

INTEGRATION OR ASSIMILATION?

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE SWEDISH
INTEGRATION DEBATE

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TIMBRO

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PREFACE

Few political issues have a spot on the 2011 agenda as urgent as integration. This issue, which for a long time was discussed primarily by those with particular interest in immigration and integration policy, has now become one of the most urgent.

There are many reasons for this development. The political establishment has been silent so long that it is astonishing, as the alienation of large immigrant populations hardened in place, but the situation has finally become untenable and it must be discussed.

This awakening was probably hastened by two dramatic events at the end of 2010 - the entry of the Sweden Democrats into Parliament and the suicide bombing in the heart of downtown Stockholm in the midst of the Christmas shopping season.

As the integration debate takes off, it is also apparent that many of us are still half asleep when facing these issues. Many of the fundamental questions have yet to be answered. Are the objectives of current policy the right ones? How effective is our current immigration policy? How have other countries faced the problems we are struggling with? How successful can Sweden's policy be, viewed realistically?

The confusion is palpable. Fundamentally different groups of people with immigrant backgrounds are lumped together in generalized discussions of "poor integration," and when a madman shoots innocent Malmö residents in public it is considered as an "integration problem" merely because the victims have a foreign background.

And when we experience the first suicide bombing on Swedish soil, there are wild speculations that failed integration in the suburbs of major cities is the cause – even though the suicide bomber, who came from the small city of Tranås, appears to have been remarkably well integrated in many respects, just as many of his predecessors in Great Britain were.

Integration will be one of Timbro's top priority issues in the future; we believe there is much to be done in this area. A great deal of discussion remains to be pursued before the integration debate reaches the same point of maturity as other political debates in Sweden.

One of the first paradoxes we want to come to grips with is that while integration is the issue at the tip of everyone's tongue, what we actually mean when we say "integration" is noticeably diffuse. What does this concept mean? How does it relate to the concept of assimilation? Or to other concepts that are relevant in this context, such as equality and identity?

In this report, Andreas Johansson Heinö – University of Gothenburg political scientist and one of Sweden's most prominent integration experts – revisits these fundamental questions.

He scrutinizes the point of departure that we have chosen in Sweden for immigration policy, compares it with the experience of other countries, and provides a refreshing level of concreteness and clarity in an area that is otherwise often characterized by a confusion of ideas, turf wars and ideological blinders.

Johansson Heinö has an extremely broad perspective, and he has longstanding experience in this complex area, but of course we still do not believe that the issue will be resolved in this report. On the other hand we hope that this survey will help facilitate a more level-headed and manageable debate on Swedish integration policy. Because this is truly needed.

Markus Uvell

President,

Timbro

1. OBJECTIVE

The basis of this report is the fact that it is problematic that an area of policy as central as integration policy suffers from so much fuzzy thinking and lack of clarity when it comes to the differences among the political alternatives.

Its objective is to lend clarity to the integration debate. What do we actually mean by integration? What are the different perceptions of integration in the political debate? What are the crucial differences among the different outlooks?

I relate the concept of integration to three other closely associated concepts - assimilation, equality and identity. - in order to highlight the most important ideological differences. I will make the case that we need to talk more about assimilation, equality and identity and less about integration.

The focus is on the Swedish debate, but in order to gain a necessary sense of perspective there are also comparisons with debates in other countries, primarily Great Britain, Germany and France.

2. NOT ONLY IN SWEDEN

Today integration issues can be found everywhere. They are discussed in essentially every country in Europe, and a tremendous amount of research is devoted to them. But even if the problems being considered are similar, the debates take on a differing national character and the policy choices are distinct for each country. In fact, our neighbors offer a wide variety of integration policy models and approaches to the challenges that are largely shared by all of the major countries experiencing immigration in Western Europe, including Sweden.

In the 1970s the design of Swedish integration policy was clearly inspired by other countries, especially Canada. However the international perspective in the twenty-first century is more limited, rarely reaching beyond Denmark. Fertile ground for comparative research is rarely explored, and the integration policies of other countries are something to be appalled by and keep at a distance rather than to learn from. The invocation that we must “take care so that things don’t become as bad here as they are there,” is frequently repeated.

It's true that Sweden is different in several respects: for instance, the movement toward increased assimilation that characterized most Western European countries in the last decade is not present in Sweden. No doubt part of the difference may be worth defending, but other aspects may not.

But the narrow domestic perspective has disadvantages: opinions that would be mainstream in other countries are rejected in Swedish debate as extremist. For example, Sweden is on its way to becoming the only country in Europe that does not make knowledge of the language a requirement for citizenship - certainly a plausible position, but hardly the only reasonable one. It can also seem a bit odd when people who claim to advocate diversity and criticize nationalism and narrowness of vision simultaneously dismiss everything that falls outside the Swedish standard as extremism. The perception that the rest of the world is incomprehensible is in turn connected with conditions in the media, where only spectacular pronouncements by extremists penetrate the media buzz: we hear about Geert Wilders, Nick Griffin and Jean-Marie Le Pen, but the significantly healthier and more objective integration debates are rarely mentioned.¹

¹ One example is the recent British debate on multiculturalism, where *Prospect Magazine* editor in chief David Goodhart has been a leader (see for example Goodhart's article "Too Diverse" in *Prospect Magazine*, September 2004), which has not been mentioned in the Swedish media at all. With the exception of the cultural section of the *Expressen* newspaper, there was no coverage either of the major debate on multiculturalism and Islam and Europe that attracted several of Europe's leading intellectuals to the German online magazine signandsight.com in the winter of 2007.

I am proceeding from the position that the debates on integration and immigration issues presently taking place throughout Europe are both desirable and inevitable. In my view, these debates refer at heart to genuine problems associated with widespread social changes. Waves of migration of the size we have seen in Sweden and the rest of Europe in recent years must have major consequences and cause widespread stresses for both individuals and societies.

But this debate must not be reduced to a question of good or bad. The volume is often deafeningly high. Those warning against the Islamification of Europe, who see a future governed by Sharia law, are shouting from one corner, while from another corner we hear warnings of the march of jackboots from people who believe they are witnessing a comeback of the 1930s. An informed debate requires a more moderate tone and greater humility in the face of the changes that European societies are currently experiencing. Certainly diversity also poses a challenge to society's basic institutions, since they developed in the context of a relatively homogeneous society. But this does not automatically mean that diversity is what needs to change, rather than the institutions.

3. BACKGROUND: CONCEPTS IN SWEDISH IMMIGRATION POLICY

Although interest in experience from other countries is limited in Swedish debate and research, international research has a comparatively large interest in Sweden. In this sphere Sweden often serves to represent the multicultural model, in contrast with the German policy of segregation, British laissez-faire and the French policy of assimilation.

The term “multiculturalism” is often used carelessly by supporters and opponents alike. In a broad sense multiculturalism is a matter of increased recognition on several levels of society – political, economic, cultural and social – of previously marginalized groups in Western countries, which took off in the mid-1960s. The broad definition includes both the repeal of discriminatory laws (such as segregation policy in the US, or Swedish policy toward the Sami), and greater cultural diversity in popular culture and advertising.

A narrower definition restricts multiculturalism to more specific political measures – distinctive legislation, affirmative action, and a policy of recognition – which only a few governments have pursued. It’s also important to point out that multiculturalism, whether in the broad or narrow sense, is a normative concept that always relates to the idea of confirming or strengthening differences in society. This is different from a descriptive concept such as “multicultural society,” which only describes a society’s degree of diversity without setting a value on it.

