



## **SWEDISH MULTICULTURALISM: Newly arrived Arab immigrants in Malmö**

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### **I-INTRODUCTION**

Until 1975, Swedish immigration policy was officially one of assimilation. The view was that immigrants should become Swedes, adopt Swedish manners and customs, and fit into Swedish society. This year marked a change in official immigration policies with regard to cultural pluralism. However, Sweden's multicultural policy was formulated in a period of stable economy, full employment and a clear tendency towards rapid growth.

In the following decades, the Swedish economy has weakened and unemployment has risen while the influx of refugees and immigrants has continued to grow. Segregation within Swedish society has begun to appear. This situation, in the early 1990s, created a reaction against immigration policy, and also against immigrants already established in Sweden. In 1988, in a local referendum in Sjöbo, a small municipality in southern Sweden, 65 percent of voters opposed the town's participation in the national refugee reception programme (Rystad Ed. 1992). In the summer of 1993, racist conflict appeared in Trollhättan, a municipality in Western Sweden with over 50,000 inhabitants, including 7,000 immigrants, and with a high rate of unemployment (15%). In the late 1990s, it became increasingly clear that the immigration policy was no longer adequate and that a better integration policy was required. The government decided that the focus should be on education, employment and housing segregation issues (Jederlund 1998).

This study analyses the main features of the Swedish multicultural policy and its shortcomings in terms of integrating newcomer Arab immigrants in the city of Malmö. It focuses on both national and international law with respect to immigrant rights and analyses the relation between these regulations and the real situation and demands of Arab immigrants. The process of Arab immigrant integration is analysed in the light of discrimination and marginalization, cultural identity and minority rights.

## II.-METHODOLOGY: DIFFICULT OPTIONS

### 1.-Opting for a case study

This critical case study starts out from the assumption that in-depth case analysis not only offers the researcher invaluable insights into the specificity of the case, but also suggest possible implications for comparison or theory reassessment. Although a case study, by definition, cannot grant the researcher the possibility of generalising the results, it opens up the possibility for deep exploration of the particularities of the case.

In discussing the claims of newly arrived Arab immigrants in terms of the aims of the Swedish pluralistic migration policy, I focus on Sweden's migration law, European law on migration and minority rights and the UN law on minority rights. I analyse how these laws interact and the ways and extent to which they affect the integration of Arab immigrants in Malmö. Arab immigrant integration is studied in four aspects of social life: 1) the labour market; 2) political and organisational life; 3) the housing market; 4) and, finally, the education system and cultural life.

### 2. - Selection of key respondents

I have selected two groups for the analysis: newcomer Arab immigrants in Malmö studying Swedish language at Lernia centre and various experts on immigrant integration issues.<sup>1</sup> The first group included all immigrants with Arabic as a mother tongue, who studied Swedish in HÖST and AKI, two programmes for people with an academic background at Lernia.<sup>2</sup> I chose Arab immigrants with an academic background because of the widespread opinion that immigrants with a university degree encounter more difficulties in integrating into Swedish society because of considerable competitiveness on the job market at this level ("Action plan to promote integration in the City of Malmö", 2000). The list of the Arab immigrants sample population was exhaustive, from all four levels of proficiency in the language course, and chosen independently of age and gender. The population studied consisted of 40 people, among whom 42.5 percent were women and 57.5 percent men. The majority had a university degree or at least a technical college qualification and had lived in Sweden for no more than four years. Of the 40 Arab

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1. Lernia, located on the outskirts of Malmö, is a company hired by the Malmö City Council to implement the SFI course (Swedish for immigrants) as part of the introductory programme. The programme is drawn up by the City Council and administered in collaboration with government agencies like the Swedish Migration Board and the Swedish National Integration Office, social agencies like the employment office and the social services office, and different voluntary organisations and associations (City of Malmö, Immigration Service, 1998).

2. The Högskola (university) programme (HÖST) comprises those immigrants who have a university degree or have studied at least two years at university. The Akademikerintroduktion (academic introduction) programme (AKI) is a new variant of the HÖST, designed especially for people who have a university degree or have studied at least three or four years at university, though exceptions are quite frequent.

immigrants interviewed, the majority are from Iraq (80%), while the others (20%) are from Palestine, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon.

The eight experts were chosen from Lernia, the Malmö City Council, the Malmö Immigration Office, housing associations and immigrant or cultural associations. The sample was constructed using the snowball technique.

### 3. - Data and sources

The case study is based on quantitative as well as qualitative data. I have obtained the quantitative data from a survey (a group-administered questionnaire) among new Arab immigrants in Malmö who had started the introductory programme. The qualitative data came from semi-structured interviews with the two sample groups. I used a loosely- structured formula, about issues like personal background and experience, cultural stereotypes, aspects of integration policy implementation - housing, labour market, political and organisational life, education and culture. Interviews were only carried out with English-speaking Arab immigrants, ten of the forty respondents, and experts on immigrant issues. Another method I used was observation. I was mainly an observer, but also a co-participant in class activities. I spent some time among the respondents during the breaks, observing and listening to them, and participating in their *ad-hoc* groups of conversation.<sup>3</sup>

### III.-WHAT IS PARTICULARLY INTERESTING ABOUT ARAB IMMIGRANTS IN MALMÖ?

The economic crisis in the early 1990s that severely affected Sweden had a greater adverse effect on Malmö than on any other major Swedish city and represented the end of Malmö's traditional industrial structure. New and more challenging companies have replaced old industries in Malmö and there is no longer any need for an unskilled labour force, but rather for specialised people. Between 1990 and 1993, the city lost almost 20 percent of its former job opportunities (City Office, Department of Employment and Training, 2001:2).

Besides, the crisis coincided with a great increase in the numbers of refugees and other immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The proportion of the population with a foreign background in Malmö increased during the 1990s by 10 percent and the figure is now about 37-38 percent, of which 24 percent were born abroad and 14 percent have at least one parent born abroad. Unemployment is high (6.0%) in relation to Sweden as a whole (3.7%).

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3. The research was carried out in a two-month period, from the end of April until the end of June 2002. My translator was an Arab immigrant studying Swedish language at Lernia who assisted me throughout the period of interviewing or using questionnaires.

**Table 1: Citizens of Malmö**

1st of January 2002							
Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Population	245.699	248.007	251.408	254.904	257.574	259.579	262.397
Population with foreign background							
Born abroad (Immigrant)	50.508	51.942	54.100	56.903	58.499	60.244	62.252
% of population	21	21	22	22	23	23	24
Born in Sweden with one parent born abroad	27.126	28.486	30.147	33.206	34.728	35.957	37.193
% of population	11	12	12	13	13	14	14

(Source: *Statistiska Centralbyran, Malmö Stadskontor, Strategisk utveckling, Elisabeth Palsson, 2002*)

**Table 2: Labour market in Malmö**

Employment rate (age 20-64)	1990	2000
Men	79%	65%
Women	78%	62%

The unemployed as % of the workforce (age 16-64)	Malmö	Sweden
December 2001	6.2%	3.4%
December 2002	6.0%	3.7%

(Source: *Malmö stad, "Facts and Figures"* on <http://www.malmö.se>, 2003)

Immigrants come from Europe, Asia, South America, Africa and North America. The five most important groups of immigrants by country of origin are: Yugoslavia (approximately 3.6% of Malmö's total population), Poland (2.1%), Bosnia-Herzegovina (2%), Iraq (1.9%) and Denmark (1.5%).

