

# MECHANISMS OF EXCLUSION AND CONTROVERSIES ON INTEGRATION

NOTES ON THE SCANDINAVIAN MINORITY SITUATIONS

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Some interesting similarities and differences concerning the immigration policies of the three Scandinavian countries make comparisons interesting, and what I intend to do in this brief contribution is to look at the social logics of integration and exclusion in the three countries. Sweden has received many more immigrants and refugees in recent decades than Denmark and Norway, both in absolute and in relative numbers. Foreign-born residents now make up about ten per cent of the total Swedish population, while the percentage in Denmark and Norway is between 4 and 5; however, these figures include Western European and north American immigrants as well -- groups which in all countries comprise about half of the actual immigrant population, but which are not included in the popular conceptions of immigrants. The term "immigrant" in Scandinavia suggests a physically distinct (dark-skinned) member of the working-class, employed or unemployed. In popular discourse (and in this article), it is not common to distinguish between labour migrants, typically arrived during the 1960s and 1970s, and refugees, who have arrived under very different conditions in the 1980s and 1990s. In Sweden, Yugoslavs and Syrians form large communities, while Turks form the largest single group in Denmark and Pakistanis occupy a similar place in Norway. In all three countries, the tendency is for immigrants to be most numerous in the metropolitan areas -- in greater Copenhagen, greater Stockholm, Malmö and the Oslo region. Finally, the public debates over immigration have followed similar lines in all three countries, where issues regarding linguistic pluralism,

religious rights, exclusion from the labour market and crime rates have figured prominently.

It would probably be fair to say, as a general statement, that research and public debate over immigration and immigrant policy have moved since the 1970s from a chiefly sociological to a more anthropological point of view. A couple of decades ago, the main focus was on ethnic discrimination, social marginalisation and economic exploitation. Today, both research and media attention is instead focused on issues relating to identification and cultural dynamics. In this, immigrant research has followed the fashions characteristic of social research in general.

Some final similarities between the Scandinavian countries have to be mentioned. Notwithstanding their mutual differences, all three countries have social democratic welfare states which are still trying to protect the rights of all citizens; they have their small extreme-right fringe groups which militantly and occasionally violently oppose the current dilution of pure Germanic appearance and language in the population, as well as larger population segments which oppose the new poly-ethnic situation in more moderate ways.

A main problem has been perceived, by the political authorities in the three countries, as the problem of integration. How should the immigrant populations be integrated in such a way as to enable them to enjoy equal rights and equal opportunities to the majority population? There is a characteristic Scandinavian way of framing this issue, although it is dealt with somewhat differently in Norway, Denmark and Sweden:

1. The idea of social engineering is still powerful. The good and just society is, according to this vision, achieved by giving all inhabitants the same formal rights and opportunities through the institutions of the nation-state. Large-scale, standardised solutions to specific problems are believed to apply universally. The state is responsible for implementing and monitoring the processes of integration of immigrants.

In one of the most penetrating recent studies of the political predicament of immigrants in Sweden, Thomas Gür (*Staten och nykomlingarna*) argued very powerfully that the strong involvement of the state prevents the use and development of informal networks, and thereby tends to turn immigrants into clients. Comparing the situation of immigrants in Sweden with that prevailing in countries such as Canada and Australia, he shows how different immigrant groups, drawing on specific social resources, rapidly become autonomous and self-sufficient in countries where the state encourages independent initiatives and does not seek to standardise the behaviour of immigrants by subjecting them to a rigid bureaucratic regime. Another general point in relation to the ideology of social engineering is that "immigrants" is merely a lump term bringing together individuals, families and larger groups in extremely different situations, and that any policy based on standardised solutions (relating to e.g. language training, employment strategies and education) is bound to fail, since the requirements of different groups and individuals vary significantly.

2. There is no terminological distinction between similarity and equality in the Scandinavian languages. Since *likhet/lighed*, which has positive connotations, translates both as similarity and as equality, an automatic equivalence are established between the two. When the international youth campaign "Equal but different" was launched in Norway, thus, it was difficult to translate the slogan. "Lik, men forskjellig" (Similar/equal, but different) evidently did not make sense. As a consequence, similarity is believed to be a necessary condition for equality. The general conflation between the two meanings of "likhet" leaves the impression that cultural difference (from "us") is tantamount to lacking something as the other is still not "equal" (i.e. similar); and also contributes to creating a total muddle of most debates over cultural rights. One cannot, within this conceptual framework, be culturally different and politically equal.

Many immigrants feel that they have been offered the worst of both worlds in this respect: They are offered similarity (especially in the Norwegian case) in the realms of language and religion, where many of them demand the right to

be different; while they are not offered equality in the realms of education and work, where equal treatment is essential for integration proper to come about.