Therefore it’s completely obvious that Sweden is now a multicultural society. It is likewise obvious that Sweden has been greatly influenced by the ideas of multiculturalism in recent decades, and has developed a public discourse like that of few other countries, with a strong stamp of multicultural ideals and a national self-image characterized by openness, diversity and tolerance. But even when narrowly defined, the classification of Sweden as multicultural is reasonable given the course set at the beginning of the 1970s,² which combined immigrants’ freedom to decide themselves the extent to which they wanted to become integrated into society with comprehensive public support for immigrant groups

² Swedish Government (1975)

(instruction in students' home languages, support for cultural activities in languages other than Swedish, the right of non-citizens to vote in municipal elections, etc.).

But at the same time this classification is dubious. Although the opposite is often asserted, Swedish policy is fundamentally universalist. The Swedish government offers very few exceptions or special rights to minorities compared to countries such as the US, Great Britain or the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. The five recognized national minorities have certain legal protections related to language, and there is a special policy for Sweden's only indigenous population, the Sami, which includes the advisory body the Sami Parliament, which only a small number of Swedish citizens are allowed to vote for.

But this is an exceedingly "mild" version of multiculturalism. If Sweden had been like many other democracies, the Sami and the Finns would each have had a member of Parliament, and the members of the group might have been obligated to vote for a candidate within their own group. Moreover the exceptions only apply to Sweden's national minorities – which is justified by the argument that the languages and cultures of these minorities have existed in Sweden for a very long time, during which they were mostly subjected to serious discrimination by the Swedish government – while there is no distinctive legislation for a large number of immigrant groups.

Nor have the Swedish authorities ignored unfair treatment and poor conditions in the name of multiculturalism, as has happened in countries such as the Netherlands, France and Canada.³

Sweden has also been moving away from multicultural ideals since 1975. In the 1980s there were departures from the idea of cultural freedom of choice, and in the 1990s politicians began to highlight the problem of special measures targeting immigrants. The "All of Sweden" strategy employed from 1986 to 1994 was intended to distribute newly arrived refugees all over the country for example, in order to counteract the concentration of immigrants in large cities and thus make it easier for them to

³ One illustration of universalist principles' strong position in Swedish debate is Nyamko Sabuni's proposal for mandatory gynecological examinations of schoolgirls to combat female genital mutilation. The proposal is identical to one introduced by Ayaan Hirsi Ali in the Netherlands a year or so earlier, with one important exception: while Hirsi Ali wanted examinations of girls from risk zones, primarily Somali immigrant children, Sabuni thought that the Swedish examinations should be for all girls.

learn Swedish.⁴ In the autumn of 1997 the Social Democratic government introduced a new immigration policy, which was based on society's "ethnic and cultural diversity" but also emphasized that initiatives targeting immigrants as a group should be limited to measures during their early time in Sweden. At the same time the authorities' responsibility to be standard setters was emphasized, and "offensive recruitment" was called for in public administration in order to better reflect the ethnic makeup of the population.⁵ The center-right alliance government that took office in 2006 has continued on this path, and has stressed that integration policy must be a policy for newly arrived immigrants during their very first years in Sweden. In December 2010 the newly appointed Minister for Integration Erik Ullenhag launched what he described as the largest integration policy reform since the mid-1980s. The reform was primarily devoted to individualization - both in the sense of considering individual differences in the group of new arrivals and assigning greater responsibility for integration onto the individual - and to speeding up the integration of new arrivals into the labor market.⁶

Thus in rhetorical terms a great deal has happened since the 1970s, when the importance of immigrants' ability to retain their culture was emphasized. In 2010 Swedish integration policy is about helping immigrants with job placement and language instruction. This is certainly complemented with an orientation course on Swedish society, but there is not room for much more.⁷ Of course this reflects a trend where the issue of employment has gone from being an obvious requirement for migration to a difficulty whose solution is viewed as the key to integration problems.

Swedish integration policy has been characterized by comparatively strong consensus among parties, at least at a general level. For a long time all of the parliamentary parties shared the ideal of a multicultural society (a consensus that endured until after the 2010 elections), and support for universal principles has been stronger in all parties than support for multicultural special rights (with the possible exception of the Swedish Green Party). In the first half of the 2000s individual advocates of radical multiculturalism received a certain amount of media exposure and the backing of some enclaves

⁴ SOU (2004)

⁵ Swedish Government (1997)

⁶ Ullenhag (2010)

⁷ I describe the general ideas present in national policy and debate. Real conditions are often different at the municipal level, with greater elements of both pragmatism and multicultural projects. See Sakine Madon (2010a).

within the universities and the culture sections of the newspapers, but it's worth pointing out that their influence on policy has been limited. Mona Sahlin, then minister of integration and present party leader of the Social Democrats (though resigning in March 2011), was the one who ordered Masoud Kamali's investigation of the powers that be concerning structural discrimination, an investigation heavily inspired by postcolonial theory. But another Social Democratic minister - Jens Orback – was the one who put Kamali's report straight into the wastebasket after receiving it in the spring of 2006. The extremely long list of demands that Kamali presented had absolutely no hope of winning Parliamentary support in Sweden in the twenty-first century.

Just as in the rest of Europe, the Swedish integration debate became increasingly a debate about Islam during the twenty-first century. This has also meant that the principle of freedom of religion has received greater attention, and that situations where freedom of religion clash with other highly valued principles – such as freedom of expression and equality – have been highlighted. Thus in recent years the clearest arguments in defense of multiculturalism have also invoked freedom of religion. One example is Equality Ombudsman Katri Linna, who defended both a Muslim man whose unemployment compensation was cut off after he refused to shake hands with a female employer at an interview, and a Muslim woman with a face veil (niqab) who wished to pursue training to be a preschool child care assistant. Another example is the representatives of the Church of Sweden who asserted in July 2010 that Swedish animal welfare legislation is in conflict with freedom of religion, and should be altered in consideration of Muslim and Jewish minorities.⁸ A third example is legal scholar Mosa Sayed's 2010 dissertation on Islam and inheritance law in Sweden,⁹ which received a great deal of attention. Sayed argued that religious and cultural factors should receive higher priority than the principle that Swedish law applies in Sweden, which Sayed considered to be an expression of an "ideology of adaption based on the proposition that people ordinarily adapt to the legal rules in the country where they live."¹⁰

Few Swedish politicians have expressed any more coherent views on integration policy. One exception is former Minister for Integration Nyamko Sabuni, who published a book before the 2010 election campaign where she interwove accounts of her own growing up with arguments in favor of the integration policy she represents. Sabuni's line of reasoning is of interest in that she so clearly emphasizes the importance of immigrants following the law and receiving incentives to quickly find jobs and learn the language, while also explicitly distancing herself from assimilation. Consequently the question arises of what sort of integration ideal she

⁸ Fast (2010)

⁹ Sayed (2010)

¹⁰ Sayed (2010), p. 131.

is advocating when she simultaneously describes integration as “a process that often takes a long time and requires a great deal patience” and as “mutual, just like friendship and love,” a mutuality which is “of course the responsibility of each individual.”¹¹ If an immigrant were integrated merely by obeying the law, working and speaking Swedish, these lines of argument would be superfluous.

However, as usual the devil lies in the details. Sabuni also writes about Uppsala poet Mohamed Omar who “seemed positively integrated” but is now a “radical Islamist.”¹² In other words the Islamist is not integrated, regardless of the fact that he was born in Sweden and supports himself by writing in Swedish.

Swedish public opinion has never been entirely on board the multicultural train. Repeated opinion polls show roughly the same thing: most Swedes feel that diversity is positive, that society has benefited from integration and that all residents should have the same rights and obligations regardless of background. Most Swedes also feel that immigrants should adapt to Swedish society, and they draw sharp distinctions between different groups of immigrants concerning their ability to do so. A large group of Swedes feels primarily skepticism about Islam and associates Muslims with the oppression of women. 84 percent feel that “the immigrants” are obligated to adapt to “the customs of our country” (only 8 percent are opposed to this). Meanwhile two thirds - 65 percent - feel that “there are groups of immigrants who are not able to integrate into our culture.”¹³

¹¹ Sabuni (2010), p. 125.

