative findings, and therefore further *intensive* research is needed into each individual mechanism and its generated tendency to distinguish their operation and how they hold constant *consent*. More specifically, from the development of the explanatory critique, *inequality, equity, eliding, obscuring* and *feasibility* mechanisms are seemingly pivotal for class struggle and possibilities for mobilising social transformation. The investigation of these mechanisms is important in this time of political transition where traditional socio-cultural principles and structures are being reconfigured and there are new emergences that hold the potential for struggle. The point of conducting such an investigation to explore the dynamic working of particular

mechanisms would be to build on this study and address further themes of what conditions would be necessary for the impetus for critical revolutionary consciousness to emerge. Exploration at the level of *real* where mechanisms generate tendencies for empirical reality would assist strategic theory building for these times inspired by Gramsci's *class war of position*. One particular point in the explanatory critique that could be a stimulus for further research was the informants' belief in a general fairness prevailing in Sweden, in which rewards and flourishing was decided by way of individual endeavour. In this consciousness, they reported that rewards were appropriately merited, and with this tendency, they regarded undeserved rewards as non-existent because all rewards are justified by the application of talent, competence, and skill - with hard work. Undeserved rewards, for instance, being *born into* power and privilege, did not feature as part of their accounts. The social position into which one is born is disregarded because, presumably, they perceived fair distribution of chances for individuals to *make it*. Perceptions of social reproduction of generational disadvantage for those born into working class families could be an avenue for further research focuses, especially to provide explanation about types of *consent* that they report (i.e. assent and acquiesce). The mechanism of assumed prevailing equity seems to generate a tendency whereby inequality as a social structural disadvantage is negated in these informants modelling of social dynamics, which ultimately leads to a practical function of obscuring inequality. While holding constant the status quo, the possibility may also be present in such a context for the emergence of critical consciousness, and this is important for strategic theory building based on *real* generative mechanisms that give rise to tendencies for lived consciousness and actions.

Furthermore, the issue of religion emerged as a tentative background theme in the analytical reporting, and is a potential space where conservative/progressive struggles may be ongoing in contemporary Sweden that has a role for consciousness and social formation with potential for development in the context of five related themes i) Sweden's Lutheran history [see chapter 2 and also the discussion of Götrek and possibility of religious and lawful communism in chapter 3] ii) the recent ending of the Church of Sweden as the official religion iii) political and demographic changes bringing a plethora of diversity and difference iv) and the reporting of increasing Islamophobia simultaneous with the increase in far-Right political activity v) in 2014, from 65 countries being polled Sweden showed to be the "least religious in the Western World with 78% [of residents] saying they are either not religious or convinced atheists" as compared to two thirds of the 63,898 sample claiming to be religious (Win/Gallup, 2015). In the light of these themes, questions can be posed about the role of religion and the Lutheran antecedents in contemporary lived life, and Swedishness identity, as a force for establishing stability and also creating the conditions for consciousness. An aspect of this exploration could be in examining secularism and national identity played-out in the lagom cultural form. The focus with such a research endeavor would be on expressions of Swedishness in religious cultural forms, and how these could be understood as formations in class struggle.

In terms of practical arrangements for pursuing these focuses further and building *extensively* on the research design, the sampling design could draw a more representative and wider range of informants. Related the themes identified above,

Muslim voices may be able illuminate aspects of consciousness intertwined with class specifically in Swedishness cultural forms.

Furthermore and in respect to practical arrangements, it was noted earlier in chapter 4 that the criterion of the recruitment strategy was purposive insofar as it was designed to enable articulation between class, culture and 'race'. While it did deliver diversity of perspectives in this way, it was limited in other ways, for example in terms of pan-Scandinavian and gender balance and representation. In terms of the former, the non-Swedish Scandinavians were limited to *Finnish* informants absencing Danes and Norwegians, and in contrast there was a more expansive range of diversity within the Global South Immigrants group. In terms of the latter, the gender profile was limited - the Swedes were all male and the Finns included one male, whereas the Global South included two females; all of which skewed representation and this begs questions, for instance, would Danes and Norwegians have said anything different in terms of class and Swedish empirical reality because they are not Finnish? Also, in what ways specifically in Sweden, where gender equality is a political priority, does gender make a difference for classed experiences?

It is impossible to have perfect representation but in retrospect, a future study could be designed with a more focused recruitment strategy. A new study could designate the subdivisions within each group with more specificity for example gender and Scandinavian regionalism, which could be facilitated by expanding the study to include more than five informants. In addition to the diversity that this would bring, expanding the number of participants would also allow for the

possibility to make more fine textured comparisons *within* each of the groups, and these insights could be used to analyze furthermore by each group *across* the participants as a whole; for example, the nuances and commonalities of intra-Scandinavian perspectives, and how this compares with the Global South perspectives about generative mechanisms and critical nuances. Setting up a research strategy in this way would also allow for a fine textured analysis of the tentative typologies that were discussed in Part three.

I end the account of this study, not in recognition of a completed journey but as a temporary pause in ongoing exploration and struggle, by returning to an abiding memory of a remark that was made to me by a Swedish stranger at a bar in Stockholm after I had told him the topic of my research in 2007:

Social class? [quizzical look then arms outstretched] There's no social class here [now smiling]!

Coming from the background that I noted in chapter 4 and developed in Appendix H, I found this response intriguing. However, through the course of this study, I can now better comprehend some of the dynamics and profound complexity of the way that class intersects with: equity, 'race', social democracy and interpretations of forms of feasibility of fairness in Sweden. The Swedish stranger's remarks resonated with the analysis of informants' testimonies, and it can be said that such perceptions are decidedly more complex and critically nuanced than they at first seem. It is in this frame that this study has contributed, depicting how a perception of feasible equity had until now elided inequality and racial disadvantage, emerging in critical and passive acquiescence to the status quo. However, with the

destabilisation of social democracy and the feasibility of flourishing in decline, as the opening epigrammatic quote to this thesis stated, “serious fissures” (Booth, 2014, p.13) have begun to emerge, subsequently widening classed and ethno-racialised inequality in the *Swedish Model* allowing for a new conjuncture in the struggle for Left hegemony in contemporary Sweden. Such struggle should not be conducted with lagom.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms and their Deployment

This Appendix contains a glossary of the key conceptual, theoretical and analytical terms as they are specifically used in the study.