**Table 3: Immigrants' composition by regions of origin, Malmö**

Europe	63%
Asia	28%

South America	4%
Africa	4%
North America	1%

(Source: *Statistiska Centralbyran, Malmö Stadskontor, Strategisk utveckling*, Elisabeth Palsson, 2002)

**Table 4: The five most important immigrant groups, Malmö**

Yugoslavia	9.337	3.6% (of the total population)
Poland	5.374	2.1%
Bosnia-Herzegovina	5.146	2%
Iraq	5.067	1.9%
Denmark	3.999	1.5%

(Source: *Statistiska Centralbyran, Malmö Stadskontor, Strategisk utveckling*, Elisabeth Palsson, 2002)

There is a total of 9,599 (3.7% of the total population) Arab immigrants already established in Malmö. Approximately 53 percent of this group come from Iraq.

**Table 5: The composition of Arab immigrants by country of origin, Malmö**

Total population of Arab immigrants	9.599	3.7% (from the total population)
Iraq	5.067	52.8%
Lebanon	2.802	29%
Syria	319	3.3%
Saudi Arabia	208	2.2%
Palestine	193	2%
Kuwait	193	2%
Morocco	155	1.6%
Jordan	148	1.5%
Algeria	143	1.48%
Egypt	137	1.4%
Tunisia	125	1.3%
United Arab Emirates	95	1%
Bahrain	14	0.1%

Note: The countries of Djibouti, Oman, Qatar and Yemen do not have any immigrant representation in Malmö.

(Source: *Statistiska Centralbyran - SCB, Malmö Stadskontor, Strategisk utveckling*, Elisabeth Palsson, 2002)

Thus, the highly heterogeneous composition of Malmö's population, the rising unemployment rate due to structural changes in the labour market, and ethnic and socio-economic segregation between different neighbourhoods have meant that politically established guidelines promoting integration are absolutely necessary. In December 1999, the City Council adopted a plan called "The Action Plan to Promote Integration in the City of Malmö".<sup>4</sup>

The Arab immigrant group is territorially segregated in the city of Malmö. The highest concentration of Arab immigrants is to be found in the *Rosengård* district, followed by other districts like *Fosie*, *Södra Innerstaden* and *Kirseberg*, which generally have the highest proportions of foreign residents. Does this territorial segregation determine further social segregation? Whether or not there is social segregation of Arab immigrants (refugees) in Sweden, is perhaps the most important question related to this study. But, is this simply about cultural explanations? Or is it more about different aspects of state policy and legal formulations, interpretation and implementation? In other words, is it self-segregation or imposed segregation, or both, or something else?

In my study of the newcomer Arab immigrants in Malmö, I examine aspects of their integration as they go through the introductory programme. I also highlight Arab immigrant strategies for survival and adaptation.

#### IV.-THE CORE THEORETICAL DEBATE

##### 1. - Introduction

In recent decades Europe has become a zone of migration. People from South-East Europe and from non-European countries try to settle in Western European societies in their search for enhanced economic and social opportunities. Europe, therefore, continues to change and so do cultural and national identities. The changes, however, are determined not only by global processes and state policies, but are also shaped by people themselves, through their own needs and aspirations for a new and better life.

The condition of being a stranger forces one to adjust one's cultural identity in order to be integrated, while the labour market is still divided on a race and ethnicity basis. As a result, the ways of being an immigrant and having a cultural identity differs from one socio-cultural environment to another (Cortesi 2003). At the same time, migrants and refugees ask for diverse forms of recognition of their

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4. This plan is aimed primarily at people of foreign background so as to include them in municipal programmes and agencies. It is also meant to promote equality of opportunities for everyone, a 'good childhood' for every child in Malmö which includes equal access to education and work in the future, equal job opportunities for each resident of Malmö regardless of social and ethnic background, and the elimination of fear of foreigners, discrimination, xenophobia and racist manifestations ("Action Plan to Promote Integration in the City of Malmö" 2000: 23-29).

existence in the mainstream culture and society, a trend that has recently stimulated much rethinking of the concept of citizenship in its broadest sense (Kymlicka Ed. 1995; Kymlicka 1995; Kymlicka and Norman 2000; Baubock 2001; Rogers and Tillie 2001).

The ways in which two of the major religions, Islam and Christianity, approach different problems of morals and ethics, or shape general attitudes towards life affect the implementation of new laws and policies in order to protect and preserve minority rights. The meaning of migration from non-European (non-Christian) countries to (Christian) Western European countries has thus to be interpreted through the roles played by different cultures and religions.

## 2.- Collective Minority Rights and Multicultural Policies

Minority rights have long constituted a controversial issue in international human rights legislation. Many legal scholars believe human rights to be universal and emphasise the Western understanding of individual rights as entitlement held by individual and only by individuals. Other socio-legal scholars, like Boaventura de Sousa Santos (1995) or Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1990, 1996) consider individual human rights violation of minorities to be directly connected to the non-recognition of cultural and ethnic rights. Hence, the main issues currently invoked and debated are the universality of human rights, or to what extent 'human rights' cover minorities' rights, and the non-discrimination component of the universal individual human rights.

Collective rights are related to self-determination, so they are often seen as undermining nation-state sovereignty and as questioning the national monopoly of law production and distribution. As such, nation-states are, in many instances, not so much protectors as human rights violators. A cultural-oriented approach to human rights considers collective minority rights as a *sine qua non* condition for respecting cultural diversity and difference. Dialogue within a country and a cross-cultural dialogue between countries can achieve this minimum common cultural denominator (Santos 1995; An-na'im 1992; Stavenhagen 1996; Khalaf 1999).<sup>5</sup>

Multicultural policies can uphold collective rights. Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman clearly distinguish assimilation - "a method of eliminating difference" from multicultural integration - "a method of managing difference". Both seek to integrate people from various ethnic backgrounds into shared social and political institutions and thus accomplish "a new identity, the identity of citizenship or full, equal membership in the state". Nevertheless, multicultural integration does not aim to *eliminate* the cultural differences between subgroups, but rather to accept

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5. Those scholars, for example, who see an incompatibility between Islam and human rights, should first acknowledge the diverse interpretations of Islamic law and its heterogeneity and then try to find common ground for dialogue.

multicultural identities, making the state institutions accommodate to the different backgrounds of the citizens.<sup>6</sup>

Charles Taylor also distinguishes assimilation - a "politics of universal and equal dignity" that has fought for forms of non-discrimination that were quite blind to the ways in which citizens differ - from multicultural integration - a "politics of recognition" of "second-class citizens" that often redefines non-discrimination in terms of differential treatment (Taylor 1992: 39-40). Taylor supports a more communitarian type of politics of difference, while Kymlicka adopts a more liberal standpoint. Thus, Kymlicka favours some minimal cultural needs or liberties, for example an integral and undamaged language policy and some positive discrimination measures with which one can define and pursue one's own conception of a good life. But, he does not touch on the question of cultural survival and perpetuation of minority group cultures through future generations.