¹² Ibid, p. 117.

¹³ Mella & Palm (2010). It appears from an (admittedly strangely worded) question about “cultural distance” that Somalis, Roma, Iraqis, Iranians, Chinese, Kurds and Turks are worst off, when Swedes attempt to define foreign cultures.

4. INTEGRATION AND ASSIMILATION

Over the last decade European immigration and integration policy has been uniformly evolving away from multiculturalism and back to a more or less explicit assimilation ideal. A large number of laws have been amended in order to set higher priority on adaptation by immigrants (from non-EU countries): there have been new or more difficult conditions for receiving residency permits and/or citizenship, exceptions have been eliminated, special rules for support and family formation, bans on veils in schools, bans on wearing burqas in public places etc.

Even if each individual proposal is controversial, these changes have often had broad parliamentary support and won strong support in public opinion. The debates have generally revolved around increased critical scrutiny of immigration and integration in general and integration of Islam and Muslims in particular. Many measures are explicitly justified by citing the need to combat radical Islamism and counteract anti-liberal and antidemocratic currents found in Muslim immigrant populations.

4.1 GREAT BRITAIN

In Great Britain the Conservative party campaigned in the spring of 2010 on its criticism of a “broken society,” an allusion to dependence on social welfare and declining employment figures. However as early as January 2007 David Cameron, who is now Prime Minister, asserted in an opinion piece that multiculturalism had failed:

The doctrine of multiculturalism has undermined our nation’s sense of cohesion because it emphasizes what divides us rather than what brings us together. It has been manipulated to entrench the right to difference (a divisive concept) at the expense of the right to equal treatment despite difference (a unifying concept).¹⁴

¹⁴ Cameron (2007)

In a debate in February 2008 David Cameron developed the concept that multiculturalism was undermining social cohesion by not only allowing but even encouraging different cultures to live separate, parallel lives: "State multiculturalism is a wrong-headed doctrine that has had disastrous results. It has fostered difference between communities," Cameron said, calling for a policy of equal treatment.

Minister Without Portfolio Sayeeda Warsi, the former Shadow Minister for Community Cohesion and the country's first Muslim cabinet minister, was even more pronounced in her criticism of multiculturalism. During the Tory party conference in Birmingham in the autumn of 2008 she repudiated "a decade of state-driven multiculturalism" and expressed the opinion that Labour had left an awful legacy:

It has sent out the message that we're not sharing a society, we're just cohabiting a space. It has led people to retreat into separate cultures rather than reach for a shared community... and their obsession with self-appointed community leaders and crude use of patronage politics has led to communities divided against each other, with people losing that inner instinct of what it is to be British.¹⁵

Warsi promised that the Conservative party would prioritize integration instead. She expanded on her thoughts in a Guardian interview in late summer 2010. Warsi described immigration as out of control and criticized the Archbishop of Canterbury for his widely reported statement that Sharia law might be able to aid social cohesion in certain parts of Great Britain.

If you're saying, are you a multiculturalist or an integrationist, I'm an absolute believer in multiculturalism per se, where people have the right in their private lives to do what they want - as long as when it comes to the public sphere there is an acceptance of what the mainstream culture is, and our values and principles are. And our values and principles are about giving everyone an equal opportunity to improve their lives through economic involvement. They will not be able to do that if they don't speak the

¹⁵ Mulholland (2008). The Labour government's predilection for discussing integration with Muslim leaders has also been criticized by Kenan Malik (2009), one of few critics of multiculturalism to be received with open arms on the culture section pages of liberal Swedish newspapers.

*language of the land. We have to be quite clear about what people are joining here, and that includes having to join the language.*¹⁶

At the beginning of the summer of 2010 it became known that the new government planned to pass a law requiring people from non-EU countries applying for visas in order to join a husband or wife in Great Britain to provide proof that they had good knowledge of English. Until this point it was sufficient for a visa applicant to certify that the marriage was legitimate and that they could support themselves. According to Home Secretary Theresa May the purpose of the rules is to improve integration. In her view fluency with the English language is a necessity for permission to live in the UK:

*I believe being able to speak English should be a pre-requisite for anyone who wants to settle here. The new English requirement for spouses will help promote integration, remove cultural barriers and protect public services ... It is a privilege to come to the UK and that is why I am committed to raising the bar for migrants and ensuring that those who benefit from being in Britain contribute to our society.*¹⁷

4.2 GERMANY

The German debate shares some similarities with the debate in Sweden: although Germany chose a different model – the “guest worker” system – they proceeded precisely as Sweden did from the assumption that the immigrants would not be staying in the country permanently, which made integration a non-issue, while at the same time there was an emphasis on the immigrants’ right to their own customs during their time there. Just as in Sweden a public discourse evolved in Germany that had limited opportunities for criticism of multiculturalism, with the important difference that the German government, unlike the Swedish government, did not make any efforts to strengthen integration.

There was a marked change of course after the turn of the century, with the 2000 decision that everyone born in Germany is entitled to German citizenship. The noticeable change took place partly through new naturalization laws introduced in 2005, which means that new arrivals from non-EU countries must complete an

¹⁶ Aitkenhead (2010)

¹⁷ BBC News (2010)

integration course in order to receive a residence permit, while citizenship requires a passing grade on a language and general knowledge test about Germany.

Angela Merkel's remarks on the failure of multiculturalism were certainly among the most widely noted political statements made in 2010. Merkel's statement made at the CDU's youth congress in Potsdam is worth quoting at length:

In Frankfurt am Main two out of three children younger than five come from immigrant backgrounds. At the beginning of the 1960s we invited the guest workers to Germany. Today they live with us. We lied to ourselves, and we said "they won't stay long, one day they'll be gone." But that's not how it turned out. Naturally multiculturalism, the concept of living side by side and being happy to do so, has failed with a vengeance. This is why integration is so important. People who want to be part of our society must not only obey the law and the Constitution; they must also above all learn our language. They must be able to speak German. A very high value must be set on this. This means that the requirement for integration is one of our top priorities in the immediate future.¹⁸

It is worth noting that multiculturalism is contrasted with integration in the German debate. What Merkel is saying is that the immigrants have done too little to integrate, and the requirement to integrate is one of the most important priorities in the immediate future. This includes a clearly specified requirement that newcomers learn German.

Merkel's statement came after the debate that arose after the publication of Thilo Sarrazin's book *Deutschland Schafft Sich Ab* in the summer of 2010, in which Sarrazin asserted that German Muslims had not integrated, that they were less intelligent and that they used more welfare services than the rest of the population. Sarrazin's book was dismissed at first, but after it became a runaway best seller his ideas were given serious consideration in both the German and European media.

At about the same time the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which has close ties to the social democratic SPD party, published an opinion survey that showed that 30 percent of the respondents felt that

¹⁸ Merkel (2010)

Germany was “swamped” by immigrants and that most of them had come in order to receive the country’s social benefits.¹⁹

Muslims and Islam are in the spotlight of the debate. As in Sweden, many people share a strong conviction that faithful Muslims cannot, or in some cases don’t want to, adopt Germany’s customs and traditions. Sarrazin’s line of argument focuses completely on Muslim immigrants from Turkey and North Africa, only a third of whom support themselves by working according to his statistics. In a speech to the Turkish parliament in the fall of 2010 German President Christian Wulff praised the Turkish immigrants in Germany and described Islam as a natural part of Germany. But he also highlighted the problems within the Muslim immigrant groups: “dependence on social welfare, criminality, poor educational achievement and a macho culture.”²⁰

Germany’s own counterpart to the proposal currently being discussed in Great Britain – a requirement that people from non-EU countries applying for visas in order to join a husband or wife in the country must be able to provide proof that they have basic knowledge of the language of their new homeland has been in place since 2007.²¹

4.3 FRANCE

France is the Western European country that never abandoned the ideal of assimilation. This has been combined with application of the territorial principle for citizenship which is otherwise unusual in Europe, i.e. a person born in France receives French citizenship regardless of the origin of the parents. But even in France there is a noticeable tendency toward renewed requirements for the naturalization of newcomers.