Assent	<i>Assent</i> is a tendency to actively and enthusiastically agree to endorse the status quo; <i>acquiescence</i> is when compliance occurs but where full <i>consent</i> is withheld because of some criticism or <i>consent</i> is passively generated through inaction or tacit agreement.
Dialectical historical materialism	The evolution of history is not straightforward and it is manifested through a process of mediation and negation. History is comprised of a complex totality, including, antecedent forces from yesteryears, and also

	<p>humans having the agential capacity to shape society, as well as the imposition of ideas of the ruling class through State structures.</p>
Egalitarianism	<p>The proposition that everybody/everything should be made/is equal.</p>
Elide	<p>A process whereby there was a coming together of aspects of the social world, for example the eliding of inequality with equity, and what was analytically interesting was the <i>emergent</i> socio-cultural form, and the creation of the conditions of empirical reality. See Obscure.</p>
Emergence	<p>The generation of a different or new idea arising from mechanisms coming</p>

	<p>together to generate conditions for consciousness. See Elide.</p>
Epistemic Fallacy	<p>Reducing reality to empirical appearance and observable phenomena, as distinct from deep analytical concern with mechanisms and critical nuances. See Reality.</p>
Equality	<p>A reference to sameness. Everybody being the same, this could be in terms of, socially, economically, politically, culturally, and/or any combination of the above. See inequality</p>
Equity	<p>A reference to the distribution of chances to flourish. It is an indicator of social fairness (either perceived, real or both) of opportunity that exist for individual's, or groups of individuals, to access provision (for example resources of knowledge) for betterment. Social policy to adjust</p>

	<p>access and opportunity is important, for example through taxation policy, can also be applied to address fairness issues to with inequality.</p>
<p>Explanatory Critique</p>	<p>The quest to <i>explain</i> and also <i>critique</i> for emancipatory purposes. The <i>explanatory</i> aspect is to find knowledge about mechanisms that have the power to generate <i>tendencies</i> for qualitative changes to, for example, consciousness and practices in empirical reality. The <i>critique</i> aspect of explanatory critique is about using knowledge of causality to critique the underlying causes of beliefs and practices that alienate, exploit and limit human flourishing, then the possibility arises for building theory for struggling against these causes. See Mechanisms.</p>
<p>Fairness</p>	<p>Condition of justice prevailing because</p>

	<p>of even-handedness that is appropriate, for example access to welfare provision, labour markets and education. See equity.</p>
<p>Feasibility</p>	<p>The condition of what is possible to come to realisation. For example, a different kind of society. This can be either: i) an idealist conception, such as a classless society; or, ii) one that is comparatively conceived, thus by making a judgement against another materially existing context, such as at a different time of place/country.</p>
<p>Flourish</p>	<p>The transformation of potential into subjective empirical reality by virtue of agential action, luck or both. This presupposes conditions are existent for the possibility for this transformation to take place.</p>

Inequality	The difference between the highest strata and the lowest strata in the social structure of society. This cleavage represents the division in society. The bigger the level of inequality, the less egalitarian society is.
Hegemony	Leading class struggle through the establishment and maintenance of culture and ideas to dominate.
Lagom	Not directly translatable but it is a distinctively Scandinavian socio-cultural expression and practice, relating to promoting moderation, avoiding exuberance and conspicuous symbols of distinction. The phrase used by Swedes to make it meaningful is <i>not too much and just enough</i> .
Mechanisms	Generative <i>mechanisms</i> have the

	<p>power to set-off <i>tendencies</i> for qualitative changes to, for example, consciousness and practices in empirical reality. See tendencies.</p>
Objective	<p>A dimension of empirical reality about the informant's perception of class as existing in the social world in Sweden. In other words, class is objective in the sense that it is real and existing out there in Swedish social structure and recognisable in cultural and other forms. This empirical reality is independent of their direct lived experience of it, so this is how they see social class as working for others in Sweden. See subjective and reality.</p>
Obscure	<p>To take away from perceptibility. When class becomes obscured it is negated in consciousness. See elide.</p>

Open System	The conception of history non-linear as never ending with infinite possibilities. History is not predictable like in natural science and can be thought of in terms of tendencies that create the conditions of possibility, for example in capitalism the possibility of its self-destruction is immanent. See tendencies.
Reality	In <i>Historical Materialist and Critical Realist</i> mode this is the analytical delineation between the levels of reality: i) real - where generative mechanisms can be identified ii) actual - where social tendencies are created by the generative mechanism iii) empirical - where lived experiences arise from the tendencies.
Research Problematic	The exploration of class consciousness, which is the precondition for class struggle and

	<p>class formation for social transformation.</p>
<p>Science</p>	<p>History does not unfold like a science that follows philosophical and positivistic determination. This is rejection of: i) Hegelian idealism - where ideas are separate to the dialectical nature of the social world; ii) positivistic social science - society cannot be studied like an experiment in a laboratory because the social world is open to a multiplicity of conjunctions and humans practices, history and structural forces are all part of the complexity of social life.</p>
<p>Subjective</p>	<p>A dimension of empirical reality about the informant's sense-of-self as embodying a social class identity and its manifestation in everyday practices, if indeed they did recognise this to be the case. Put another way,</p>

	<p>subjective is deployed to infer the informant's understanding of himself or herself as living classed actors, and class apprehended in their agential routine practices. See Objective.</p>
<p>Tendencies</p>	<p>In relation to open systems, the social world can be perceived to have a direction with which it is evolving and knowledge of this can provide predictive powers for its outcomes. The conceptual deployment of tendencies crucially avoids the randomness and indeterminacy of the post-modern paradigm. See mechanisms.</p>
<p>Underlabour</p>	<p><i>Underlabouring</i> is a term used to mean conceptual clearing, for example to avoid economic determinism and positivistic conceptions of history. For example, critical realism can be used to</p>

	<p>underlabour Marxism as a dialectical and non-positivistic science for the purpose of human emancipation.</p>
War of Position	<p>The perpetual class war in and on the terrain of the ideological, philosophical and political interactions of individuals. This is a class struggle in cultural forms, for the establishing and maintaining dominant hegemony. This war was distinct and also a part of the class war that Gramsci termed the <i>War of Manoeuvre</i>, which was a reference to the full-frontal insurrectionary revolutionary strategy, particularly of Lenin and the Bolsheviks.</p>

Appendix B: Swedish Social Democratic Hegemony

The following tables show the emergence of the crisis and diminishing hegemony of the Social Democratic Party between 1973 and 2014, and simultaneously the rise of popular nationalism of the Sweden Democrats in more recent times. The Swedish political system is based on proportionate representation and there are a total of 349 seats in parliament. The total population of Sweden is approx. 9.4 million.