There is no doubt that assimilation or 'integration' of minorities into the national cultural model without considering their cultural identities and their right to cultural development can lead to wilful destruction of the former. Specific affirmative action for minority groups - language rights, particular educational and cultural institutions, including religious ones, and often self-government and political autonomy in the case of territorial claims - is needed in order to defend and protect these groups. Yet, in almost all countries, state policies aim more to 'integrate' minorities into the model of the dominant national culture through the well-known "melting-pot" or "national integration" policies than to accommodate the existing cultural diversity (Stavenhagen 1992, 1995).

Some of the main questions that arise from the acceptance of culture which is, after all, a key factor in redefining the Western concept of human rights and in formulating multicultural policies are: to what extent can we acknowledge cultural distinctiveness? Can we be sure that giving certain rights to some minority groups will not give them, in turn, the right to exclude others in order to preserve their cultural integrity? Does this cultural recognition of disadvantaged people imply just a few basic cultural rights, like language rights, or does it mean a more generalised positive discrimination?

### **3. - What is the key theoretical argument?**

The theoretical standpoint of the study is in keeping with the cultural-oriented approach to human rights. Despite the prevalence of human rights in international declarations, there has been poor integration of human rights with the real political

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6. The assimilation policy can be more or less coercive. In its more coercive aspect, it can ban associations and publications that seek to preserve a minority identity, or oblige all citizens to stop using surnames that reflect a minority background. On its less coercive side, it can respect individual civil rights, but refuse to recognise any cultural rights like support for languages and cultures, and insist that all public schools, government institutions, street signs, and public holidays reflect the dominant language and culture (Kymlicka Ed. 1995: 12-18).



and social processes in society (Hydén 1999: 27). Moreover, minority rights as a direct expression of people's collective will and preferences have been neglected, not only in their normative aspect but also as possible explanatory factors of different social phenomena.

Certainly today there are different laws, national, supranational and international, which try to protect some minority group rights. Yet, these continue to be ambiguously defined in the international instruments even though there are ardent debates about minority issues, not only among scholars, but also at international level.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, I think that the problem for collective minority rights is twofold: governments do not always implement international or supranational laws, and these laws need constant reconsideration according to changing social realities.

The haziness in defining minority rights primarily comes from the difficulty of identifying who are the 'peoples' who might possess the right to (cultural) self-determination (those who reside in a specific territorial unit or those who belong to a national or ethnic community divided between different territories). Every cultural group has the right to maintain and develop its own specific culture, no matter what the relation of this culture is with other cultures in a wider context. This is the right to cultural identity that, as part of individual human rights and the right of peoples to self-determination, must be given greater emphasis.<sup>8</sup>

Many minority groups are problematically defined within the terms of the international instrument of human rights and from here comes their high vulnerability as a group. The United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees (1951), for example, is outdated for many present situations of forced migration and excludes most displaced people, who are victims of devastating conflicts, human rights violations, civil wars, external aggression and occupation, foreign domination and so on.<sup>9</sup> Although some "peripheral" and "semiperipheral" countries have tried to extend the refugee concept in order to include "humanitarian refugee", the "core countries" have consistently opposed this proposal and have adopted still

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7. UNESCO and other international organisations affirm the importance of using minority languages for example, as a constituent part of state cultural policies, and the 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities mentions all the various standards regarding minority issues, but it is still reluctant to insist on the enforcement of laws protecting minority collectives in an obligatory treaty.

8. Culture is defined as a broad spectrum of human activities, symbols, values, and artefacts, which identify a human group and distinguish it from others. As such, an ethnic group is recognised in terms of language, religion, tribe, nationality, and race. There may be numerous cultures within one country and, thus, minority rights are culture-specific (Stavenhagen 1990, 1995, 1996).

9. Convention refugees are those who have reason to fear persecution in their native country due to their race, their nationality, their affiliation to a particular social group, and their religious or political opinions. Besides Convention refugees, under the Swedish law, "persons in need of protection" may also qualify (after rigorous checks) for asylum: those who have left their native country and "have good reason to fear capital punishment, torture, etc"; "need protection due to war or an environmental disaster in their native country"; "fear persecution due to their gender or homosexuality"; or people with strong humanitarian grounds, for instance, those suffering from a grave illness for which no treatment is available in their own country ("Asylum Seekers and Refugees", <http://www.migrationsverket.se>).

more restrictive legislation on refugees and asylum seekers. The most notorious examples are the 'Schengen countries' in Europe, Sweden included. Also, the few rights refugees are entitled to, through international human rights and humanitarian laws, are regularly violated with total impunity (Santos 1995: 302-303).

Another problem is that of identifying minority rights by types of groups.<sup>10</sup> Although different minority groups may ask for the same rights, like representation or recognition, they may also request different rights for different purposes (needs, aspirations and identities). For example, while national minority groups ask for autonomy from the central government to manage their own affairs, immigrant groups tend to ask for measures that will make it easier for them to participate in the central institutions of the state. Rainer Bauböck (2002) considers that there are three types of minority rights that could be asked for: a) cultural liberties that are comprised in Article 27 of the ICCPR;<sup>11</sup> b) public recognition or poly-ethnic rights (specific religious, language, education or public representation rights); and c) political autonomy or self-governing rights (in the case of territorial claims).

How can one implement affirmative action measures for different minority groups when, in national and international law, minority rights are so ambiguously defined and, when, those that do exist, are left open to arbitrary interpretation? Sweden has ratified all the United Nations Declarations, Conventions and Convents on human and minority rights and, it is among the largest contributors to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and one among about ten countries in the world that, in co-operation with UNHCR, receive refugees from camps around the world according to an annual quota. Sweden has also partly changed its legislation in accordance with European law but has nevertheless maintained its particular principles in dealing with minority group issues by keeping with the values of the Swedish welfare state. There are restrictive readings and controversial aspects of implementation in relation to some group rights like freedom of religion or language rights.

## V. - MULTICULTURALISM IN SWEDEN

The term multiculturalism is generally interpreted in Sweden positively in comparison with other countries such as Germany. This positive view is reflected in Sweden's 1974 Constitution, where the efforts of religious and ethnic minorities to

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10. Kymlicka and Norman (Kymlicka Ed. 1995) consider that in order to analyse the different logics and social implications of minority rights claims, we need to define the variety of ethno-cultural groups that exist within the state. They distinguish among: A. National Minorities (1. stateless nations; 2. indigenous people); B. Immigrant Minorities (1. with citizenship or rights to become citizens; 2. without rights to become citizens; 3. refugees); C. Religious Groups (1. isolationist; 2. non-isolationist); D. *Sui generis* Groups (1. African Americans; 2. Roma or Gypsies; 3. Russians in former Soviet States).