For example Eric Besson, France’s former Minister of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Mutually-Supportive Development (2009-2010), has asserted that foreigners must speak better French, and stressed the importance of national pride. Since 2007 all new immigrants have had to attend a free but compulsory course on French society, which in the course of six hours introduces the country’s history and administrative and institutional systems, as well as the values and principles that form the foundation

¹⁹ Barrowclough (2010)

²⁰ Die Tageszeitung (2010)

²¹ Preuß (2010)

of the Republic.²² The course will be developed further at the beginning of 2011. Going forward there will be a greater emphasis on conveying the values that the majority population in France lives by, and stressing equality between women and men and prohibitions on polygamy, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

But of course what received the most attention otherwise was the law passed in 2010 forbidding the wearing of the burqa in public settings, which follows an earlier ban on religious symbols – including the ordinary hijab – in public schools. Despite extensive debate and international criticism, the burqa ban was passed by a broad parliamentary majority, and in opinion surveys it has been supported by 60 to 80 percent of the French people.²³

There are also tendencies to a relaxation of the view of France as a nation that does not concern itself with the identity of its citizens. In 2009 President Sarkozy's advisor on discrimination issues formed a commission intended to investigate the prospects for a survey of France's ethnic composition. In concrete terms this could lead to the repeal of the ban on recording ethnic (and religious) information, and a census where ethnicity is included as a central category.

²² French Government (2010a)

²³Bremner (2010) & CNN (2010)

4.4 AN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IDEALS

If we follow the debates in Germany and Great Britain there is no doubt that integration in these countries is about an aspiration toward greater conformity and a restriction of the diversity that characterizes a multicultural society. The responsibility for this adaptation is primarily laid at the feet of the immigrants. As we have seen, Merkel asserts that obeying the law is not sufficient; rather, immigrants must also do more themselves to learn the language. The British Prime Minister has been even more explicit: "Britain should be a cold place for those refusing to integrate," David Cameron asserted in 2008.²⁴ The integration ideal is contrasted against a multicultural ideal, not an ideal of assimilation. On the other hand the concept of assimilation is used more openly in France, as a self-evident ideal. Overall the ideas promoted by leading politicians – prime ministers and ministers for integration – are relatively similar.

A brief survey of the US can help us increase our understanding of what is characteristic of the European view of integration. As is well known, the ideal of assimilation prevails in the US as well. In the legal sense the difference from Europe is not obvious: the territorial principle is applied for citizenship just as in France, and American naturalization requirements are reminiscent of those in force in the majority of European countries, i.e. requirements for knowledge of the language and history. The difference lies instead in the view of the mutability of cultures and nations.

Since the US has been a nation of immigrants since its earliest days, assimilation has been viewed as a necessity in order to create a lowest common denominator for all of these immigrants from different cultures. Even if certain ethnicities and religions have doubtless come to dominate – while others are discriminated against – there's a widespread idea of American culture as a social and economic project, rather than something that is rooted in ethnicity. Being an assimilated American is to be a part of this project regardless of your identity. It is viewed as un-American to take exception to the fundamental principles represented by the Founding Fathers of not belonging to a particular religion or ethnicity; on the contrary, having ancestors from different countries is quintessentially American. Therefore the American identity can be described as pluralistic, a culture that itself

²⁴ Speech in February 2008 to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, cited in Rose (2009)

encourages and strengthens diversity. As migration researchers Jens Schneider and Maurice Crul summarize the research consensus on the situation:

*Immigrants and new ethnic communities can become American by retaining and celebrating their "own" culture, albeit within an American way of institutionalization and with the American aim of becoming economically successful.*²⁵

In contrast with this (assuredly idealized) depiction of American assimilation, European integration ideals stand out even more clearly. The integration ideal that appears in European discussions – including that in Sweden – seems to be primarily the story of a conflict-ridden encounter between static cultures and not a dynamic exchange between changeable cultures as in the American ideal of assimilation.

The European media have devoted extensive coverage to the American debate on the construction of a mosque near Ground Zero. The similarities between the US and Europe may appear large, with prejudices against Muslims and resistance to the mosques on both sides of the Atlantic. But this conceals essential differences. In Europe nearly all mosque construction projects result in widespread protests: the Ground Zero protests – which are not unique to the US, but still a consequence of a unique event in the country's history – have their counterparts in most large European cities all over the Continent. The comparative studies that have been performed also show that Muslims in the US are significantly better integrated into American society than those in Europe, both concerning how they themselves experience integration and concerning the difference from the average population at the aggregate level in areas such as education, employment and criminality.²⁶

One interesting difference is that religious institutions in Europe are often viewed with suspicion, as an obstacle to integration. For example mosque construction projects are defended by politicians on the grounds of freedom of religion, but they are seldom accorded an instrumental value, as tools for greater integration. Few people argue that more mosques could help make the sense of community stronger. The value of strong religious congregations for facilitating integration is rarely heard.

Another illuminating example concerns Ayaan Hirsi Ali's widely reported idea that Christians should proselytize in Muslim-dominated areas:

²⁵ Schneider & Crul (2010), p. 1144.

²⁶ Ibid, p.1145.

*Christians, feminists and Enlightenment thinkers should become organized and provide opposition. You must actively advocate for what you believe in. People who believe in the Enlightenment, feminism and Christianity must show conviction: they must go out to areas with concentrated immigrant populations and actually stand up and advocate that what they believe in is the best.*²⁷

Hirsi Ali has received a comparatively great deal of attention in the culture sections of Swedish newspapers, where her ideas have been rejected as expressions of “anti-liberalism” and “intolerance.”²⁸ This is a remarkable conclusion, which appears to originate in the view that there is an opposition between an impartial liberal government and a civil society where political, religious, professional and cultural organizations argue on behalf of their messages. But an open battle about people’s ideas, identities and interests is a requirement for democracy, and requires in turn that parties, churches and trade unions can act freely, advocate for their activities and try to recruit new members and supporters. It is anti-liberal when the government chooses to favor one organization over another. Intolerance is when some participants are not allowed to work on behalf of their views. It is possible to defend multicultural society while simultaneously being convinced that one’s own faith or lifestyle is the best, even for other people.

The indignation reveals a typical European view of religion and culture. In fact the alternative to what Hirsi Ali advocates is the static society that supporters of identity politics are defending, where individuals are reduced to representatives of their culture and where these cultures live equally but separately, side by side but without bridges that join them. Assuming that we regard Muslims as an ethnic group, every attempt to influence their religion is a violation of their most fundamental identity according to this school of thought, in which case Christian proselytizing, or even the presence of Christian congregations in a homogeneous Muslim area, is a problem. An expression of the way the majority society belittles the minority.

But if we instead start with the assumption that there are individuals whose ideological and religious convictions are self-chosen and subject to change, proselytizing is actually a recognition of Muslims as citizens of equal merit. Because religious mobility is not just about people moving across borders, it is also about individuals changing congregations, converting to another religion or completely abandoning their religious faith. But this rarely happens without mobilization. In the book *Shall the religious inherit*

²⁷ Axess Magasin (2010)

²⁸ Madon (2010b) & Hadley-Kamptz (2010)

the Earth, which attracted a good deal of attention, Eric Kaufmann demonstrates that the net exchange between liberal and fundamentalist religious persuasions is to the advantage of the latter, within both Christianity and Islam.

