Accommodating Difference or Ensuring Sameness?
Integration Policy in Sweden

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In the summer of 2004, the Swedish national daily newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, made front page news out of the Integration Minister's announcement that Sweden had structural racism. The Minister, Mona Sahlin, suggested that instead of placing the impetus on immigrants to integrate and conform to Swedish standards, the majority needs to question whether their actions are preventing immigrants from fully participating in society. Furthermore, she indicated that Sweden needs to move from discussing 'integration' to embrace a politics aimed at anti-discrimination (Stenberg, 2004). This discursive shift in Swedish integration politics raises a number of questions about how immigrants are received by their host society, the responsibilities of both immigrants and the host society for integration, and of how to best promote equality – by treating everyone the same or through the recognition and accommodation of difference.

This last issue, raised frequently by feminist theorists, looks to the 'dilemma of difference' (di Stefano, 1990). While some feminists argue that gender differences should be downplayed in order to emphasize and focus on gender equality, others suggest that this approach posits a 'false universalism' that tends to reinforce traditional forms of sexism. Instead, advocates of difference believe that the characteristics that tend to define women's difference should be advanced as an alternative model. (Warnke, 1995; di Stefano 1990; Flax, 1990; Anthias 1991 and 1998)

As suggested above, a similar debate has emerged in response to immigration and the challenges posed by the resulting societal diversity. This paper explores this issue with regard to Swedish integration policy. Beginning with a brief discussion of the idea of 'sameness' in Swedish political culture, the paper then proceeds to an overview of Swedish immigration and integration policies, focusing in particular on recent developments in integration policy. The paper asks whether these policies aim at achieving equality by treating everyone the same or by recognizing the differences represented by immigrants with differential treatment.[1] In response, I argue that while Sweden has tried to follow a 'middle way' with regard to the integration of immigrants, they continue to impose an assimilationist model of integration on newcomers.

[1] While this paper tends to discuss immigrants and Swedish people, or Swedish-born and foreign-born residents, I do not mean to suggest that these are homogenous groups. In fact, part of the difficulty of recognizing the challenge of difference posed by immigrants within Swedish society is to also recognize the diversity within immigrant groups and communities, and within mainstream Swedish society.

Ensuring Sameness?

The Swedish welfare state is probably the defining feature of Swedish identity in the twentieth century. Leigh Oakes argues: "If it is possible at all to discuss the core of national Swedish identity, that core would be this notion of modernity, of being part of modern Sweden, part of an advanced, highly developed, rationally organized country whose leading principles are justice and social welfare" (Oakes, 2001: 70). Both the Swedish state's discourses and its citizens are characterized by a strong belief in compromise, equality and the avoidance of conflict. They are neutral, reserved, and pragmatic. They are "organized, regulated and disciplined" (Ålund, 1991a: 82). These characteristics are both the source of the rise of the welfare state in Sweden, with its accompanying strong tradition of corporatism, and the product of the huge role of the welfare state in the average Swede's life. The Swedish model, and the idea of equality that underpins it, is very much based on a premise of sameness – the idea that all Swedish people are basically the same and should therefore be entitled to equal rights, responsibilities and benefits. This understanding is itself rooted in Swedish history where the primary difference between individuals and groups in society was one of class difference. Thus, the Swedish model, advancing an idea of equality as sameness, attempted to build a social democratic welfare state society in which those differences would be diminished.[2]

While it may seem that a model based on ensuring socio-economic equality would be well prepared to address various other forms of disadvantage, in reality, the introduction of ethnic, cultural and racial difference proved to be a serious challenge to the Swedish model. Mikael Hjerm (2005) argues against the assumption that the social democratic welfare state helps with the integration of immigrants. In fact, he suggests that "social exclusion along ethnic boundaries is one of the most acute and challenging problems facing the Swedish welfare state today" (Hjerm, 2005: 135). Thus, the problems associated with immigration are exacerbated by the welfare state, rather than addressed by it, precisely because the welfare state itself is premised on the homogeneity of the population.

Lagom, a Swedish word that has no direct translation to English although similar words exist in neighbouring languages, is also at the core of Swedish identity. For something to be 'lagom' is the highest praise in Swedish society, carrying the connotation of perfection and appropriateness. Lagom is neither too much, nor too little – it is just about enough and just about right (a bit like Goldilocks and the Three Bears). Don Belt (1993) describes the idea of lagom as an all-purpose definition of what is acceptable and is not acceptable. " 'Lagom is best,' the Swedes say, meaning reasonable, in moderation, with no extremes. 'To be average is good in Sweden… To be different is bad'" (Belt, 1993:

[2] Even gender differences, and the women's movements which arose from them in the second half of the 20th century, were 'resolved' through the introduction of policies that had the state take over certain responsibilities related to families and care in order to enable the equal participation of women in the paid workforce.