11. Art. 27 of ICCPR: In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

preserve their cultures are legitimated. The multicultural migration policy, based on three central aims - equality, freedom of cultural choice, and co-operation and solidarity, officially allows and even encourages cultural diversity.<sup>12</sup> Yet, one may still doubt Sweden's effectiveness in integrating the 'foreigner' into mainstream society.

Sweden has created a self-image as a model society with a respectful and decent treatment of immigrant issues in all fields of social life: education, press, politics, and the labour market. However, the reality of rising unemployment, the increasing segregation in schools, the workplace and housing, a growing income gap and signs of open hostility and discrimination towards immigrant groups challenge this. Previous consensus in public support for a generous refugee policy as well as for concepts like multiculturalism and ethnic diversity seems to be breaking down.<sup>13</sup>

The Swedish model of cultural pluralism (1975) was implemented according to its welfare state principles, the result of a political compromise between left and right. There was broad acceptance in parliament between left and right regarding the goals of cultural pluralism and its implementation. In the last few decades, Swedish multicultural policy has performed in a somewhat confusing way. The much-wanted integrative goal has not been achieved and the implementation has been, in practice, a balancing act between the paternalistic social-administrative system, schools and employment agencies, at the local level, and the Immigration Board at the national level. The paternalistic, uniform and broad-based nature of the Swedish welfare state becomes a serious problem for people identifying themselves in ethnic terms result of a political compromise between left and right (Blanck and Tyden 1995: 64-66).

During the 1980s, the principle of *freedom of choice* received a still more ambiguous interpretation and, *freedom of religion* and the *right to home language instruction* became more restricted.<sup>14</sup> Swedish society, traditionally religious in comparison, for example, with the Netherlands now faces the dilemma of how much to allow immigrant groups to express their cultural identity. Even if *freedom of religion* has long been a constitutional right, a lot of objections have been raised

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12. Equality implies that immigrants should have the same opportunities, rights and obligations as the rest of the population. Freedom of cultural choice refers to the extent to which they want to acquire Swedish cultural identity and to which they preserve and develop their original cultural identity. Co-operation and solidarity refers to mutual tolerance and supportive cohabitation between immigrants and the host population (Jederlund 1998).

13. Surveys from the 1960s on Swedish public opinion suggested increasing tolerance toward immigrants and immigration while recent opinion polls suggest an increasingly negative view on immigration and immigrants (Blanck and Tyden 1995: 66).

14. In 1985, the principle was changed so 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 interest". At the same time, the Minister of Immigration stated that the term "minority" did not apply to immigrant groups in Sweden. This de-recognition of minorities in official Swedish policy was accentuated in the report of the Royal Commission in 1984, where immigration was viewed primarily as a dimension of the internationalisation and uniformity of Swedish society: "we foresee a development of a society characterised by intercultural individuals rather than a multicultural society with distinct minority groups with different languages and cultures" (Blanck and Tyden 1995: 66).

lately. For example, when Muslims wanted to build mosques in some of the larger cities, the authorities and general public tried to prevent them.

In the case of Arab immigrant groups in Sweden, besides linguistic and customary differences, the theocratic culture – Islam, and their ethnic sense of belonging seem to be the most difficult issues to manage with.<sup>15</sup> An efficient policy, therefore, should not minimize or ignore this higher degree of ‘strangeness’, but accept it and try to accommodate it. At the same time, integration cannot take place if the person who is supposed to be integrated does not wish to embrace this by fulfilling the conditions of integration.

In short, the contentious issues in relation to Swedish multicultural policy come primarily from interpretation and implementation of principles like *freedom of choice* and *equality*. In public debate, they frequently appear in terms of confrontations between the multiethnic policy and the principles of the welfare state, or in terms of cultural conflict when high crime rates among immigrants are seen as an effect of ‘cultural differences’ or ‘cultural racism’ (Blanck and Tyden 1995: 65-66). The terms *multiculturalism* and *multiethnic* are very ambiguous, therefore, in Swedish discourse.

## VI. - NEWCOMER ARAB IMMIGRANTS IN MALMÖ: STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL

### 1.- General background

In Malmö, perhaps more than elsewhere, people believe that it is difficult for immigrants to be accepted and to participate in the society. There are many segregated residential areas where mainly immigrants live. Meeting places are almost non-existent and it is very difficult for immigrants to come into contact naturally and to establish social relationships with native-born Swedes. At the same time, immigrants have divergent opinions, wishes and opportunities regarding their integration into Swedish society.

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15. In Sartori’s opinion (2001: 107-114) language and customs can be translated in “strangeness” (type 1 and 2) that can be passed over, if so desired, while religion and ethnicity (type 3 and 4) usually produce radical “strangeness”. An immigrant different in religious and/or ethnic terms cannot become integrated in the same way as an immigrant different only in language and tradition. Moreover, the differences, with type 3 or 4, increase when the immigrant belongs to a theocratic culture that does not separate the civil state from the religious state and identifies citizens with believers.

The refugee case is more special as many refugees think about asylum in Sweden in terms of temporary exile. Their motivation, therefore, to learn Swedish, get an education or supplement their studies is very low. Those who do acknowledge that it would be impossible to return home within the foreseeable future are more motivated to participate. Besides, the personal situation of almost all refugees is very delicate, and they are extremely fragile emotionally, as their lives or those of their family members are possibly endangered by home-state regimes.

Segregation in Sweden refers to those situations when different ethnic or socio-economic groups are separated with respect to housing, labour, education and schools, political and organisational opportunities. The social dimension of the term is consigned to the absence of social relationships between different groups in the society, a severe problem that obstructs integration. Discrimination is seen as a particular and negative treatment of individuals or groups, going against the principle that everyone should be treated equally that appears not only in the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948, Arts. 1 and 2), but also in the Swedish law. Moreover, in many instances, discrimination might take an institutional form or, in other words, “discriminating patterns of decision-making in public and private institutions” (Stavenhagen in Bartolomei et al. 1999: 40). Other marginalising or discriminatory practices like *fear of strangers*, *xenophobia* and *racism* also appear quite often in the Swedish public debate.<sup>16</sup>

The principle of non-discrimination and equality before the law is necessary but not sufficient for the protection and survival of a minority group. The kind of minority rights that Arab immigrants in Sweden demand are the *cultural liberties* that are formulated in Article 27 of the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966) and some public recognition or *poly-ethnic rights*, like the right to practise the Islamic religion in a public space (building a mosque), or to wear a veil at the workplace and in schools, the right to home-language instruction, or the right to political representation. But different cultures have different ideas about which rights are ‘basic’. Does Sweden really respect the principle of non-discrimination and equality before the law? If so, does it respect the cultural liberties of immigrants and foster their poly-ethnic rights?