The historical circumstances are extremely different, which explains a great deal of the difference between Europe and the US. But the comparison is still relevant, since it illustrates the static view of integration that de facto characterizes the European integration debate.

While assimilation and multiculturalism give two different answers to the question of the shape society should take, the integration ideal is significantly less distinct. In the British and German debates integration is contrasted with multiculturalism, becoming nearly synonymous with assimilation. One explanation for the reluctance to use the concept of assimilation instead, when this is what is meant in practice, is of course its negative historic associations.²⁹ Still, it's possible that this reluctance makes the debate murkier. One illustrative example is an opinion piece by political scientist Lisbeth Lindeborg that criticizes multiculturalism and describes the development of the German debate approvingly. The article is permeated by higher requirements for adaptation and the need for greater equality in society, but it winds up with the nearly obligatory observation that the goal is "to integrate – not assimilate – the immigrants who live in the country."³⁰

When integration and assimilation are made into polar opposites, two dimensions are confused. One concerns whether the government should pursue unity or diversity, while the other is whether this should be accomplished through mandatory or voluntary means.

The advantage of the assimilation concept is that it allows for a debate more or less about: how much assimilation do we need? Which methods are acceptable for achieving this equality? On the other hand the integration concept is insatiable, aspirations to integration never cease, and there will always be aspects where the newcomer is not sufficiently integrated.

²⁹ Here it's important to distinguish between the dated definition of assimilation that lives on, for example in the Swedish National Encyclopedia – "a process whereby a minority (...) completely surrenders its own culture, so that original cultural differences are erased" – and the more limited view of assimilation used in research. All demands that are made for adaptation are qualified and limited; there are no advocates of "total assimilation." See for example Alba & Nee (1997) and Brubaker (2001).

³⁰ Lindeborg (2010)

5. INTEGRATION AND EQUALITY

Surveys of integration take place nearly exclusively at the aggregate level. Immigrants (or the “foreign born” as they are usually called in Swedish statistics) are made into a special category, the average values of which are compared those of the rest of the population for several selected variables, such as employment, income, education, voting, being on sick leave and reported crimes. Differences at the aggregate level are automatically interpreted as an integration problem in need of both explanations and measures to address them. This is true not only of people hunting for explanations of the “structural discrimination” or “institutional racism” type, but also of people studying integration who have more liberal and individualistic outlooks.

Various rankings of the level of integration in countries or municipalities often have a great impact, so it is important to consider how the surveys are conducted. One example is the magazine Fokus, which has created an index that ranks Sweden’s municipalities according to how well integrated they are. In somewhat simplified terms, Fokus’s criteria mean that a municipality receives a higher ranking for more foreign-born and refugee residents, and when these residents have higher levels of employment, high income and low sick leave figures (both in absolute numbers and relative to the rest of the residents of the municipality).³¹

Naturally these kinds of surveys are not pointless. Certainly differences at the aggregate level have some significance, not least as indicators of structural problems that are worthy of attention. Therefore it is also nearly exclusively these types of statistics that are used as the basis for integration policy measures. For example, the present Swedish government has used concepts such as alienation and problem areas, which are completely defined on the basis of how many people with an immigrant background in a particular community are unemployed and/or have a low education level.

But there are a couple of problems with these kinds of surveys that should be highlighted. First of all, there is the recurrent methodological problem that they do not distinguish sufficiently between what is meant by integration and what is believed to cause integration. Does employment contribute to integration, or is a person who has a job also integrated through employment? Are language skills a criterion for integration, or do they facilitate integration? Are integrated immigrants more politically

³¹ Ahlquist (2010)

active, or are politics a tool for integrating immigrants? If these distinctions are not drawn, you are inescapably drawn into circular reasoning, where shortcomings in integration are explained by poor integration.

This is connected with another problem: integration is depicted as a relatively uniform phenomenon. It is more fruitful to distinguish instead among various dimensions of integration, and allow the question of the correlation among the dimensions to be an empirical - and not normative - question. Naturally the academic literature is full of theoretical distinctions of the concept. One of the most classic is the one drawn by sociologist Milton Gordon in his standard work *Assimilation in American Life* (1964), where he drew a distinction between acculturation and structural assimilation. The minority group first acquires the cultural patterns of the host society, and it is only then that its members become integrated into the society's various groups on equal terms.

The reasoning of the current Swedish government is exactly the opposite: they have made a very clear choice to prioritize measures that promote integration in the economic sphere, based on the fundamental idea that if immigrants enter the work force most of the problem will resolve itself. But there is very weak empirical support for this assumption in the research, even if current studies provide weak support for the idea that economic integration leads to social or cultural integration.

A third problem is that the integration debate is based on a firm assumption that ethnicity, piety and culture should not be correlated with social, economic and political factors. If an ethnic group is concentrated in a particular neighborhood or occupational sector, it is regarded thereby as less integrated. When a higher percentage of immigrant parents choose to receive a child-care allowance rather than sending their children to childcare, or prefer independent schools to public schools, this is also perceived as an integration problem.

But that is a normative assumption. By this logic, a Chinatown in a Swedish city could never be an asset, only a burden. But there must be a clarification of the underlying assumptions, according to which it is a problem that individuals who identify with a particular ethnic group, for example, choose to live in the same community, work at the same company and start families within their own group. Culture plays a role in how we value most things in life, such as child rearing and care of the elderly. If certain immigrant groups chose the child care allowance over daycare to a greater extent, and are more likely to take care of their ill and elderly family members themselves at home, without the support of society, for whom is this a problem? For society or for the minority group?

A classic ideological contradiction emerges here: how should freedom and equality be balanced? Even in an individualistic society like Sweden, individual freedom of choice leads to more than individuals freeing themselves from various collectives; it can equally well result in the strengthening or emergence of new collective restrictions. The critically important decisions we make – about schools, where to live, career choices, life partners – are governed to a great extent by our background and identity. The available Swedish research on social integration shows exactly what one would expect: family formation and social interaction take place primarily within the ethnic group.³²

On the left, it is easy to compose an ideologically convincing argument about the need to restrict freedom of choice. With the support of research that shows that representative democracy, prosperity and general welfare all work the best in nationally more homogeneous societies, it ought to be possible to argue for the need to maintain a common civic society through measures that create equality. The negative association between ethnic heterogeneity and "public goods provision," i.e. low crime rates, good school, good health care and clean water, has been described as "one of the most powerful hypotheses in political economy."³³

Paradoxically, it is instead primarily center-right debaters who have pursued this line of argument, while the left has been more inclined to defend minorities' right to be different. Let us briefly set this discussion in relation to three well-known center-right integration policy proposals.

In 2002 the Liberal Party gained both attention and voters through its proposal to require language knowledge for citizenship. (The Moderate Party supported this proposal, but it has not been made a government policy.) But the Liberal Party has had an extremely difficult time presenting an ideologically convincing argument for the requirement. For example they've chosen to highlight language skills as an important key to integration: without language skills, immigrants lose access to the labor market. But this has nothing to do with citizenship. The labor market is also open to non-citizens.

³² A 2007 study (Andersson & Scott) reported that 94 percent of Iranian women and 88 percent of Turkish women in Sweden are married to a man from their native country. One percent of Somali women in Sweden are married to a man of Swedish origin.

³³ Banerjee (2005). In plain terms this means that there is an inherent conflict between free immigration and a generous and extensive welfare state. This conflict does not have to mean that a choice must be made between one and the other, but neither is it constructive to pretend the conflict is not there, as happens in large parts of the debate.