Source: Alvez-Rivera, (2014).

2014

List	Votes	%	Seats
Social Democratic Party	1,886,473	31.2	113
Moderate Party	1,403,630	23.2	84
Sweden Democrats	781,120	12.9	49
Green Party	408,365	6.8	24
Center Party	370,834	6.1	22
Left Party	344,514	5.7	21
Liberal Party	326,055	5.4	19

Christian Democratic Party	277,227	4.6	17
Feminist Initiative	184,230	3.1	0
Others	57,069	0.9	0

2010

List	Votes	%	Seats
Social Democratic Party	1,827,497	30.7	112
Moderate Party	1,791,766	30.1	107
Green Party	437,435	7.3	25
Liberal Party	420,524	7.1	24
Center Party	390,804	6.6	23
Sweden Democrats	339,610	5.7	20
Left Party	334,053	5.6	19
Christian Democratic Party	333,696	5.6	19
Others	85,023	1.4	0

2006

List	Votes	%	Seats
Social Democratic Party	1,942,625	35.0	130
Moderate Party	1,456,014	26.2	97
Center Party	437,389	7.9	29
Liberal Party	418,395	7.5	28
Christian Democratic Party	365,998	6.6	24
Left Party	324,722	5.8	22
Green Party	291,121	5.2	19
Sweden Democrats	162,463	2.9	0
Others	152,551	2.7	0

2002

List	Votes	%	Seats
Social Democratic Party	2,113,560	39.9	144
Moderate Party	809,041	15.3	55
Liberal Party	710,312	13.4	48
Christian Democratic Party	485,235	9.1	33
Left Party	444,854	8.4	30
Center Party	328,428	6.2	22

Green Party	246,392	4.6	17
Others	165,390	3.1	0

1998

List	Votes	%	Seats
Social Democratic Party	1,914,426	36.4	131
Moderate Party	1,204,926	22.9	82
Left Party	631,011	12.0	43
Christian Democratic Party	619,046	11.8	42
Center Party	269,762	5.1	18
Liberal Party	248,076	4.7	17
Green Party	236,699	4.5	16
Others	137,176	2.6	0

1994

List	Votes	%	Seats
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Swedish Social Democratic Party	2,513,905	45.3	161	+23
Moderate Party	1,243,253	22.4	80	0
Centre Party	425,153	7.7	27	-4
Liberal People's Party	399,556	7.2	26	-7
Left Party	342,988	6.2	22	+6
Green Party	279,042	5.0	18	+18
Christian Democratic Society Party	225,974	4.1	15	-11
New Democracy	68,663	1.2	0	-25
Other parties	57,006	1.0	0	0

1991

List	Votes	%	Seats
Social Democratic Party	2,062,761	37.7	138
Moderate Party	1,199,394	21.9	80
Liberal Party	499,356	9.1	33

Center Party	465,175	8.5	31
Christian Democratic Party	390,351	7.1	26
New Democracy	368,281	6.7	25
Left Party	246,905	4.5	16
Green Party	185,051	3.4	0
Others	53,487	1.0	0

1988

List	Votes	%	Seats
Social Democratic Party	2,321,826	43.2	156
Moderate Party	983,226	18.3	66
Liberal Party	655,720	12.2	44
Center Party	607,240	11.3	42
Left Party Communists	314,031	5.8	21
Green Party	296,935	5.5	20
Christian Democratic Party	158,182	2.9	0
Others	36,559	0.7	0

1985

List	Votes	%	Seats
Social Democratic Party	2,487,551	44.7	159

Moderate Party	1,187,335	21.3	76
Liberal Party	792,268	14.2	51
Center Party	691,258	12.4	44
Left Party Communists	298,419	5.4	19
Green Party	83,645	1.5	0
Others	26,546	0.5	0

1982

List	Votes	%	Seats
Social Democratic Party	2,533,250	45.6	166
Moderate Party	1,313,337	23.6	86
Center Party	859,618	15.5	56
Liberal Party	327,770	5.9	21
Left Party Communists	308,899	5.6	20
Christian Democratic Party	103,820	1.9	0
Green Party	91,787	1.7	0
Others	16,121	0.3	0

1979

List	Votes	%	Seats
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Social Democratic Party	2,356,234	43.2	154
Moderate Party	1,108,406	20.3	73
Center Party	984,589	18.1	64
Liberal Party	577,063	10.6	38
Left Party Communists	305,420	5.6	20
Christian Democratic Party	75,993	1.4	0
Others	40,933	0.8	0

1976

List	Votes	%	Seats
Social Democratic Party	2,324,603	42.7	152
Center Party	1,309,669	24.1	86
Moderate Party	847,672	15.6	55
Liberal Party	601,556	11.1	39
Left Party Communists	258,432	4.8	17
Christian Democratic Party	73,844	1.4	0
Others	21,972	0.4	0

1973

List	Votes	%	Seats
Social Democratic Party	2,247,727	43.6	156
Center Party	1,295,246	25.1	90
Moderate Party	737,584	14.3	51
Liberal Party	486,028	9.4	34
Left Party Communists	274,929	5.3	19
Christian Democratic Party	90,388	1.8	0
Others	28,244	0.5	0

Appendix C: Rise of the Far-Right in Swedish Politics and Banned Swedish Democrats Advert

The success of the Far-Right could be attributed to a combination of their campaign to create a perception amongst Swedes that characterises immigrants, especially from the Global South, as a threat to Swedish people's employment prospects, Swedish cultural norms, and a threat to the *Swedish Model* itself because of the strain that they put on the welfare state. Also, the far-Right popularity could be part of a general mentality shift away from foundational social democratic ideals of liberalism and international social solidarity, and this has opened up the space for a different sort of socio-cultural politics of individualisation and selfishness, that has spawned racism, intolerance and xenophobia to emerge in everyday life. The Sweden Democrats have taken advantage of the exponential rise in immigration and linked this with native Swedes' diminishing prospect's relating to employment, accommodation, and a general decline in life standards. It appears that the far-Right are attempting to capitalise on working class issues, such as unemployment and affordable housing, and racialise these issues by creating a discourse of Swedish working class victimisation perpetuated by immigrants. For example, in one of their most controversial campaigns, a television advert depicted a frail elderly (Swedish) woman being chased by a group of menacing looking burqa-wearing women pushing prams. A link to this advert is embedded below.