## 2. - The Introduction Programme

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16. Fear of strangers or foreigners is considered to arise from inadequate knowledge of the other, or of ethnically, culturally, religiously or linguistically distinct groups. Xenophobia, a stronger term, is used to denote the attitudes and negative feelings held by individuals about people of different origins than themselves. Xenophobia often influences people's attitudes towards others even though these attitudes are not always expressed verbally or in organised action. Racism is seen as an evaluation in terms of the superiority of one race over others, or of a particular ethnic group or culture that is believed to distinguish itself from others through some fundamental biological and ethnic differences. In a more extreme form, racism also includes those situations when an ethnic group that considers itself to be superior also believes that it has the right to oppress or to terrorise other groups or individuals that are perceived to be foreign or that support some kind of cultural diversity in the society (Action Plan, 2000: 7-8).

According to Swedish law, immigrants are entitled to study Swedish in a course called, *Swedish for Immigrants* (SFI - Svenska för Invandrare). Each municipality with a significant number of immigrants offers its own introductory programme, as part of the multicultural policy. The aim is to provide Swedish language skills to immigrants and to give them information about how the community works. Normally, the programme does not last more than two years, but it can be extended if so required by the person involved. After two years the local authorities examine the individuals who have completed the programme. The immigrant is then expected to be able to manage by himself/herself, to find a job or to continue his/her studies (City of Malmö, Immigration Service, 1998).

In Malmö, the introductory programme is mainly an individual plan, taking into account the educational and professional background of each person and his/her job possibilities in Sweden. The local authorities and the immigrant are supposed to meet regularly to discuss the plan to ensure that it is being implemented in accordance with his or her changing needs. The employment office is required to provide information about the situation on the labour market and advise each person individually about job possibilities (City of Malmö, Immigration Service, 1998).

The task of the Integration Office is to make sure that local authorities provide all immigrants with the proper introduction. Nevertheless, the introductory programme is addressed mainly to refugees who have been granted residence permits in Sweden and relatives who have been granted residence permits on the grounds of family ties. The Government pays local authorities for introductory programmes provided to refugees, if they are entitled. The Integration Office now requires that all local authorities provide introductory programmes for all newly-arrived immigrants (City of Malmö, Immigration Service, 1998).

Income and other assets affect the right to receive introductory benefits. Local authorities pay for the introductory programmes for non-refugee immigrants through an introduction allowance or through social welfare benefits. Introduction allowances are supposedly a kind of wage, paid for performing a job. Moreover, the Integration Office recommends that local authorities pay introduction allowances instead of social benefits as the latter are considered more socially stigmatising. After completing the programme, immigrants are entitled to the same benefits and services as every other Swedish person (City of Malmö, Immigration Service, 1998).

### *2.1.- Lernia: a tool for Learning*

The introductory programme at Lernia is fairly personalised so that immigrants coming to Lernia are divided into different groups depending on their professional and educational backgrounds. There are seven programmes: (1) *Service* (for jobs in the service industry); (2) *Högskola* (university degree); (3) *Bygg/Verkstad* (construction or manufacturing industry); (4) *Vård* (health care); (5) *Hantverk* (skilled jobs like carpenters, plumbers, and so on); (6) *Studieförberedande*

(preparing for school-leaving or university level); (7) *Administration* (administrative work). All these programmes are organised into four levels of proficiency or four steps, amounting to 4 X 12 weeks, where 50 percent represents the language course (SFI) and the other 50 percent is more connected with joining the job market.

The *Högskola* (HÖST) programme includes those people who have a university degree or who have studied at least two years at university. *Studieförberedande* goes together with *Högskola* because it is assumed that these students are similar in many ways and, therefore, efficient working groups can be established. Because of the job market situation, there is a new programme - AKI (2001), aimed at job integration for people with an academic background, a variant of the HÖST programme, which some students from *Studieförberedande* can join. All students doing AKI have started with HÖST, but have gone on to AKI by their own free choice when this was offered to them. However, there are a limited number of places.<sup>17</sup>

The general evaluation of the SFI course (2002) demonstrates that, although a relatively significant number of Arab students registered in the language course (135, approximately 30% of the total), only a small percentage received a language certificate (11.85%) and a very insignificant percentage found work (1.48%). These figures have fluctuated considerably in the period 1999 to 2002. The results of the AKI programme after its first year (2001-2002) are more encouraging. Of 105 people registered in the programme, around 31 percent completed the programme and continued their studies or found work.<sup>18</sup>

**Table 6: Students finishing SFI at Lernia**

Students finishing SFI at Lernia								
Year	1999		2000		2001		2002	
Total population	268		812		994		452	
From whom, Arab students	86	32.09%	199	24.50%	292	29.37%	135	29.86%

17. The AKI programme consists of 48 weeks in total: 24 weeks of an intensive Swedish language course (six hours per day instead of four like in the HÖST programme), nine weeks of activities at Malmö University with a mentor and a study project leader, twelve weeks of training, and three weeks of follow-up and future planning. Unlike HÖST, the AKI programme offers no optional activities such as sport, cooking, drawing, and so on, which makes it more intensive. Selection of the mentor is in accordance with the criterion of similar professional backgrounds. Choosing mentors on the basis of shared language has not proved to be a successful option, because there are so few. The student counsellor gives advice on the procedures of getting degrees recognised, or on the next steps in their planning for the future (Student Counsellor, AKI programme, Lernia, Malmö).

18. Of the 33 people who finished the programme, eight found temporary work or became involved in university-based or practice projects and only one got a fixed job through a contact from the trainee period. Fifteen others continued their studies at Comvux (Municipal Adult Education - basic adult education, upper secondary level adult education and supplementary education) and six more continued their studies at IMER (International Migration and Ethnic Relations Programme) at Malmö University. Another person continued his studies in technical design at a public school and one moved to another city (AKI Programme, Lernia, Malmö 2002).