Instead of arguing for the obvious social benefits of a common language, the Liberal Party has tried to make out that a language requirement would benefit immigrants' individual situations. This can be compared with the British debate, where David Cameron chose a different line of argument: "The most basic contact comes from talking to each other: and if people cannot speak the English this becomes near impossible."³⁴

Thus it is not especially difficult to make the case for a common language: how can a community be created without a common means of communication? But if you choose to begin with the needs of the individual as the Liberal Party does, it is remarkable that you would not consider to what extent language requirements are the government's responsibility. And if you arrive at the conclusion that language skills are of such great importance, there's no reason to stop at symbolic political actions rather than proposing mandatory preschool attendance for immigrant children as the Danes have done (or going even further, as the Danish People's Party has done, and propose that immigrants must speak Danish at home).

Another example comes from the debate on burqas, where during the 2010 election campaign it was once again the Liberal Party that wanted to improve school principals' ability to ban them in schools. The party failed to justify a ban on ideological grounds in this debate as well. Instead, they discussed the pedagogical importance of being able to looking one another in the eyes in a classroom setting, but without explaining why it is the government's job to determine what is most suitable pedagogically.

A remarkable feature of this debate was how many people discussed the substantive issue – is the burqa good or bad – while extremely few questioned whether it is even the government's job to decide the issue. From a liberal perspective the question should rather have been whether there was an emergency situation that warranted government intervention.

A third example is an idea that has been discussed within the center-right parties, concerning some form of social contract for immigrants. This is a measure that has been introduced in various forms in a large number of other countries in recent years. Such measures are justified partly on the basis of the need to establish a shared set of values for society - which is an explicit goal of Swedish integration policy -

³⁴ London Evening Standard (2007)

and partly by requiring some type of promise from new arrivals that they will fulfill them. In Sweden this process stopped with a government inquiry into the subject matter of a new social orientation course for immigrants.³⁵

Certainly I'm not providing a complete picture here, but nevertheless the question is why are center-right and liberal politicians so willing to use the coercive power of government to regulate language, clothing and values? Language skills, cultural knowledge and understanding of prevailing norms and values are undoubtedly useful tools for functioning in a society. But whose responsibility is it that newcomers assimilate this knowledge? And whose problem is it if individuals do well anyway without this knowledge? Voices are seldom heard in Swedish debate advocating that individuals themselves should bear the costs for their choices.³⁶ The objective of cooperation that prevailed in the 1970s, when the government assumed the responsibility for ensuring that immigrants were able to maintain their cultural identities, has shifted into an idea that the government assumes the responsibility for ensuring that immigrants become integrated. The ultimate objective changes, but the government's evident responsibility seems to endure (even if as previously mentioned there are also tendencies to place a greater emphasis on individual responsibility, at least when it comes to employment).

The confusion of citizenship with integration policy is also unfortunate. Citizenship should be an option for those who want to remain in Sweden for a long time, and should not be made a necessity for people who plan to move on after a few years:

[There are refugees] who are not motivated to integrate, quite simply because they hope – however improbably – that they can return home soon. Since they ordinarily remain in Sweden for a long time anyway, there must be an integration policy for them as well. This is exactly why an “integration policy for citizenship ... thus results in additional exclusion and greater polarization.”³⁷

Swedish opinion studies show that supporters of a negative ideal of freedom have an uphill battle in Sweden. Support for a positive ideal of freedom (where the government is expected to actively help individuals make the “right”

³⁵ SOU (2010)

³⁶ One positive exception is Bauhn & Demirbag-Sten (2010).

³⁷ Johansson Metso (2010), p. 24.

decisions, such as alcohol and drug policies), is much stronger than for the "negative" ideal of freedom (which protects citizens' right to make the "wrong" decisions, such as the veil debate).³⁸

³⁸ Gustavsson (2010).

6. INTEGRATION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Identity is a slippery concept that rarely lends itself to political debate. Meanwhile there is a growing realization in many quarters of the need to take something that could be taken for granted for a long time, and subject it to critical scrutiny. In recent years there have been challenges to European national identities, which are intimately linked with the European nation-states, from several directions: globalization, Europeanization and migration. The surge in nationalist parties all over Europe from the 1980s onward is largely a reaction to this.

But even in the political mainstream, nationalism has made a comeback over the last two decades. The interest in national identities is strong in many countries, and it cannot simply be reduced to a concession to extremist parties.

In countries such as Denmark, Great Britain and France, various types of campaigns related to national identity have been initiated by governments in recent years. For example in fall 2009 the French government launched a nationwide debate on which values the French included in their concept of national identity. Over several months more than 58,000 entries poured into the site www.debatidentitenationale.fr. According to the government the project had three objectives: better knowledge of the Republic's values, stronger French national pride and improved integration of foreigners into French society.³⁹ In a statement accompanying the news that the drive had been a success, French Prime Minister Francois Fillon said that "the issue of French identity is no longer taboo." It is telling that the legacy President Nicolas Sarkozy plans to leave to posterity is a history museum in Paris devoted to the emergence of French identity.

Meanwhile the Socialist opposition objected to the debate, reflecting a conflict between the left and the right that is repeated in many other countries.⁴⁰ Overall, social democratic parties have been more skeptical. However one exception is Labour in Great Britain, which initiated a similar

³⁹ French Government (2010b)

⁴⁰ Peillon (2009)

campaign. As early as 2005 Gordon Brown, who was still the Chancellor of the Exchequer at that point, proposed a national holiday to celebrate Britishness, and in 2007 a major government inquiry was initiated.

Thus the identity issue is part of the integration debate in many countries. The return of nationalism is a problem for some. It is said to mobilize xenophobic attitudes toward immigrants, especially Muslims. From this perspective we find ourselves on a slippery slope where conservative governments' initiatives related to language, identity and the cultural canon slip unnoticed into racism, Islamophobia and right-wing extremism. Given this perspective, nationalism is always exclusive and strictly negative as it relates to integration.

Meanwhile there are those who assert that the major problem is rather the lack of a self-aware identity among the European nation-states. In his widely noted book *Reflections on the revolution in Europe*, American journalist Christopher Caldwell writes that European cultures must become more self-aware in order to avoid being assimilated by (the Muslim) immigrants:

When an insecure, malleable, relativistic culture meets a culture that is anchored, confident, and strengthened by common doctrines, it is generally the former that changes to suit the latter.

6.1 NATIONAL IDENTITY IN SWEDEN

Sweden does not have a public debate on the issue of national identity. One reason is that language tinged with nationalism has been taboo since the end of the 1960s, both in politics and in the newspaper culture sections. Another reason that there is a Swedish self image that describes Swedes as independent of cultural traditions and uninterested in nationalism and patriotism. A third and deeper reason is the self-evident and unchallenged position Swedish identity has had in Swedish society for a very long time.

But even in Sweden there are tendencies toward a change. One example of a somewhat more sophisticated line of argument is a 2009 piece in the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, where Göran Rosenberg wrote approvingly about political attempts to strengthen the awareness and substance of Swedish national identity. Rosenberg observes in a somewhat resigned tone that the political ideal (democracy without the nation-state) is not always humanly possible. "A society requires cohesion. A national democracy requires

national cohesion.” He continues by arguing for the introduction of a new form of social conflict in order to force a community into existence:

In fact the problem is extremely tangible: how to get citizens who neither wish nor need to get to know one another, let alone feel any affinity for each other, to do so anyway.