The message promulgated in these campaigns is that the Sweden Democrats were the advocates for the most vulnerable Swedish nationals and immigration is a danger to Swedes. The music in this advert created an atmosphere of doom and

emergency until the advert ended with a commentator proclaiming "All politics is about priorities - now you have a choice". This was a strategic attempt to capture the attention of the working class to the dangers of the apparent scrounging 'aliens' in their everyday access to welfare.

The global economic downturn has provided the conditions for the appeal of the Right-wing nationalistic message. The Social Democratic Party who once championed the 'ordinary' Swede is losing its appeal, and the consequential degeneration of a *People's Party* has opened a space for a political alternative to emerge. This ground has been strategically appropriated by the Sweden Democrats (Widfeldt, 2007), who have couched their politics in working class issues, suggesting that immigrants and multi-culturalism are the source of Sweden's problems. By highlighting social class and 'race' in seemingly pragmatic terms, they have skilfully negated (though not always successfully) hints of racism by suggesting that their politics is in the interest of Swedish working people. The result of the demographic changes to Swedish society and the emergence of the Sweden Democrats is that issues of social class are increasingly tied up in a synthesis of complex dynamics, involving, *inter alia*, 'race', politics and culture.

The Banned Swedish Democrats Advert

(Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7u_UB85v1I4)

STATSBUDGET
505.926.342.293

Appendix D: Email Exchange with a Swedish Industrials Relations Expert

This is an example of an email conversation that I had with an Industrials Relations expert about the LO (Trade Union) and its historical link with the Social Democratic Party. This kind of ethnographic material was crucial because it was not easily found in English language.

“Dear Alpesh,

Sorry for the delay; I should have answered you much earlier.

The link between LO and SAP was highly formal from the start. SAP was founded in 1889 and many trade unions affiliated to this new social democratic party already from the start. When LO was formed in 1898, it instigated a clause saying that all individuals who were members of any union within LO should automatically also be members of the social democratic party. SAP and LO were just two branches of a common labour movement.

Despite protests over the years from groups within LO, in particular Leftists, this formalized system was alive and kicking till 1987. In the early/mid-1980s though, there was, in media's parlour, a so-called War of the Roses (the rose is the symbol of SAP, as you probably know). LO could not accept parts of the new social democratic politics after SAP's return to office in 1982. In tandem, there was a push

from the Right, arguing that LO members' political belonging was no longer solely an internal matter for the labour movement.

Hence, the formal system lasted for almost a hundred years. And still, the chairpersons of the most important LO affiliated trade unions are more or less automatically introduced to a place in the SAP board. The new chair of SAP, Stefan Löfvén, is a great example. He made his 'career' in the Metal Workers' union. After the merger of two trade unions to IF Metall, he was, as the chairperson, invited to the board of SAP. After that, he became the front leader of the opposition against the centre-Right government, but that you already know.

I knew Stefan Löfvén in the mid-00s when I worked on a book project for Metall. He seemed to be a very nice guy, and I really hope politics won't destroy him, but still that is what likely happens when people from reality meet people from politics.

Regrettably I haven't found any English-speaking sources for this, but it's very well established facts, and in case you need more information, please do not hesitate to contact me again.

Friendly yours,"

Appendix E: Gramsci's Subjective Empirical Reality

Gramsci's scholarly contributions were predominantly set out in the *Prison Notebooks*. The Notebooks were written at a moment when Marxist-Leninism had seemingly been liquidated by the alternative political movements, and his own conditions of reality were severe. He was experiencing extreme repression after being imprisoned. It is therefore worth very briefly outlining the distinct broader historical, political and cultural history of when, and in what conditions, Gramsci was writing which he tried to capture reflexively in his revolutionary strategy that took culture as an important aspect of the possibility of social change.

By the early 1920s Gramsci was a prominent radical and a key figure on the Italian Marxist political Left. After the failed uprisings in Italy and Europe by 1919, Gramsci visited Russia as a delegate of the Italian Communist Party to participate in revising the strategy for revolution. After his time in Russia, he returned to Italy in 1924 where workers had largely abandoned far-Left politics, and the alternative fascist movement led by Benito Mussolini was gaining momentum. In the aftermath of the 1914-1919 war, Mussolini had begun to galvanise workers by promoting a strong sense of nationalism, which was popular and by 1925 he had formed a government. Mussolini embarked on a campaign of repression and extermination, and as a threat to Mussolini's rule Gramsci was arrested in 1926. Gramsci was given a twenty-five-year prison sentence, much of which was to be in solitary confinement.

In conditions of deprivation and censorship, in prison he set about building on Marx and Lenin's works, and recording his ideas on why communism had not succeeded and to embrace a focus on culture and hegemonic struggle, thus to mobilise revolution in the new times marked by emerging fascism, social democracy and capitalist contemporarily. Such was the repression of dissent, it was ten years after his death for his works to be discovered and published for the first time in Italian between 1947-49, and a further two decade before they were translated into English. In total he had written 33 notebooks that contained significant evaluations and innovations for the Marxist tradition, notably that the social world is complex and workers realities need to be appreciated and used as part of the *war of position* in the class struggle.

Appendix F: Ethical Dimensions

To prepare for the fieldwork, the Swedish Research Council [Vetenskapsrådet], as well as the British Education Research Association [BERA], ethical guidelines were consulted before applying for ethical clearance, which was granted from the Institute of Education in 2008. Practically I had a duty of care to the informants and made a point of stating on two occasions – when they first volunteered, and before the interview commenced, that account's would be anonymised in the thesis. Informed consent was received from each informant.

Although at first ethical issues did not seem to be particularly problematic for this study – it was a straightforward study interviewing adults, issues that emerged that I had not anticipated. I had embarked on this study cognisant of the fact that my research would need the informants to discuss some sensitive issues, such as racial discrimination, however I thought that I would address this by anonymising the informant by giving a pseudonym that roughly represented the informant's ethnic origin. What I had not anticipated was that the life history accounts, because they were highly personalised, would make it possible to identify the informant, and my ethicised pseudonym exacerbated this negation of anonymity.