Arab students finishing SFI at Lernia								
Year	1999		2000		2001		2002	
Total Population	86		199		292		135	
Persons by reason								
No information	8	9.30%	-	-	2	0.68%	-	-
Others	-	-	-	-	1	0.34%	-	-
Employment	4	4.65%	3	1.51%	18	6.16%	2	1.48%
Certificate/Diploma	9	10.46%	30	15.07%	50	17.12%	16	11.85%
Moved in another place	5	5.81%	7	3.52%	11	3.77%	7	5.19%
Pregnancy	4	4.65%	20	10.05%	19	6.51%	14	10.37%
Certificate	1	1.16%	10	5.02%	10	3.42%	1	0.74%
Not coming to the course	-	-	9	4.52%	4	1.37%	7	5.19%
Maternity leaves	2	2.32%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unknown	18	20.93%	8	4.02%	19	6.51%	5	3.70%
Transferred	21	24.41%	56	28.14%	95	32.53%	37	27.41%
Personal reasons	1	1.16%	4	2.01%	2	0.68%	-	-
Practice	-	-	1	0.50%	2	0.68%	-	-
Problems with child care	2	2.32%	13	6.53%	18	6.16%	12	8.89%
Illness	8	9.30%	30	15.07%	22	7.53%	16	11.85%
Be absent from teaching	-	-	1	0.50%	4	1.37%	1	0.74%
Stay abroad	-	-	2	1.01%	3	1.03%	-	-
Agreement with SDF	3	3.49%	5	2.51%	12	4.11%	17	12.59%

(Source: Lernia 2002)

## 2.2. - Interacting with different Social Agencies

Most Arab immigrants interviewed were refugees (75% of the sample population while only about 22% came because of family ties and less than 3% for studying). The reasons for leaving were, in general, similar (war, conflict and political persecution). Yet, different personal reasons like economic problems or keeping the family together had also contributed. They experienced a double 'strangeness', both spatial and cultural. Their stories, each with its own particularities, consistently showed they had no choice but to leave their countries. These traumatic circumstances, however, received little attention from the local authorities and other social agents.



Through the questionnaires, I learned that many Arab immigrants felt satisfied about the way they were treated by the Swedish authorities or public agencies. Yet, some of them also went through some extremely difficult moments. When asked to evaluate their interaction with different social agencies or actors, the Arab interviewers generally responded positively: the Immigration Service registered the highest level of interaction and was given a relatively high evaluation; the Tax Office registered lower levels of interaction and relatively low satisfaction; the Social Service Office registered a low level of interaction and a relatively low level of satisfaction; very few responded to my question about the Police but those who did expressed a high level of satisfaction; the Post Office recorded a very high interaction rate, as well as satisfaction.

When interviewed, however, about their arrival in Sweden, most of the Arab respondents faced significant interaction problems with the Immigration Service in Malmö. Besides the traumatic move to Sweden, they also experienced rigid and many times discriminatory policing checks until they finally obtained a Swedish residence permit.

### *2.3. - In search of a job*

The "equality" goal of Swedish immigration policy means that immigrants should have the same employment and income opportunities as native-born Swedes. The main duty, therefore, of the Swedish labour market has been "equal pay for equal work". Nonetheless, the goal of equality is far from being achieved and has become ever-harder to implement. The labour market is divided on ethnic grounds. Immigrants are concentrated in the most menial jobs in industry and the service sector, where they work long hours of physically taxing, stressful, monotonous or dirty jobs, in poor working environments with high risks of occupational injury. This occupational discrimination also includes a gender and age bias, with immigrant girls at the most basic level of unemployment. The distribution of unemployment shows also substantial differences in occupational distribution according to ethnic groups. Again, there is discrimination against highly-skilled, highly-educated immigrants, which draws attention to failures with regard to equality in Swedish immigrant policy (Bäck and Soinenen 1998; Rooth 1999).

The results of some studies have shown that there are significant differences among different refugee nationalities regarding their integration into the Swedish labour market. There is a "core" group, immigrants from Romania, Poland and Chile who have relatively high employment rates and a good possibility of an annual income of above 100.000 SEK. Then, there is a "marginal" group of immigrants from Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Somalia who have low employment rates and very little chance of achieving an annual income of above 100.000 SEK. Between these two groups, we find immigrants from Ethiopia, Yugoslavia, Vietnam and Iran. There

are some differences in employment probabilities even between immigrants from the neighbouring countries of Ethiopia and Somalia and Iran and Iraq.<sup>19</sup>

Structural changes in the Swedish labour market also play an important role. A relatively declining industrial sector and a growing service sector during the last decades has meant that more co-operative and communicative working skills are now valued and this trend is unlikely to change. This process, which occurred during the late 1970s and 1980s involved an increasing demand for employees with a high-level skills and specialisation, while unskilled labour was made redundant by efficiency improvements. For Sweden, formal educational qualifications and skills are important but the demand for informal skills has also increased. These latter skills include, for example, a good knowledge of Swedish culture, language skills and a better understanding of behaviour in teamwork and relations with authorities and labour-market organisations. Hence, the integration of later waves of immigrants into the Swedish labour market is more difficult than it used to be, especially for groups that come from completely different cultures (Bäck and Soininen 1998: 33-34).

**Table 7: Jobs by section of industry, Malmö, 2000**

Public services	28%
Private services	27%
Trade, Communications	23%
Manufacturing industry	14%
Building industry	5%
Others	2%

(Source: *Malmö stad*, "Facts and Figures" on <http://www.malmo.se>, 2003)

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19. Some interviews with Swedish workers and media reports from different parts of the country show that Swedes prefer to work with immigrants of Western and Eastern European descent rather than with people from Third World countries. In official terms, these cultural differences can complicate the established "universal" and "uniform" Swedish labour market procedures, for example for people who need to go to the mosque on Friday (Rooth 1999: 189-190).

But the main explanation of the labour market differences between native Swedes and foreigners relates to the shift in the nature of immigration and the immigrants' characteristics. The majority are not so much labour immigrants as political refugees and asylum seekers from non-European countries, with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and an ill-prepared arrival (Bäck and Soininen 1998).

Foreign residents in Malmö have a higher unemployment rate than citizens of Swedish or Nordic countries, and they have no hope of finding the same type or level of job as they had in their home country. The typical jobs Arab immigrants get in Malmö are in restaurants and food shops and, to a lesser extent as cleaners, in health care or assisting old people, usually seen as immigrant jobs. The gender delimitation in these kinds of jobs is blurred in the case of Arab immigrants because of their culture that is still opposed to women working. Generally, Arab people work is low paid, or illegal (on the black market), so they have no social security, holidays or rights. Those still on introductory benefits try to prolong their language course and work on the black market at the same time, in order to get more money.

**Table 8: Unemployment in Malmö by citizenship**

Year, September	Total	Swedish citizenship	Nordic citizenship	Other foreign citizenships
2001	10 513	8 927	187	1 399
2002	10 101	8 730	200	1 171
2003	10 670	9 228	220	1 223
Percent, % of labour force 16-64 years				
2001	6,3	6,1	4,9	9,3
2002	6,0	5,8	4,7	7,9
2003	6,3	6,2	5,1	8,2

(Source: SCB, Arbetsmarknadsstatistik, Malmö statistisk årsbok 2001-2003)

The majority of Arab immigrants interviewed were teachers and engineers in their home country. Others had worked as architects, accountants, pharmacists,

microbiologists, chemists, nurses, military officers, computer designers, businessmen or university lecturers. Very few of them had been unemployed, including the women. At the time of the interviews, the great majority had no job and were living on introductory or social benefits (90% of the sample population), or on the salary of Swedish partners. Only three were employed, but none full-time: one a part-time cleaner, another was intermittently buying or selling cars, and the last one was doing unremunerated work helping immigrant children with their homework. Of these three people, one was speaking Swedish at workplace, another Arab and the third, Swedish and English.