Thus the possible solution is also extremely tangible, if not definite: give citizens an imperative reason to get to know each other whether they want to or not, an imperative reason to meet and jostle against each other across ethnic, cultural and social boundaries, an imperative reason to discover their dependence on one another, and thus their civic connection to one another.⁴¹

Rosenberg’s reasoning is interesting but problematic. The point of a nation – what is often called “an imagined community” in nationalism research – is that it is a substitute for “true” community. The very idea of a national identity rests on the assumption that we can feel a strong sense of community with people we have never met. We’ve read the same textbooks, we consume the same media, and we choose from an identical range of products in identical (in Sweden at least) shopping centers, regardless of which city we live in – and that’s enough!

So when Rosenberg states that we need to force solidarity into existence through social duty more than we need national symbols, he is missing something important. Certainly the two major duties – military service and compulsory education - were extremely important for the dissemination of a national identity in the population of Europe during the nineteenth century. But they were part of a larger context, in a comprehensive narrative that we belonged together, how we belonged together and what the consequences of this should be. An idea of a community that could bridge socioeconomic and ideological conflicts, uniting high and low culture. The duties would never have been able to operate without these myths.

Thus national ideas have served an important function by creating a shared narrative about a society’s population. No nation would be able to exist without such narratives or myths. The interesting aspect of national myths is not the extent to which they provide an accurate reflection of reality, but rather the extent to which they contribute to a sense of community and can be used to promote the inclusion of new arrivals. All communities are defined by means of those who are excluded from the community, but

⁴¹ Rosenberg (2009)

this does not mean that all exclusion is equal. In theory (practice is rarely as simple), societies with a widespread assimilation ideal are more inclusive toward newcomers because they are based on the idea that people are able to change and adapt. This could be contrasted with communities based on racism, in which even well assimilated individuals are regarded as undesirable.

So what is typical of Swedish nationalism and how does it relate to integration? The political party that is most explicit when it comes to the Swedish nation is the Sweden Democrats. But one of the remarkable things about the Sweden Democrats is that they use a subjective definition of Swedishness (in contrast with the majority of nationalist parties in Europe, which more often use objective definitions⁴²):

*A Swede is a person who is perceived as Swedish by himself and others. In practice this means a type of open Swedishness, with the ability for people with a different origin to belong to the Swedish nation.*⁴³

In fact, the Sweden Democrats thus define nationality in roughly the same way as researchers on nationalism. Naturally the fact that nations cannot be defined objectively (an example of an objective definition might be that a person who is born in Sweden or speaks fluent Swedish is Swedish), does not mean that they don't exist or that they are unimportant. To the contrary, a clear majority of Sweden's population feels a strong sense of belonging to the nation of Sweden.

The fact that the Sweden Democrats are not more specific in their view of Swedishness is due to the absence of an established image of Swedishness to oppose. Therefore the nationalist project is to provide the nation with a political role, rather than politicizing a particular version of the nation. Swedish identity has emerged in close symbiosis with the Swedish government. For this reason the usual distinction drawn by researchers between ethnos (language, culture, religion, blood ties) and demos (political institutions, citizenship) is not applicable in Sweden. Swedish identity has also been relatively protected from external threats for a long time. Two centuries of peace, stable borders, stable political institutions and small and powerless indigenous and ethnic minorities have made Swedishness self-evident, although not static. Over time the importance of religion has diminished and has been replaced by a common value system

⁴² For example parties such as the Front National and the British National Party have a clearly racist definition of what French or British identity entails.

⁴³ Sweden Democrats (2005)

concerning secular values, and nineteenth-century retrospection upon a glorious history was replaced in the second half of the twentieth century with a forward-looking idea of modernity and progress.

The newspaper *Sydsvenskan*'s editorial writer Heidi Avellan provides a typical example of the image of Swedishness portrayed in the current debate:

*Swedishness [has] become a matter of openness toward the world, toward people and impressions and discoveries and trends. ... Therefore closed borders, introversion and xenophobia are un-Swedish today. On the contrary the view of Sweden as a modern country that looks to the future is Swedish.*⁴⁴

The point is not whether this image of Swedishness is true or false. The important thing is that the image as such exists. Of course it's typical that it is a positive characterization through and through: only good things are typically Swedish. Aside from Avellan's list, the national discourse on Swedishness also provides such beneficial qualities as gender parity, equality, sexual freedom and individualism. Taken together this forms an all-embracing comprehensive narrative of a country with open and tolerant inhabitants, who with curiosity and open arms receive people from all corners of the earth who were the victims of inequality, patriarchal structures, religious oppression and other un-Swedish phenomena.

6.2 IS IDENTITY AN OBSTACLE OR A REQUIREMENT FOR INTEGRATION

The overall issue here is whether national identity constitutes an obstacle or a necessary condition for integration. Is it even possible to imagine integration without a reasonably clearly defined national identity which is supported by the majority of the population? This is often an implicit assumption in the debate that a person who integrates is a person who becomes Swedish. Those who are not integrated lack or are short of "Swedishness." It's difficult to find examples of the opposite. Who would be a non-integrated Swede? Possibly returning ethnic Swedes who've been living abroad, with extremely abnormal

⁴⁴ Avellan, [2010] p.16.

ideals and life paths, such as Anna Anka. Nor is it possible to find examples of integrated non-Swedes. Certainly there are Sweden Democrats who have questioned soccer star Zlatan Ibrahimovic's Swedishness for example, but given the attention these comments have received, it's obvious that such thinking is a violation of the dominant discourse on Swedishness.

In general the people who are the subject of the integration debate and those colloquially described as "immigrants" share the following two characteristics:

- 1. An ethnic identity that is not Swedish. Ethnicity means very different things to different people – from being utterly unimportant to being one of the most important things in life – but to very many people ethnic identity is precisely the reason they were forced to leave their native countries.*
- 2. An idea of staying in Sweden, and thus an ambition to gain a Swedish identity, at least to some extent.*

On the other hand very few people come here because they are or want to be immigrants. The tragedy of the immigrant category is that it dispossesses individuals of both types (1) and (2). The non-Swedish is reduced to a homogeneous mass, defined solely by exactly its lack of Swedishness.

Assuredly there are probably few people who immigrate to Sweden because they are primarily drawn by the lure of Swedish culture. This is a problem in and of itself; it would be outstanding for many reasons if Sweden could attract people who aren't just fleeing from something else, but want to move to Sweden in particular. Nor is it reasonable to expect that a person who has fled from his native country because his religion or culture is oppressed would have any ambitions other than to preserve as much as possible of this religion and culture in his new country. If I had fled Kurdistan due to harassment by the Turkish authorities, I would hardly be prepared to abandon my Kurdish identity in my new homeland. To the contrary, it's because I perceive Sweden as a society that is more tolerant to minorities that I chose to move here, the primary objective is to gain living space for my ethnicity/culture/religion.

Given these assumptions – that most immigrants have an ethnic identity that is important, and that most are also prepared to become Swedes – the integration policy challenge consists of increasing acceptance for people being Swedes and something else at the same time. But this is an idea that meets with resistance on many fronts. For example political scientist Anne Sofie Roald sees large problems with immigrants preserving their ethnic identities:

*A sense of belonging to one's own group above all can be illustrated by the first generation of Swedish Muslims, who view themselves as Palestinians, Lebanese, Afghans, Pakistanis, Iranians, Iraqis or Kurds – or as bearers of a hyphenated identity: Palestinian-Swede and so forth – and not as Swedes pure and simple. And this is despite the fact that they were born in and grew up in Sweden, speak Swedish as their first language and have only visited their parents' native countries for short periods if they've even been there at all. Minority thinking will very likely lead to a lack of loyalty to Swedish society, a loyalty that both the Swedish welfare model and a sense of community are completely dependent upon.*⁴⁵

The idea that one is either one or the other is common in Sweden. Rather than allowing ethnic or religious identities to be given a natural place in the Swedish nation (i.e. in civil society; the government should have some subjects other than the country's population), it is immigrant status itself that is inherited, and concepts such as second- or third-generation immigrants are freely used.