Furthermore, my recruitment came from a small pool of universities, and at each of these universities, my study and work was reasonably well-known as I had given academic presentations about the preliminary findings to Academic Research

Groups within Schools of Education/Sociology as part of my ethnography. I found that academics and students were on the whole familiar with each other, with and also across universities. Walford (2006, p.88) cautions that, “with so many people knowing about the research it is very difficult to hide the identity of the ... individual”, which resonated with this study.

Familiarity was a prominent ethical issue with just 15 informants from four universities, who were recruited via snowball recruitment. In this situation, students and academics were likely to recognise character traits and I potentially risked exposing individual’s sensitive accounts in the presentations and also in the written reporting. Therefore the promise of anonymisation was, in the end, not fully possible. To allay this to an extent, in the reporting, whilst I have used pseudonyms that roughly represented the informants’ ethnic origin (so that the reader of this thesis would be able to approximate the subgroup from which the informants came without having to trace back at every instance), I have deployed ambiguity where I felt it to be necessary, for example about place names. Also, the study has taken place over a long period of time, and by the point that this thesis has been published, it is likely that many, if not all, of the informants will have a new chapter in their life history and so the possibility of recognition is rendered less potentially risky. These are issues at the heart of doing highly personalised research like this.

Appendix G: Rapport in Fieldwork

Here is an example of where an informant could be seen to be connecting with me *because* I identified with being working class, I was a non-White academic – this identity resonated with the informant and could have gained me an enhanced insight that may not have been available to others.

“H: I started to study sociology and by doing that I started to hang around with people from different kind of background. Most of them were working class background. Suddenly I had become something in common based on class not based on ethno-racial identity construction. And there were other students in my class, they came from academic background, father and mother, former teachers or engineers or doctors so. And I learned the differences ... you know when you study in university class become much more clear. ... I don't know. Do you have an academic background?”

AM: Working class background. [long pause]

H: [Smiling] Do you remember that feeling, do you understand?”

AM: Yeah, yeah. [longer pause]

H: [Now more animated] So, I can tell you [that] for me it was like entering a huge fog... and they were classmates, they were just sitting and relaxing and I was sitting sweating and I went home and took hours and hours reading the books and they

were just drinking beer and having fun. ... Was it like that for you too [intriguing look]?"

A telling aspect of this excerpt was the pauses after my replies to the informant's questions. Both of my replies were short and direct. The body language [smiling / being animated], and the pregnant pauses, which were signs for me to elaborate, were indications from the informant that he wanted me to disclose more information as part of the rapport emerging. This was also an example of how I treated situations to guide the discussion to manage my input on the direction of the conversation and prioritise the voice of the informant.

Appendix H: Personal Biography of the Research Problematic

To begin with, it must be stated that this study was not conducted objectively, free from personal commitments and experiences; indeed, whether this is ever possible or even desirable, especially in *social* science, is even debatable (Nagel, 1989). Many researchers reject pristine methodological objectivity and assert the importance of necessarily and unavoidably locating research in the researcher's own lived world. For instance:

It is often said among sociologists that, as sociologists, we 'make problematic' in our research matters that are problematic in our lives. ... In fact, much of the best work is ... probably grounded in the remote and/or current biographies of its creator (Lofland and Lofland, 1995, p.13).

The point that Lofland and Lofland (1995) make is that a research project is an extension of the researcher practice of responsibility. Similarly, Bennett (2009, p.11) states that "we cannot easily 'stand back' from our cultural frames to allow a dispassionate evaluation of them". Following Lofland and Lofland (1995) and Bennett (2009), it is important for me to stipulate *who* I am and *how* my personal experiences and constructions of reality have suffused my approach to this study and especially the treatment of the findings. This is intended to provide the reader with informative materials for engagement with the text as both, an objective statement and a subjectively produced object.

My vantage point on issues of social class has significantly been cultivated by the lived experiences and observations in my home town of Bradford, which is a medium sized Northern English city in West Yorkshire. The city has been in economic recession since the decline in industrial manufacturing, especially from the 1980s, subsequently manifesting in social problems. It was during this bleak time that I was in my early formative years, living with my parents on the borderline of the much more affluent city of Leeds. This geography of two cities side-by-side with differing fortunes was in my mind ambiguous, and this serendipitous aspect of my biography generated inadvertent preparation of my research practices to explore class in Sweden in a historical moment where there are significant complexities that are analogous.

Bradford is an ethno-racially segregated city with concentrations of White and non-White areas, the latter being predominantly Pakistani and Indian who were in themselves also spatially divided. I lived in a small village, called *Idle*, which was and still is almost exclusively a White area. Being ethno-racially British Indian¹⁰⁵, my family were an anomaly in the village, but it was not something that I remember being conscious of during that time.

I now understand my social practice as sociologically multi-faceted and complex in class cultural and ethno-racial terms. This was exemplified by a keenness to don my England football shirt and overtly and proudly presenting my identity as

¹⁰⁵ My parents and much older two brothers and sister were born in Kenya, East Africa but my ancestors were from India.

Yorkshire, defining it colloquially as - *salt of the earth* at every opportunity¹⁰⁶, meaning to be common, good and worthy. I had in these ways developed an anglicised identity much more than Indian, or even British Indian. Perhaps, I was unconsciously aware that I occupied an ambiguous socio-cultural 'Othered' position in the local *White* community and this was the reason that I deliberately attempted to assume an identity that was 'normal'. This self-reflexion on the conflicted and ambiguous aspects of my own biographical experiences had resonance with the reports of subjective empirical reality and then classed self-identity or non-White immigrants reported this study¹⁰⁷.

Despite these complex identity issues, the ethno-racial dimensions of reality were not the main source of social and cultural curiosity for me growing up. I was compelled by, what I now understand to be, the dynamic connection of social class as the basis of other identities. Idle Village where I grew up, whilst being known as a 'nicer' and a 'respectable' part of Bradford, nevertheless had significant problems with alcoholism and drug abuse, especially from the 1980s onwards when unemployment and poverty became starker due to industrial decline with the onset of neoliberalism instigated by Thatcherism. My family and I lived just outside of a sprawling council estate that was known for many social problems. Each morning my walk to school would take me in the opposite direction through a far more salubrious neighbourhood that was a gated community – these were the “posh people”, and it was common to hear phrases “not the likes of *us*” in reference to

¹⁰⁶ There is no link here between my usage of the term and the biblical reference to *Matthew 5:13*.

¹⁰⁷ See Appendix G for how this kind of socialization was used to build rapport as a means to glean information about mechanisms that conditioned class consciousness and practices.