However, I had the distinct feeling that most of the Arab interviewees felt optimistic about their chances in Sweden. Only a few were pessimistic and some resigned. The optimism was less to do with possible job status than with the conviction of getting some kind of job in the near future. All of them, however, were aware that they first have to learn Swedish and then think about a job. Swedish, however, is difficult to learn and thus acts as an impediment to getting a job.

Age also turned out to be an important issue in job seeking. The age composition of the sample of Arab immigrant population was relatively homogeneously distributed between a significant young segment (52%, between 18 and 35 years old) and quite a large older segment (48%, between 36 and 55 years old). The processes of learning Swedish and trying to get qualifications recognised in Sweden, or changing profession completely in order to get a job are particularly long in Sweden. Obviously, the older segment encountered more problems in finding work. Yet, they were optimistic because they were determined to get a job. As work is generally valued very highly by men in Arab (Muslim) culture, finding a job is one of the men's first objectives. However, they have to confront a number of prejudices and different kinds of discriminations because of their appearance or 'strange' names.

Some teachers from Lernia explained immigrant job problems mainly in terms of structural changes in the Swedish economy, or labour market regulation. They saw the extremely centralised and regulated Swedish system as a barrier for immigrants. Other teachers spoke more in terms of language, cultural differences and prejudice. They did, however, acknowledge that getting a job is extremely important in order to become integrated in Swedish society. Others talked about a lack of experience in dealing with cultural diversity (Sweden's long homogeneous tradition) to account for the prejudice faced by some immigrant groups on the labour market.

#### *2.4. - Trying to find a home*

Malmö is divided into ten administrative sectors or city districts (*stadsdel*): *Centrum, Fosie, Husie, Hyllie, Limhamn-Bunkeflo, Kirseberg, Oxie, Rosengård, Södra Innerstaden* and *Västra Innerstaden*.<sup>20</sup> *Rosengård*, followed by *Fosie* and

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20. Each city district provides pre-school activities, nine-year compulsory schools (for children aged 7-16), geriatric care centres, care centres for handicapped person, individual or family care services, local free-time schools or leisure activities, library and cultural activities (<http://www.malmo.se>).

*Södra Innerstaden*, is mainly an immigrant neighbourhood, Arabs being the predominant group. Unsurprisingly, it has the highest unemployment rate.

**Table 9: Immigrant distribution by city districts**

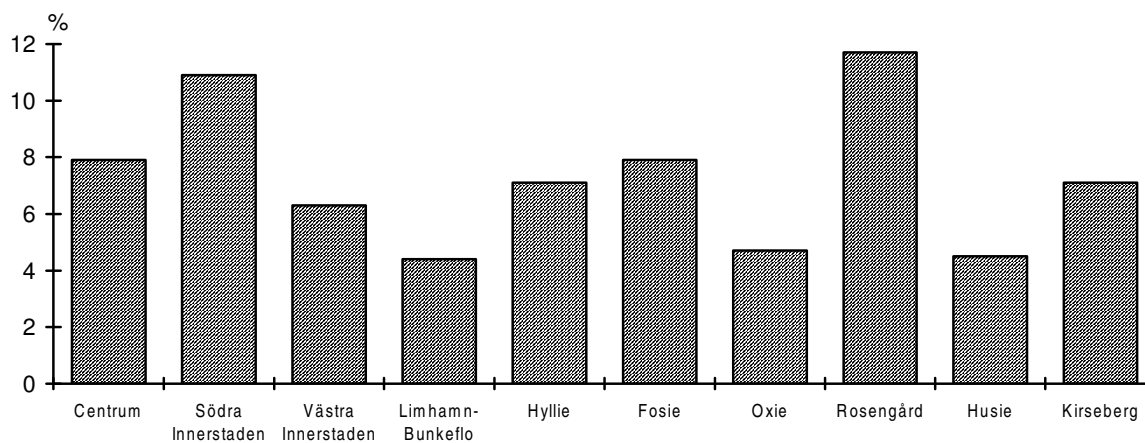
Place	Total countries represented	Top 5 representation by countries					Total population	Share from population
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th		
		Country (number)						
MALMÖ	163	Yugoslavia (9337)	Poland (5374)	Bosnia-Herzegovina (5146)	Iraq (5067)	Denmark (3999)	62 252	24%
CENTRUM	131	Poland (761)	Yugoslavia (709)	Denmark (697)	Iran (565)	Hungary (321)	7 448	21%
SÖDRA INNERSTADEN	133	Yugoslavia (1264)	Bosnia-Herzegovina (1257)	Iraq (784)	Poland (626)	Iran (473)	9 959	31%
VÄSTRA INNERSTADEN	96	Denmark (391)	Poland (327)	Germany (233)	Finland (196)	Yugoslavia (138)	2 697	9%
LIMHAMN-BUNKEFLO	101	Denmark (522)	Poland (280)	Germany (200)	Finland (169)	Yugoslavia (143)	2 751	9%
HYLLIE	131	Yugoslavia (1103)	Poland (833)	Iran (573)	Denmark (488)	Afghanistan (456)	7 458	24%
FOSIE	128	Yugoslavia (1979)	Bosnia-Herzegovina (1635)	Poland (1290)	Iraq (1227)	Denmark (667)	13 038	34%
OXIE	79	Denmark (190)	Poland (148)	Yugoslavia (137)	Iran (94)	Hungary (94)	1 348	12%
ROSENGÅRD	111	Yugoslavia (3026)	Iraq (2175)	Bosnia-Herzegovina (1388)	Lebanon (1318)	Poland (553)	12 457	58%

HUSIE	89	Yugoslavia (363)	Poland (277)	Denmark (198)	Germany (103)	Finland (100)	1 976	11%
KIRSEBERG	105	Yugoslavia (450)	Poland (259)	Bosnia- Herzegovina (252)	Denmark (210)	Iraq (174)	2 785	20%

(Source: *Statistiska Centralbyran - SCB, Malmö stadskontor, Strategisk utveckling, Elisabeth Palsson, 2002*)

**Table 10: Unemployment in Malmö by city districts (October 2003)**

Persons 16-64 years old



(Source: *Statistiska Centralbyran-SCB, Arbetsmarknadsstatistik, Malmö statistisk årsbok 2001-2003*)

Arab immigrant respondents' accounts of their problems in finding housing were quite similar and were generally complicated by the lack of a clear housing policy in Malmö. They seem to encounter many difficulties in getting a decent apartment in a good area or among Swedish people. Around 85 percent of the Arab immigrant

sample population was living in *Rosengård* (35%), *Fosie* and *Södra Innerstaden* while only 15 percent was living in more central or better areas.