22). The middle way of lagom can be seen throughout Swedish society and in the compromises between capitalism and social welfare, equality and liberty. This concept, however, also makes it difficult to recognize or value difference within Swedish society or to create different policies and programs for different groups.

The multicultural reality of contemporary Sweden represents a serious challenge to state actors and institutions. The Swedish state, however, has made an effort to bring policy in line with its rapidly diversified population. It offers a high level of rights, benefits and programs to immigrants and refugees – effectively, they are treated the same as all Swedish citizens, with the exception of some limitations on political rights. Integration policy is, effectively, a response to the challenge of difference posed by diverse immigration. It does recognize that new immigrants – particularly those belonging to the refugee or family reunification classes – need special programs and policies. In other words, they require a measure of different treatment. Still, this is viewed within the policies as an aberration and the goal of an effective integration policy is, ultimately, that everyone can be treated the same again. Unfortunately, as the following sections demonstrate, this focus on individual equality, combined with a shift away from multiculturalism to integration, resulted in greater inequality between Swedish-born and foreign-born residents. The following sections explore the willingness and ability of Swedish immigration and integration policies to both accommodate the difference represented by new immigrants and promote equality for both Swedish-born and foreign-born residents.

The Politics of Immigration and Integration: Accommodating Difference?

While Sweden has always experienced some immigration, it is only in recent decades that immigrant numbers reached a level where they began to challenge the organization of the Swedish society, the state and the assumptions underpinning it. Since the Second World War, immigration to Sweden has remained tied to international political events. Approximately 2.1 million people have immigrated to Sweden and 1.2 million have emigrated from Sweden in the post-war period, either to return home or to live elsewhere in the world (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2001: 19). Sweden is viewed as a desirable place to seek refuge because of the high standard of living, the attractive welfare state benefits, high wages, low unemployment, good housing and the high quality of the education system (Ohlsson, 1995: 86). Immigration has increased dramatically since the Second World War and the nature of immigration has changed from imported workers to refugees and immigration based on family reunification. The number of permits to stay and work in Sweden doubled in the 1980s and more immigrants are remaining in Sweden than ever before (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2001: 19). As a result, immigration is literally changing the face of Sweden.

Today, one in five residents of Sweden has some non-Swedish background (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2001: 30). This increase represents a significant change in Swedish demographics. As Oakes (2001) points out: “Unlike the immigrants of the past, who on the whole were not substantially culturally distant from the Swedes, the Yugoslavs,

Turks, Greeks and others who arrived in the post-war years constituted a major challenge to Swedish identity" (Oakes, 2001: 112). Not only did many of the new arrivals look differently than the average Swede, they struggled to maintain their distinctive cultural practices and were of significant enough numbers that they began to raise the idea of what it meant to be Swedish in a multicultural Sweden.

The phases of immigration and integration policy are summarized below:

> **Phase One:** ***Prior to 1945*** – Early immigration and emigration was relatively unrestricted. During the war years (1914-1945), Sweden began to implement immigration and refugee legislation and created authorities for managing the movement of people.
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> **Phase Two:** ***1945 to the late 1980s*** – Following the war, immigrants were recruited to fill labour needs and assimilation was considered to be an automatic process. In the late 1960s and 1970s, there was a shift towards multiculturalism in Sweden, while at the same time immigration controls became more restrictive as there was a change from recruiting labour based immigrants to receiving refugees.
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> **Phase Three:** ***Late 1980s to the Present*** – Stricter control of immigration continues. There is a renewed emphasis on integration of immigrants into Swedish culture and language, as opposed to multiculturalism. With EU membership, an increase in EU and professional immigration occurs.
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> (adapted from Hammar, 1999: 172-3)