“*them*”. These were formulations that subsequently were understood as depicting cultural tensions as part of class identity.

This route to school was significant because it exposed and crossed the borderlines between two wholly different realities side by side: one where social and economic deprivation was a part of the *nitty gritty* reality of daily life (Willis and Trondman, 2000), and the other where indoor swimming pools and sports cars were normal. I could not understand this inequality and I frequently pondered why there were such poor people when other people seemingly had so much, especially within a short distance of one another. This empirical reality generated questions within me while growing-up during my early teens, and this experience in life history, with the critical nuance in my consciousness stimulating an awareness of *social and cultural* differences as *unfairness*, is one that I consider to be formative of my emergent *class* consciousness.

Furthermore, in addition to being in a small ethnic minority in the village, my family were further removed from the ‘norm’ because financially they were more comfortable than most locals in the area, made more visible when the family-run shop eventually became a much larger convenience store and monopolised much of the trade in the local area. This complex ethno-racialised class identity created a dynamic that was difficult to understand and grasp, and I was intrigued by it. My later life history included playing in a constitutionally socialist football team in Leeds.

When I first joined, I knew little about *Republica Internazionale FC* other than they were successful on the pitch. What is now serendipity in my position as an activist and academic interested in radical politics and public intellectualism, *Republica* were a football team mainly consisting of socially committed – ranging from Anarchists and Marxists to social democrats - academics and activists at universities in Leeds, and uniquely the club had a socialist constitution that they staunchly defended. It was a Lefty football club, where the sport came hand-in-hand with political education. Through the people I met at the club I was introduced to new and alluring ideas, such as international socialism, political activism and revolution. A major part of my education was learning about the plight of the Mexican Zapatistas and how we could use football to work in solidarity with them. I had an emerging appetite (and confidence) to learn more.

At the age of 19 after injury blighted an attempt to be a professional footballer, unlike the majority of my friends from Idle who would attempt to get a *trade*, I was helped by New Labour's widening participation agenda (and mostly because I did not know what else to do), I managed to secure a place at University College Northampton (UCN) at a time when fees were not prohibitive for people from families, such as mine. A course in Education Studies led me to think about stratification, and the role of education in this process. For the first time in my life I found myself surrounded with people who mostly identified themselves as *middle class*, which put another layer of intrigue on my own identity – I was asking myself if I was becoming one of *those posh people* that I passed everyday on the way to school in Idle. I was from a place where people were proud to be *working class* and it was my sense that being working class was to be ordinarily normal. The

experience of university was bringing into focus that this was not the case universally, and I was initially unsettled in this new socio-cultural class environment. In this context, my development of theoretical understanding was becoming animated, as my studies guided me Marxism and importantly for this study - Gramsci, which facilitated my understanding of my sense-of-self and my social environment.

This understanding was that class was complicated and interesting, and this was augmented by university tutors Dave Hill and Glenn Rikowski who identified with Marx, and it was with the assistance of their teaching that I began to acquire the scholarly tools and the basic language to express and understand what I saw growing up. This acquisition of theorised experiential knowledge fed my curiosity about class structure and the interconnections with ethno-racial lived identity. This curiosity has never subsided and became my scholarly impetus behind this study and interest in the field of Marxist sociology of education.

Appendix I: Poster Used to Target Non-Swedish Scandinavians



Invitation to take part in study:

What's Sweden like for you?

I am a researcher from the University of London looking to talk to students from Denmark, Norway, Iceland and Finland about their experience of living and studying in Sweden. You can be studying at any level on any social science or humanities programme. The discussion will last approx 1-2 hours in a relaxed atmosphere over a drink and cake. The questions do not require you to have any specific knowledge. You will simply be talking about yourself, specifically your life before you came to Sweden, what you expected Sweden to be like, whether these expectations have turned out to be true, what you think of Sweden, what is 'Swedishness' and questions like this. It is basically a your reflection of experience of life in Sweden. The discussion, in English, can take place through Skype or in person at your convenience. If you are interested in helping with this study please contact me on: worthers21@hotmail.com

Alpesh Maisuria
University of London

The poster above requests that informants need to speak English. The following is an example of a fieldwork note that was not central to the focus of the study nor did it implicate the analysis but it was a part of my ethnographic experience and shows the messiness of qualitative research involving human participants:

"Today I did a strange interview with a Kurdish man. It was an experience as a researcher that I felt bad about. As the interview progressed, it became apparent that the man had a motive for putting himself forward despite not speaking fluent English, as I'd requested on the posters. At the end of the very short interview he asked me to pursue a complaint, using my presumed contacts and influence, in England to a (suspicious) edu-business who had allegedly stolen money from his brother. He offered to pay me(!) to write to newspapers to expose the organisation. I wanted to help, but simply didn't feel comfortable in getting involved, and I

managed to shake-off the request avoiding giving him my address to where he wanted to send paperwork. I wasn't expecting that!"

(FN 9.1.11)

Appendix J: Profile of the Informants

A Table to Detail the Profile of Informants				
	Date of interview	Birth country	Group	University at which enrolled
Group A	May 2009	Swedish	Swedish	Boras/Goteborg
	April 2011	Swedish	Swedish	Goteborg
	May 2011	Swedish	Swedish	Uppsala
	May 2011	Swedish	Swedish	Uppsala
	May 2011	Swedish	Swedish	Uppsala
Group B	July 2010	Finnish	Non-Swedish Scandinavian	Goteborg
	June 2009	Finnish	Non-Swedish Scandinavian	Uppsala
	June 2009	Finnish	Non-Swedish Scandinavian	Uppsala
	Oct 2012	Finnish	Non-Swedish Scandinavian	Uppsala
	Oct 2012	Finnish	Non-Swedish Scandinavian	Uppsala

Group C	Sept 2010	Anonymised	Global South	Boras
	May 2009	Iraqi	Global South	Goteborg
	May 2009	Kurdish	Global South	Uppsala
	June 2009	Indian	Global South	Goteborg
	April 2011	Kurdish/Iraqi	Global South	Goteborg

Appendix K: Example of a Life History Interview Questions Schedule

This is an excerpt of an interview questions schedule that tried to present the way social class was a dynamic part of subjective empirical reality, over a period of time and the mechanisms play.

Life History Discussion

Background

Describe your social life before you came to Sweden.

Describe your educational journey before you came to Sweden. How did you do academically?