3. There is also an awkward double-bind in official communication about culture, due to an inadequate understanding of culture. Immigrants have generally been faced with an impossible choice: either become culturally Scandinavian, or retain your own culture. Of course, neither option is feasible in practice. One can never shed one's cultural background entirely, even in a totally new cultural environment, but one cannot retain it unmodified in a new environment either.

Concerning the conceptualisation of culture, there has been a general shift in recent years, at least among activists and researchers, which has not adequately followed up by policy makers and politicians. Rather than conceiving of the world as consisting of neatly bounded, clearly delineated "cultures", theorists now see culture as a dynamic field marked by flows and variation rather than a fixed entity with definite boundaries. For this reason, ideas contrasting "their culture" and "our culture" proliferate and underlie a lot of policies. This way of thinking implies a strong cultural determinism: The problems experienced by immigrants are provided with cultural explanations. Usually, this cultural determinism goes together with an idea of the "white man's burden", but it is also sometimes activated in a relativist context where "the other culture" is seen as equivalent to "our culture". Both stances imply impossible options, strengthen boundaries between "us and them", and freeze culture in the same fashion as Romantic nationalism does.

Cultural variation is difficult to reconcile with nationhood and the integration of minorities in all three countries, and immigrants remain a category apart. However, the causes of exclusion differ between Denmark, Norway and Sweden. In Denmark, it may be said that "den danske hygge", "Danish coziness", functions as an efficient mechanism of exclusion at the level of informal social interaction. Informal Danish coziness, which is proverbially enacted around a table with plenty of food and drink, is a pleasant form of interaction for all who take part, but not for those who do not, who are by

default excluded. In Sweden, it may be said that it is the notion of equal opportunity, which does not encompass variation, and which is embedded in the welfare state ideology, which excludes immigrants since they tend to be culturally different from the majority in one or several respects and thus are not allowed to achieve equality. In Norway, finally, the prevalent cultural notion of nationhood, which also has a strong ethnic component, is impossible to disentangle from politics and the discourse on inclusion and exclusion. In other words, it could be said that immigrants are excluded for Enlightenment causes in Sweden, for Romantic causes in Norway, and through processes of informal social life in Denmark. Characteristically, intellectuals in the three countries have dealt with the problem of integration in different ways. In Denmark, a recent heated debate was initiated by sociologist Mehmet Ümit Necef's notion of "the white woman's burden": Necef argued, only partly satirically, that for immigrants to become properly integrated into Danish society, they had to be allowed into the beds of Danish women. In other words, the problem of integration was located to informal social life. In Norway, a main controversy in recent years has been over a proposed Muslim school, which was turned down by the government -- a conflict over culture and the legitimacy of tradition(s). A similarly prominent, and recurrent, debate in Sweden took as its cue accusations of bureaucratisation of immigrant problems, which weakens civil society -- in other words, a controversy involving the role of the state.

This analysis, of course, is insufficient and simplistic. My aim has merely been to call attention to some general similarities *and* differences between the respective discourses on the integration of immigrants in the three Scandinavian countries, and to point out that there may be different causes for the same kinds of effect, such as the exclusion of immigrants from particular arenas in host societies.

What is at stake for immigrants in Scandinavia as well as elsewhere in Western Europe, is personal autonomy. Factors militating against it are the straitjacket of Romantic nationalism making it impossible even for second- or third generation immigrant to be fully integrated, state policies treating

immigrants as a single group and natives as individuals, and informal practices preventing immigrant from taking part in communal life.

The difficulties of coming to terms with culture, the monolithic ideology of social engineering and the conflation of equality with similarity are three dimensions of the conceptual framework preventing true equality between natives and immigrants. The results are visible in the high unemployment numbers, poor scholarly achievements and increasing crime rates among immigrants. In the future, policies should make it their first priority to prevent clientification of immigrants. In order to achieve this, it is not sufficient -- or even desirable -- to introduce quotas or "affirmative action" policies in the educational system or the labour market. First, immigrants and their children must be able to feel that they are part of society; that the abstract "we" of nationhood's imagined community encompasses them. In order for this to come about, true pluralism is required. Mixed and hybrid identities, hitherto seen as anomalies or even perversions, must be seen as perfectly normal; the cultural fundamentalism forcing persons to take on ill-fitting cultural identities must be abandoned. In brief, the compass of nationhood must be expanded. In this, the three Scandinavian countries are faced with the same problem, although solutions have to be locally adapted in each case because the causes of the problem are local.

What is called for is a pluralism which does not divide the population into mutually exclusive groups, which recognises hybrid forms while simultaneously allowing people to make conservative choices. In other words, the values of equality prevalent, at least formally, in politics and in the economy, must be prevented from spilling over into civil society and the domestic sphere. If cultural similarity is required for social integration to be successful, the result will be fundamentalism on both sides, and the hybrids, who are, if anything, the true-born children of the migration process, will become even more marginal in relation to public discourse and the state; which would be very damaging indeed, since those individuals embody our only hopes for a colour-blind and pluralist future.