Immigration Policy in Sweden

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, immigration in Sweden was driven by the need for workers. Sweden's industries and economy were booming as a result of Sweden's intact infrastructure after the war and the demand for goods in the rest of Europe. In the 1960s, labour immigration rose sharply sparking debates on immigration and calls for restrictions, primarily from the Trade Unions and women's organisations, both of which were concerned about the risk of flooding the labour market (Blanck and Tydén, 1994: 59). Up until then – largely because of the primarily European origins of immigrants, the lower numbers of immigrants (and refugees in particular) arriving, and the relative ease with which they were assimilated – immigration was not a contentious political issue in Sweden. In fact, until the late 1960s, assimilation was considered to be an automatic social process and immigrants were expected to adapt without a specific policy or assistance (Hammar, 1999: 172). This approach appeared to work as immigrants were forcibly assimilated – they had no choice if they wanted to keep their employment and stay in Sweden. However, as the Swedish economy began to weaken and issues surrounding immigration and integration arose. Measures for controlling immigration were introduced in 1967 that required immigrants to Sweden to have employment, a work permit and housing before entering the country (Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2001: 16).[3]

[3] These new regulations did not include people from other Nordic countries (Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland) who retained their right to move freely between the countries.

By 1970, labour immigration ceased altogether as industry labour demands were met and over the next two decades the sources of immigration shifted to primarily family reunification, asylum seekers from southeastern Europe, and the freedom of movement of professionals within the European Union. Sweden currently receives approximately 50 000 immigrants and refugees per year and is one of the larger receiving countries in Europe on a per capita basis (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000: 25-28). The majority of immigrants live in the major urban centres of Gothenburg, Malmö and Stockholm. Stockholm has the largest proportion of foreign born people in Sweden at 17% of the city population (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2001: 31).

Since 1975, the main goal of Swedish immigration and integration policy has been equality (Soininen, 1999: 687). This has been achieved in the sense that few differences exist between Swedish citizens and permanent residents in terms and benefits, as well as through the easy attainment of Swedish citizenship following a number of years residency and, more recently, a new law allowing dual citizenship (Gustafson, 2002). The idea behind Swedish policy was that immigration would be regulated by the ability of the government to ensure the economic equality and standard of living between immigrants and the rest of society (Soininen, 1999: 688). In practice, however, the gap in living conditions and opportunities between Swedish-born and foreign-born individuals is increasing (Soininen, 1999; Gustafson, 2002; Hjerm 2005; Integrationsverket 2001 and 2006).

Over a period of less than a century, Sweden changed from a relatively homogenous society into a multicultural country – at least in terms of population, if not in terms of its institutions, culture or identity. As the following section shows, however, immigrants continue to face serious barriers in Sweden. In typical Swedish fashion, its policies and programs are formally very progressive, founded strongly on the idea of equality and 'sameness' for all, and aimed at protecting the rights of the newcomers to Sweden. However, they fail to address the realities brought on by increasing diversity. This diversity has proven to be a challenge to Swedish policy, institutions and identity.

Integration Policy in Sweden

In 1968, the Invandrarutredningskomissionen (Immigration Investigation Commission) was established. The Commission set out goals and guidelines for a special immigrant policy wherein immigrants would hold the same rights and obligations as Swedish citizens. The Commission also stressed the importance of the immigrant's own culture (Södergran, 2000: 3). The conclusions of the commission seemed to signal a clear deviation from the previous assimilationist stance in Sweden and led to the development of Sweden's multicultural policy. In 1974, the Swedish Constitution was amended to include a section stating that "the possibilities for ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities to maintain and develop their own cultural and religious life shall be supported" (Blanck and Tydén, 1994: 63). In 1975, Sweden introduced a multicultural policy, which was built around the framework of three concepts: equality, freedom of choice, and cooperation or partnership (jämlikhet, valfrihet, och samverkan).

Tomas Hammar summarizes the original intent of these three overarching principles (which are a bold paraphrase of the French Revolution's liberté, egalité et fraternité), in the following way:

> The goal of *equality* implies the continued efforts to give immigrants the same living standard as the rest of the population. The goal of *freedom of choice* implies that public initiatives are to be taken to assure members of ethnic and linguistic minorities domiciled in Sweden a genuine choice between retaining and developing their cultural identity and assuming a Swedish cultural identity. The goal of *partnership* implies that the different immigrant and minority groups on the one hand and the native population of the other both benefit from working together. (Quoted in Ålund and Schierup, 1991: 2)

At the time, these goals implied that not only would foreigners enjoy the same legal privileges as Swedish citizen, but also that the general public would accept these multicultural aims (Ålund and Schierup, 1991: 3). The emphasis on sameness and similar treatment is problematic, however, as it assumes that equality is achieved by treating everyone the same as opposed to recognizing that difference may require different treatment and policies in order to achieve substantive equality. Also, the idea that immigrants have the freedom to choose whether to be 'Swedish' or maintain their cultural distinctiveness is somewhat naive. As most immigrants in Sweden and their children are aware, it is not possible to 'become' Swedish without the proper last name or skin colour.