Do you remember when you became aware of social class? What was the event(s)? What did you think? How did you feel? Did the feelings disappear or continue?

What social class did you think you were? How did you come to identify yourself with this class? Do you think other people saw you in the same way?

What was the original reason for moving to Sweden? Did you come to Sweden directly?

What were your expectations of the Swedish education system and the course that you chose?

Did you have any idea about what Sweden would be like socially and culturally? Particularly, what you thought the Swedish thought about people from different places and cultures?

Did you think about what life would be like in Sweden? For example pace of life, what the Swedes were like as a 'race', any feeling of being marginalised or seen as the foreigner?

Current situation – Being in Sweden

In choosing your University and educational route, what did you look for? Were you given/seek advice from anybody? If so, where did this advice come from?

What kind of economic situation are you in at the moment, and is this different to your home country?

Has moving to Sweden made you more or less political? If so, in which ways have your values been reinforced or challenged?

Do you think of yourself as a migrant or a Swede, or something else? Do you think that this has had an impact in any way?

Was there a particular instance where you felt you were welcomed and included?

Do you think that immigrants are now accepted more or less than when you first came to Sweden? Why do you think this is – do you think it's to do with particular skills or skin colour?

I've been told about an old popular saying among Swedes returning from their extended vacations which translates roughly to "Away is good but at home is best" (*Borta bra, men hemmabäst!*). What do you think of the truthfulness of this saying? Do you think the sentiment is changing? Why?

Have your expectations of Sweden materialised - educationally and socially? Do you think your views have developed since coming to Sweden?

What would you now say to someone who was thinking about moving to Sweden?

Future

What do you imagine Sweden to be like in terms of social class, 'race', and attitudes to migration in the future?

What is your long-term residency plans? If you are planning to move away, what are the reasons? If you are planning on staying what are the reasons?

What are your expectations for the future?

How has this experience of reflection been for you?

Appendix L: *Xenophobe's Guide to the Swedes* Book Cover Used as Part of
Ethnographic 'Hanging Out'



A frank and funny look
at what makes the Swedes SWEDISH

Appendix M: Selected Extracts from an Interview with the Creators of BBC Radio 4 Programme called *The Cold Swedish Winter* on the Translation of Lagom

Danny Robbins: "It's [lagom] a whole social philosophy. ... You can have the Ikea lifestyle, with your house decked-out but nothing too grand, nothing too fancy, nothing too 'Puff Daddy', no bling. And it creeps into all aspects of Swedish life. It's pervasive. ... If lagom was [sic] a colour it would be beige and if it would be a person it would be Alan Titchmarsh. ... If you talked to a swede they might say it was a good thing, if you talked a Brit they might say they found it stifling and oppressive."

Adam Riches: "It's this strange disciplined, good and bad, way of looking at things. ... I think there's something nice about it. But there's also something slightly sinister and Stepford about it as well. ... Excess is everything as far as the British are concerned, so no [it would not work in Britain]. If they [the Swedes] did extreme lagom then we'd [the Brits] would be up for that. Double lagom, lagom Royal we'd be up for that but no lagom would never work in Britain."

Source: Robins and Riches (2014)

Appendix N: A Table Depicting a Summary of Reported Findings at the Level of the Individual Informants Own Life History

		Headlines in Reporting and Descriptive Analysis of Individual Accounts	Sense-of-self and Lived Experiences of Class, and also Informants Perceptions of Objective Swedish Social Structure
Swedish	Par	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ideals and Reality of Being "Fair and Equal"</i> • <i>"I Wouldn't Say It's a Classless Society; It's Far Away From That"</i> • <i>The Effectiveness of Swedish Education</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swedishness focus about fair and equal, though not a classless society • Comparatively relatively high opportunity social mobility in Sweden. • Education key mechanism for flourishing to take advantage of available opportunities, e.g. private schooling.
	Martin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Bamse the Bear Transmitting Swedish Cultural Values</i> • <i>Class Consciousness in Urban/Rural Sweden</i> • <i>Modelling Social Class</i> • <i>The Remodelling of Class in Sweden, the Introduction of Neoliberalism</i> • <i>"They are not really Swedes" and an "inclusive rhetoric"</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes his own social location as "educated middle class". • He also reported that "there are different kinds of middle class", indicative of differentiation <i>within</i> the middle class. • Understandings of class were conditioned by geographical positioning, and there social class was not conspicuous in rural areas. • Education was a mechanism in producing and maintaining what he considered to be dominant traits of Swedishness, e.g. social solidarity. • Swedishness is being redefined by more individualism and acceptance of widening stratification. • Recognised discrimination to be part of the immigrant experience.
	Henning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Social Democracy, The Media And The Prohibition On Class Talk</i> • <i>"The worse thing in Sweden is to be a bigot"</i> • <i>Class Advantage, Earning a Living, and Generosity</i> • <i>"Two Worlds" of Reality in Sweden</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sweden had a social structure in which social class differentials were small and that therefore class differences were obscured, • Class was not discussed in Sweden, thus conveying his awareness of the taboo nature of it in wider society, suggesting an obscuring of class to maintain a presentation of equality, which he specifically linked to being "the social democratic way". • Middle class anxiety to the issue of immigration for fear of being labelled a bigot.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle class Swedishness linked to fairness, tolerance and social solidarity in the framework of subscribing to lagom. However neoliberalisation was decaying this socio-cultural empirical reality. • Radical-Left politics was to be an unfeasible alternative and “disqualified from discussion”.
	Anders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lagom And Middle Class Practice</i> • <i>The ‘Problem’ Suburbs</i> • <i>Social Democracy and “Optimism”</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socially positioned as middle of a differentiated middle class. • Conscientiously attempted to live a <i>lagom</i> life. • Summer-houses were ambiguously reported in his testimony. They were an <i>upper</i> middle class indicator, but his <i>middle</i> of the middle class family owned one. • Social stratification by “problem suburbs”, and the upper middle class “protected communities”. • Most Swedish Swedishness was about middle classness but this is in decline and he was not “not optimistic” about the future. • Reported that ‘race’ is used by those on the Far-Right to obscure class relations in favour of ethno-racial demonising.
	Glenn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Class Action where it wasn’t “Welcome”</i> • <i>What’s in a Name?</i> • <i>Everybody Votes Social Democrats Don’t They</i> • <i>Change in Sweden</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presented himself as being distinctly class conscious, especially when it came to politics. Class was practiced in cultural form at his privileged middle class University, which led him to be conscious of an obscuring through ambivalence of working class issues by the middle class habitus. • Workers’ struggle was implicit in Sweden through voting for the Social Democrats. • Expressed regret at the turn towards neoliberalism, and specifically away from <i>lagom</i> • Reported that ‘race’, ethnicity and nationalism are all part of the articulation between constructions of Swedishness and experience for him, and others, who are not “pure” Swedes. • Optimistic about social democracy and what it can deliver, which he seemed to regard as the most feasible of political options for benefitting the working class, people who were like him.
Finns	Toby	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Usual Labours”, “Half-Managers” And “Managers” But “Everybody” Is The Same</i> • <i>Rich Guys, Poor Guys, And “Everybody Thinks That They’re In The Middle”</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finns constructs of the Swedish social structure as equitable and a place of equal opportunities. • He had a critical understanding that class status was relative but he felt that Finns, Swedes, Scandinavians were not aware that class positioning was changeable and flexible. He also revealed an insight into his own sense of class identity, which was that was not missing out on