The resistance to multiple identities and the questioning of non-ethnic Swedes' loyalty to society are a mirror image of the idea that Swedish culture is a threat to minority cultures. The ideological superstructure consists of an alliance between multiculturalism and anti-nationalism dating from the 1970s and 1980s, which laid the foundation for the still dominant idea of a logical and inevitable conflict between Swedishness and immigrant status. This is why anti-racism has been confused with contempt for expressions of Swedish culture. This is why flags have been put away, Lucia festivities cancelled and Christmas parties and Christmas presents replaced by December parties and winter presents, all under the perverse heading of "respect for immigrants."

The integration policy proposal from 1997 by the Social Democratic government then in power states that "nothing says that pride in what is Swedish must be opposed to tolerance for and understanding of other cultures and heritages, or vice versa."⁴⁶ This would probably be an incomprehensible remark if you were not familiar with the Swedish context where the idea of this exact conflict has had a prominent position.

⁴⁵ Roald (2010)

⁴⁶ Swedish Government (1997)

Paradoxically, lack of nationalism can be viewed as an integration problem: without inclusive national symbols to identify with, it's difficult to gain a foothold in a new culture. Here lies a strength of the American national myth, crowded with strong and well-known symbols: Ellis Island, the Statue of Liberty, Graceland, Mount Rushmore, Thanksgiving and so forth. All of them are rooted in a particular American version of history, with absolutely no universal claims. But the American Dream has a universal significance that goes beyond ethnicity and religion. "The greatest strength of America is that people want to live there", as *The Economist* pithily put it.⁴⁷

It is difficult to find European equivalents to the American Dream. There are no new European settlements, where immigrants come and are part of "building the country" on equal terms. France and the myth of 1789 are probably the closest thing. It is characteristic of the French conception of the revolution as the nation's Big Bang that it is both welcoming and binding. Just like the American origin myth, it is codified in principles that are still considered valid.

In the book *Fosterland [Native Country]*, Dilsa Demirbag-Sten describes her family's arrival in Sweden in the 1970s. The most striking aspect of her story is the great love and longing for Sweden that her father expressed more than anyone. For a Kurdish socialist and atheist from Turkey, Olof Palme's Sweden appeared to be the best society on earth, a modern country that offered freedom and prosperity to everyone and a chance for his family to begin a new life.

What is the Sweden that the immigrants of 2010 from Iraq, Somalia and Moldova long for? Is there a narrative about Sweden that can attract new Swedes at all? In what political visions can these groups see their own life stories? Obviously the 1970s image of Sweden was false. As we've said, that is the point of myths. But it did serve a purpose. For politically red Chileans, Kurds and Iranians the path into Swedish society was shorter, partly because it was easier for them to identify with the political narrative.

Nationalism can be rejected or affirmed, and national identities can be strengthened, altered or opposed by political means. All of the alternatives are legitimate. On the other hand it is extremely counterproductive – if the objective is to understand how integration functions in Sweden – to downplay the importance of national identity and ignore how national self-images are constructed and used.

⁴⁷ *The Economist* (2009)

5. CONCLUSIONS

Today immigration to Sweden exceeds 100,000 people per year. It's difficult to imagine a more heterogeneous group of people: the group that decides to settle down here every year encompasses all of the world's continents and religions, and there are a large number of languages and ethnicities. Some are wealthy, while others have neither funds nor education. Some are healthy and ready to look for work right away, while others suffer from illness or mental health problems, and are in great need of care.

Nor is the experience of migration a common denominator. Some have left their native area for the first time, and have ended up in Sweden for various reasons. Others have migrated several times in the past, and have been immigrants in several countries. The group includes both ethnic Swedes returning to Sweden and people who had never heard of a land called Sweden before. Some have left their families behind while others come to be reunited with their loved ones. The majority will remain here for the rest of their lives, but a large minority choose to move on after a while.

Despite the obvious absurdity of generalizing about "the immigrants," the notion of a more or less homogenous immigrant group with special needs has lain over the Swedish immigration debate like a wet blanket ever since the 1960s. This is a destructive idea that conceals the tremendous diversity that immigration to Sweden has created, rendering the ethnicity, culture and religion of hundreds of thousands of residents invisible in public discourse, as well as locking all of these people into a conceptual non-Swedishness that is nearly impossible to escape.

Above all it distances the public debate from a reality where people long ago ceased to regard themselves, or to expect to be regarded, as immigrants.

This report has sought to illuminate the Swedish immigration debate by critically examining how the concept of integration is used and what this says about prevailing standards and ideals in Sweden. I've contrasted integration with assimilation, equality and identity in order to see what remains of integration when you peel away the other three concepts. The answer is: not much.

First I have argued that in practice integration often means assimilation. Certainly the term "assimilation" carries a heavy normative load, but this does not prevent an assimilation ideal from clearly living on, not only in Swedish opinion but in political debate as well. But

the Swedish debate is less clearly structured than the debates in comparable countries such as Germany and Great Britain, where integration is presented as a clear alternative to multiculturalism, or in France and the US, where the ideal is still expressed in terms of assimilation. As I have tried to demonstrate, the advantage of the assimilation concept is that it enables a discussion of how much unity is needed in a society, and in which areas an immigrant can and should adapt to the majority culture.

Secondly, I have argued that the Swedish integration debate is dominated by an ideal of equality at the expense of an ideal of freedom. Integration is measured in terms of equality between groups, at the aggregate level. The differing fates of Swedes and immigrants are interpreted simultaneously as both integration and equality problems, with the consequence that in practice it becomes difficult to distinguish between integration and equality. While this is entirely normal from a leftist ideological perspective, it's remarkable that Swedish center-right politicians and debaters have tended to prioritize requirements for bans, sanctions and the setting of standards concerning symbolic political issues with no ideological support (language requirements, burqa bans, social contracts), instead of designing a liberal integration policy that sets higher priority on the individual and civil society rather than the collective and the state. The integration policy debate would be improved if the left and the right became more visible alternatives, and more attention was paid to issues of the individual vs. the collective and civil society vs. the state.

Thirdly, I have argued that integration is extremely difficult to separate from identity. In practice "Swedish" and integrated converge: a person who is integrated is Swedish and a person who is not Swedish is not integrated. Meanwhile Swedish identity is often highlighted as an obstacle to integration. The background here is that the multiculturalism of the 1970s and 1980s was ideologically associated with anti-nationalism: tolerance and openness toward other cultures were associated with rejection of one's own culture. But the existence of a Swedish majority culture in and of itself does not constitute an integration problem. National symbols and myths can be both inclusive and exclusive. The problem is that the dominant view of Swedishness makes it difficult to combine with other identities. One is either Swedish or something else, not Swedish and something else (Muslim, immigrant, Kurdish).

It should be said that the right and the left have extremely different views of reality all the same. This is positive. Integration policy has been protected from ideological debate for too long. But there are no valid reasons to debate integration policy on different terms from other areas of policy.

For center-right politicians and debaters, the challenge is to get away from symbolic politics. As long as integration policy rhetoric gets bogged down in what is completely apparent to the overwhelming majority - that new arrivals to a country obey the law and have the curiosity to try to learn the language, traditions and social systems - the important issues will remain unaddressed. What is perhaps most important is the fact that the combination of a large public bureaucracy and a society that is increasingly heterogeneous concerning issues such as the view of individual liberty, the concept of family and gender roles, makes it significantly more difficult to guarantee the equal treatment of all citizens. This is made even more difficult if the goal is equal outcomes rather than equal rights. There's a large opening, to put it delicately, in Swedish debate for a person who wants to use liberal arguments – as opposed to the rigid conceptions of identity politics – to defend the right of minorities to be different from the majority.

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