Westin and Dingu-Kyrklund argue that the aim of Swedish integration policy is to smooth the road (or even the playing field) for immigrants in Swedish society (Westin and Dingu-Kyrklund, 1997: 59). Furthermore, the treatment and rights accorded to immigrants can be seen as a product of Swedish belief in the welfare society and that everyone should be 'pretty much the same' or no better than anyone else. The role of the Swedish state, then, is to ensure that immigrants have access to the services they need to integrate and be part of Swedish society, whether this is through housing, work, language classes or social services. However, immigrants are having an increasingly difficult time fitting into Swedish society. They experience higher health problems, unemployment and social exclusion (Westin and Dingu-Kyrklund, 1997: 60; Integrationsverket 2001 and 2006) and not all of this can be attributed to their 'immigrant' status and 'native' culture, but rather must be accounted for by considering the characteristics of the 'host' society.

By 1985 the political climate on issues of immigration shifted again from promoting multiculturalism to cultural protectionism. This was the culmination of a variety of factors coming together, including the increased diversity, segregation and poverty of recent immigrants, economic shifts, the resurgence of right-wing extremism, and a number of policy changes. The Swedish government advanced the argument the previous policy endorsed "values that differed markedly from those enshrined in Swedish legislation and law" and that it was not possible to "accept customs or norms that deviated from what society had clearly supported" (Soininen, 1999: 690). The

multicultural policy was modified to state that: “freedom of choice must not be interpreted in such a way that it results in a repudiation of the Swedish language or the larger Swedish community of interest” (Blanck and Tydén, 1994: 64). At the same time, the minister responsible for immigration asserted that the term ‘minority’ was not to be applied to Swedish immigrants (Blanck and Tydén, 1994: 64-5). In this sense, immigrant groups could not make claims on the state on the basis of minority status. This directive reinforced the individualistic emphasis of Swedish multicultural policy – individual immigrants have rights and choices, but maintenance of their culture remains an individual choice and within the private sphere of life. Thus, one might argue that Swedish multicultural policy is about addressing the presence of immigrants in Sweden and providing them with rights, without really trying to change Swedish culture itself. The idea of a coherent and homogenous Swedish culture as a norm against which immigrant culture can be measured is still strongly present.

By the mid-1980s, discourses around immigrants had clearly shifted away from the position of the mid-1970s, when internationalization was seen as a positive development to one concerned with the impact of immigrants on Swedish society. The 1990s witnessed the continuation of this trend with a more xenophobic and restrictive Swedish immigration policy combined with integration policies that were increasingly focused on the individual (Gustafson, 2002: 468). During this time, there was also a general questioning of the role of the state in Swedish society and economy leading to emerging discourses around individual self-sufficiency. With regards to immigrant integration, the emphasis shifted even more to the individual responsibility to participate in Swedish social and economic life and share responsibility (Soininen, 1999: 692). This emphasis on individuals and their success or failure at managing on their own and meeting the norms of Swedish society became the focal point of Swedish integration policy, overshadowing earlier discourses and efforts at multiculturalism that aimed to change society as a whole.

Recent Developments in Swedish Integration Politics

Demetrios G. Papademetriou (2003) outlines three models for the integration of immigrants. He argues that the assimilationist model requires the “one-way adoption of the host society’s social and cultural values” and ultimately acts as a barrier to successful integration by sharpening the perception of group differences (Papademetriou, 2003). The multiculturalism model, on the other hand, is highly contested because of the perceived social and economic costs associated with the model, as well as the belief by many that it undermines social cohesion (Papademetriou, 2003). Instead, Papdemetriou suggests that successful integration lies in continuous interaction and mutual adjustments and accommodation. “A model grounded in equity and mutuality, and a more organic rather than forced pace of adaptation, holds the promise” (Papademetriou, 2003). Such a process requires a great deal from immigrants as they adapt to their new home; however, it also places an impetus on the host society to actively engage with immigrants and immigrant cultures in a positive and progressive manner that will shape the development of their now-common space.