		<p>anything and was therefore similar to others, and that this reflexive identity had become emergent after his father's promotion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Finns constructs of Sweden's social structure of Sweden was characterised by equity in chances for individuals to flourish, irrespective of "colour" and religious identity.
Lyka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"Well-Off" But Not Wealthy</i> <i>Working Your Way Up</i> <i>Beverly Hills is Full of Both "Rich People" and also "Homeless People"</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A self of sense as being the "same as everybody else", but ambivalence about class manifested ambiguity when she described her father as having a "high-up" status, suggesting non-sameness. Sweden's social structure was comparatively more fair than Beverly Hills.
Anna-Leena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Press And Rankings Reproducing The Common sense Of Equality</i> <i>"This Social Class Question Is ... Easy... [and]... Hard"</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sense of none-classed self-identity. Socio-cultural mechanisms, particularly the media played a significant role in contributing to a <i>common sense</i> that Sweden was equal, this she suggested made people "blind to differences" meaning inequality was being obscured. Social class gap was "less pronounced" in Sweden, and also in the other Scandinavian countries but in Stockholm class was more visible there with an elite consisting of Swedish and non-Swedish plutocratic elites.
Sonny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Political Education</i> <i>"Obviously My Parents Were on the Left" and Social Class</i> <i>Reflecting on Social Class in Sweden</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ambivalence about her own self-identity in class terms. Described herself and her class background as "normal" and "average". Conscious of social inequality by "there being different sides of society" with some "people who don't have that much" and more who, like herself, were middle class. Politically on the "Left side" though "people don't feel like that the working class exists anymore". The social structure of Sweden became visible to her when she relocated with her family to Eastern Europe. "Showing-off" was not part Sweden's socio-cultural code, although this was different in Stockholm.
Millie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Swedes Wanting to Live a "Perfect Little Life" in a "Perfect Little Bubble"</i> <i>The Real Life Working Class</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Swedishness operated through socio-cultural forms that she believed cultivated Sweden to appear as "perfect", she presented this with ironic laughter suggesting her critical appreciation of how it conditioned social life. Used her experience working in the hotel industry to assert that classed and 'raced' social realities were not perfect, and that inequalities were obscured by Swedishness. The: "<i>real</i> working class" existed in Sweden, who are the strata of the working class who were working permanently in low paid jobs.

Global South	Precious	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Parents were very strict, especially for girls"</i> • <i>"Everyone is Equal. For Me It's True"</i> • <i>"So They Don't Favour Specific Groups That's The Swedish System"</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very positive perception of Sweden as an equal society where the spoils are shared out fairly and where hard work is justifiably merited resulting in people being middle class. • Hard work would result in flourishing irrespective of background. This epitomised, she said, "the Swedish system", suggesting her own contentment and perception of fairness prevailing.
	Raj	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sweden is "A Socialist Country"</i> • <i>Equality and "There is a Lot of Discrimination In Sweden"</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used experiential historical empirical reality and his perception of others in his home country to understand the social structure in Sweden, which in his perception was an "equal" and "liberal" country. • Social structure in Sweden was one in which social mobility prevailed through individual endeavor, and also that there was a welfare system making it "a very equal society actually". • Perception of Swedish society as "very much" an equal society comparatively.
	Zlatan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Politics, Religion and Social Class</i> • <i>Immigrant Identity in Sweden</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of other immigrants' problems with their identity in Sweden, and his feeling that they had not taken the chances that were available to them. • Reflexive about his own ethno-racialised identity and privileged social position as an academic.
	Haj	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Swedish Equality and the Feeling that "We Live in Another Society"</i> • <i>"Class Become Much More Clear" at a Prestigious University</i> • <i>"Wow, I Do That Middle Class Experiences Every Day"</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class as apprehended in his own reality materially, particularly in the form of his life course from a poor immigrant to PhD student at a prestigious University who had ticked his checklist of middle class credentials. • Equality was akin to a "joke" because of the reality of immigrants and the working class who do not have a fair share of chances, but he added they do "still" have <i>some</i> chances to be socially mobile. • Became aware of class practice through observing how class was culturally manifested by way of how middle class students handled themselves • Was reflexive about the dynamic relationship between class and 'race' and how this was contingent on different spaces and moments in his life history.
	Zeynep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"The Other"</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conveyed her perception of the importance of identities other than class in her own and also in others immigrants' lived world in Sweden throughout.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Humanitarianism, "You Know the Whole Social Democratic Thing"</i> • <i>"The More Different You Are, The Harder It Is"</i> • <i>Immigrant Experiences</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presented herself as being very discontented because of her perception of Swedish inequality and unfairness in the distribution of chances to flourish. • Explicating her sense of issues of ethno-racial, political identity and immigrant status, as being pivotal to her own negative experiences, and it was her perception that other immigrants felt this too. Had sense of three degrees of cultural similarity. First, the Swedes themselves and their individual cultural practices of what is assumed typically Swedish. The second based on her perceived cultural homogeneity amongst the Scandinavians citing the relationship between the Swedes and the Finns. Third, her perceived cultural differences of all those people who were non-Scandinavians, which provided for a different experience, one which was less favourable in terms of social equity.
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Appendix O: Class Safari Video

Link to the video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU77bHy0Wcs>)

The website of *Alltåtalla* can be found here <http://alltatalla.com/>