While the third may prove to be an ideal form of integration, the following section demonstrates that Sweden continues to move closer to an assimilationist model, implicitly rejecting the ideas of multiculturalism and mutuality. Rather than accommodating the 'difference' that comes from immigration and integrating that difference into Swedish social and political life, the Swedish state continues to promote 'sameness' as a criteria for belonging.

In 2001, the Swedish Integration Board released a report (Integrationsverket, 2001) on their work of the past ten years. The report acknowledged that Swedish integration policy failed to meet its goals and that the situation and segregation of immigrants in Swedish society needed to be addressed. The report noted that Sweden has become a multicultural country and that immigrants were not a homogenous group. Further, the report acknowledged that integration poses a substantial challenge and that a great divide exists in Sweden between Swedish-born and foreign-born residents. The Integration Board's report stated that foreign-born residents in Sweden were far more likely that Swedes to be unemployed and that many are stuck in long-term dependence on social assistance, remaining at the margins of Swedish society (Intergrationsverket, 2001: 9). Others have difficulty in finding work corresponding to their education, skills and knowledge. As well, immigrant children generally have worse results in school, perpetuating these patterns of marginalization (ibid.).

As part of its effort to create positive conditions for integration, the Integration Board's report outlined a new strategy for working together with different actors, including state authorities, communities, companies, labour organizations, NGOs, schools, colleges and universities. With the goal of creating the same rights, obligations and possibilities for all people in Sweden, the new strategy would individualize the process and framework of integration by bringing the 'individual into focus' (Integrationsverket 2001, 10). Concentrating on a need to develop a common and long-term vision and plan for integration and diversity based on cooperation with all sectors of society and the creation of coordinated policies, the primary goal of the strategy was to create the conditions for immigrants to be 'self-sufficient' and 'self-reliant' (Integrationsverket, 2001: 17).

While this approach may represent a positive shift from the previous method under which all immigrants received the same introduction to Swedish society, there is substantial evidence of a more individualistic approach. This is reinforced by the emphasis on labour force participation for immigrants (as though employment will solve the integration problems) and the recurring use of words such as self-sufficient and self-reliant. The emphasis is on the individual to find a job, thereby contributing to and being a part of Swedish society. Also, while the report notes that immigrants face barriers to employment, there are few concrete suggestions for how these barriers can be overcome (Integrationsverket, 2001: 18). The ongoing and pervasive racism within Swedish society and hiring practices remains unaddressed. The emphasis is not on changing the structures of society, but on moulding immigrants to accommodate the exclusionary social structures and 'fit in' where they can, despite the active structuring of immigrants as outsiders.

In short, while the report acknowledged the failure of the previous integration strategies, the proposed plan of action promised to do little to eradicate the real barriers to the meaningful participation and inclusion of immigrants in Swedish society. Also, the focus on employment as the primary site of integration reflects a neo-liberal bias that the only (or best) way to participate and contribute to society is by working hard and paying taxes. This emphasis is further reinforced by the movement of the Integration Board from under the responsibility of the Department of Culture to the Department of Industry. Thus, while the goals of Swedish integration policy are to achieve equality for all residents of Sweden, it appears that equality is measured in a very limited way – through workforce participation. This approach may help facilitate functional integration, but does little to address the systemic racism within Swedish society or to promote their cultural or social integration.

The findings of the *Integration Report 2001* are largely restated within *Integration Report 2005* (Integrationsverket, 2006). The more recent report again acknowledges the failures of Swedish integration policy – focusing in particular on unemployment rates among immigrants, housing segregation, and unequal education opportunities – while simultaneously noting that studies of integration among European Union countries rates rate the conditions in Sweden among the best. Sweden's high ranking, however, along with that of Belgium and the Netherlands, reflects the legal and policy frameworks in place and not the resulting levels of immigrant integration (Integrationsverket, 2006: 11). The report concludes that "Inadequate integration in Sweden, therefore, can hardly be explained by immigrants not having formal equal rights" (Integrationsverket, 2006: 12) and proceeds to set out a new agenda for 'integration and diversity.'

The recommendations of the report are divided into five sections. First, the report states the "jobs are the lever for integration" (Integrationsverket, 2006: 15). The labour market needs to be opened up in order to reduce residential segregation, and thereby also improve the access of immigrants to good schools (Integrationsverket, 2006: 15). Second, the report states the need for initiatives to counteract discrimination. Without providing concrete mechanisms for doing so, the report states that:

> Measures against discrimination should be based on the principle of equal treatment. Focusing on equal treatment reduces the risk of special negative treatment for [the] foreign-born. ... integration will be better served by emphasizing equal rights, equal obligations and equal opportunities. It is in the general policy that we ought to seek the solutions, and not via special solutions based on group affiliation. (Integrationsverket, 2006: 17).

Third, the report recommends improving the newcomer's introduction process in Sweden by helping them to get a job and learn the language. However, the report also states that "At the end of this period no particular efforts should be made on behalf of immigrants" (Integrationsverket, 2006: 17). Fourth, the report recommends addressing residential segregation by making the housing allocation process more open and transparent in order to reduce discrimination (Integrationsverket, 2006: 17-8). Finally, the Integration Report 2005 recommends further research to determine the impact of these policies (2006: 18).

Generally speaking, the direction of this report is very similar to the earlier version from 2001. In fact, this report merely continues to develop the individualism and focus on the immigrants as both the source of and solution to the problem found in *Integration Report 2001*. While recognizing the challenges faced by new arrivals in Sweden and putting in place initiatives to assist them in the beginning, the 2005 report remains true to the idea of sameness in Swedish society and the promotion of equality through equal treatment. By focusing on individual economic differences, as opposed to the diverse structural and societal barriers that immigrants in Sweden continue to face *long* after their initial period is over, the Integration Board again fails to understand the nature of the problem in Sweden or to provide an adequate way to change the situation and revolutionize Swedish-immigrant relations.

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the integration department only recently began to speak about the pervasive and systemic nature of racism in Sweden. Mona Sahlin, the minister responsible for Integration from 2000-2004, publicly decried racism in Sweden and argued for a shift in policy and practice throughout the country (Stenberg, 2004). A recent government report placed part of the blame for racism in Sweden on the state's integration policies. As the primary author of the report, Professor Masoud Kamali, wrote "In practice there is a paradox, where Swedishness becomes a goal which is never reached … The whole policy is based on the idea of 'us and them.' (*The Local*, 2005).

Kamali's report represents a new and important discursive shift within the debate on immigrant integration in Sweden. Had the report been taken seriously, the emphasis on the individual in previous policy documents could have been replaced by an emphasis on society and societal responsibility for racism. In 2004, however, Sahlin was replaced by Jens Orback (Social Democrat) who dismissed the findings of the final report by Prof. Kamali (presented in 2006), including the recommendation that the Integration Department be dismantled on grounds that it was dividing Swedish society into an 'us' and 'them' (Bodin, 2006). Orback stated that he was unsatisfied with the scholarly quality of the research and would be sending it out for an external review by other interested stakeholders before addressing its contents in more detail. Kamali, in return, stated any changes depend upon political will, but argued that at least now the government cannot say that the information is not there (Bodin, 2006).

Despite the numerous reports indicating the problems within Swedish integration policy, the replacement of the social democrats with a new conservative coalition government in September 2006 further diminishes the possibility of a change in the direction of Swedish integration policy. While the new government has not implemented many specific changes with regard to the integration of immigrants, they continue to focus almost exclusively on labour force participation as a method for integration and have introduced one new policy ai

med at encouraging new arrivals to move to municipalities where the jobs are, as opposed to those with established immigrant communities and networks (*The Local*, 2007). This policy will further individualize the integration system, looking at "how each individual

can best approach the tasks of getting a job, learning Swedish and/or entering the education system" (*The Local*, 2007) and further downloading the process to the municipalities with subsidized municipal jobs for immigrants. This program is likely to evoke a response from the unions, who are unlikely to support subsidized jobs for 'some', deepening the conflicts between immigrants and mainstream Swedish society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the culture of Sweden can be described as one that emphasizes equality, in the sense of sameness. This culture of sameness is the basis for the Swedish welfare model and makes it very difficult to incorporate 'difference'. In many ways, Sweden has attempted to take the middle road in integration policy. However, the goal of the integration policy – despite a series of generous initial programs aimed at assisting new arrivals – remains the assimilation of immigrants. After an initial period, immigrants are assumed to no longer require 'special treatment' and the equal treatment that characterizes Swedish society is maintained. In this way, the goal of the Swedish integration policy is ultimately to ensure a level of sameness. Unfortunately, this approach – and subsequent denial of group difference or the need for Swedish society itself to adapt to the presence of immigrants – is, in fact, strengthening the differences between groups and deepening the divide between Swedes and immigrants.

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