Some Lernia teachers considered that the housing segregation of Arab people in Malmö is mainly a result of state policy formulation and implementation, but also of the Swedish people's *fear of strangers*. They also acknowledged other factors such as a possible self-segregation on cultural grounds, but this was always secondary. A Social Democrat on the Malmö City Council who deals with immigrant integration issues explained this territorial segregation in terms of flats prices in areas like *Rosengård*, *Fosie*, *Hermosdal* and *Holma* being the lowest in the city. He referred to *Rosengård* as "a gate to Sweden". Yet, he assured me that, as soon as they get a job, many immigrants move out from these neighbourhoods. But how these people, who have been segregated from the beginning, could be integrated? In his opinion, the solution could be "spreading the people around", by building cheap apartment blocks scattered around other parts of Malmö.

The housing segregation of Arab immigrants was also connected to the problem of language. The fact that a vicious circle had been established between language, job and housing was emphasised by the Family Counsellor from the Islamic Centre. If going to *Rosengård* temporarily solved the housing problem on arrival to Sweden, it was also a serious barrier towards integration. Most of its residents are unable to leave and, because they cannot interact with Swedes, they cannot learn the language, cannot get a job and cannot move to a better area. Arab people also fear living in a 'strange' area when they can live in a more culturally familiar and cheaper one. Besides, in *Rosengård* (but not in other districts where the private housing agencies are more predominant) the City Council helps them with housing benefits.

### *2.5. - Becoming political and organisationally active*

The 1975 electoral reform in Sweden gave immigrants the opportunity to become active in the democratic process by allowing foreign citizens to vote in the local elections. In the 1976 local election the turnout was 60 percent among immigrants compared with 90 percent for the entire population. In the 1994 local election the resident alien turnout dropped to 40 percent (Bäck and Soininen 1998: 34-35).

At times, living in ethnically-based communities, like Arab immigrants do, offers more chances for political entrepreneurs to organise the group in defence of their own interests and rights (Bäck and Soininen 1998). The fact that immigrants with a residence permit in Sweden do have electoral rights could boost their chances of negotiating with their votes. To a certain extent, this may encourage integration if immigrants can articulate their demands and participate in local elections in an organised manner.

None of my Arab immigrant interviewees voted in any local elections, mainly because they had been living in Sweden such a short time and also because they lacked information and interest. Bäck and Soininen (1998) tend to emphasise

individual characteristics, by way of explanation, stressing that the immigrants are likely to be young, single, with little education, seldom members of associations and they have recently moved to a new environment. This is partially validated in my sample, except for the educational level.

According to Henry Bäck and Marita Soininen (1998), there are two kinds of barriers to immigrant political participation. First, there is a lack of formal and legal rights linked to citizenship and second, there are problems concerning the practice of existing political rights. The first obstacle relates to the fact that the voting rights of foreign citizens are extended only to local elections, which are less prominent in the mass media (others go further in arguing that limiting voting rights for foreign citizens to the local level is irreconcilable with the basic principles of democracy). The second obstacle refers to lack of information, language problems and difficulties with voting technicalities, lack of knowledge about Swedish political life and a feeling of not belonging to Swedish society. The second obstacle has been frequently emphasised by my Arab immigrant interviewees.

Institutional explanations tend to stress the poor integration of immigrants into the Swedish labour market (Bäck and Soininen. 1998). Exclusion from the workplace has further consequences for social integration. Particular refugee groups like Turks, Lebanese, Iraqis and Somalis face long-term unemployment and, as a result, incomplete social membership. The low level of Arab immigrant political participation has often been explained in terms of their high degree of unemployment and also of their lack of democratic experience. But “Arabs” do not represent a homogeneous community. Iranians, who are seen as more “Western”, tend to be better integrated, even though they are Muslims too, so other indicators like language, nationality or way of dressing seem to gain in importance. Established stereotypes among Swedes of otherwise quite similar ethnic groups like the Iranians and the Iraqis might intervene here.

Newly-arrived Arab immigrants interact only with the authorities and find it extremely difficult to get established. Their lack of interaction with Swedish people and with everyday life in Sweden came up in my interviews as an important factor that obstructs political participation. Nonetheless, many of my Arab respondents considered that significant ethnic groups should be politically represented at the local level because this could help in their social integration.

The Swedish model of democracy perceives participation in interest organisations as being almost as significant as participation in a political party. But surveys show that immigrants have lower rates of activity not only in relation to voting but also other forms of political participation. Immigrants are excluded from almost all Swedish associational life and the barriers are difficult to surmount. Sweden’s excess of institutionalisation and closed system of integration (through state institutions) has created a fragmented political stage populated by many parallel “national organisations” of separate ethnicity with close ties to the state apparatus, but with very little contact and co-operation among themselves. This creates



barriers among the immigrants themselves as well as in their relations with the society in general (Bäck and Soininen 1998: 34-35).

Different forms of associations not only of immigrant groups, but also between natives and immigrants, could enhance immigrants' chances of becoming integrated into Swedish society. Thus, Arab immigrant associations could constitute a political tool that would facilitate cultural dialogue with the natives and support pluralistic community building. Yet, very few of the Arab respondents were active in any ethnic organisations or religious and neighbourhood associations. Their main concern was to cope with everyday life in Sweden, which mainly meant finishing the SFI course, finding a good job or a good apartment. I did, however, notice a general willingness to participate in the Swedish civil and political life.

#### *2.6. - Teaching and being taught: interchanging cultural codes and values?*

The Swedish government has made special efforts to support cultural activities among immigrants: subsidies for literature in various minority languages and other ethnic publications, funds for public libraries, radio and television programmes in several immigrant languages, the home-language programme and Swedish language programme. Almost 200 languages are spoken in Sweden, although it is debatable if they will survive. But all these cultural activities are structured and monitored "from above". The central state bureaucracy is closely linked with these organisations, and the state is their primary source of finance, which weakens their power of decision-making ("Immigrant in Sweden" 1999: 3)

Although acquiring the language of the receiving country is essential for integration, the importance of the SFI test seems to be overestimated, creating many obstacles to immigrants' integration into labour market and consequently into social life. Teachers from Lernia thought that the SFI test is more difficult for Arab people, not only because of completely different linguistic roots, but also because of their lack of interaction with Swedish people so that they do not have the chance to practice Swedish outside classes. The problem of non-interaction is confirmed again and again in this study since Arab respondents are well-educated and have in general good language skills.

The way in which a language is taught depends mainly on the national education policy and the country's educational tradition. In Sweden this is very uniform, universal and with less visible rules than in other countries. Sweden gets particularly high results in international comparative tests like, for example, PISA (the OECD Programme for International Students Assessment). However, its public education system does not seem to fit very well with the culturally distinct backgrounds of immigrants.

Language teaching at Lernia, although quite individualised, is also neutral since it is based on a professional rather than a cultural identity, which could be seen as a way of denying cultural heterogeneity. Even though teachers recognised that it is very important for them to have some knowledge of the foreign language concerned in

order to understand the errors made by different students and evaluate them properly, selection criteria were unclear and relied on the teachers' subjective evaluations. The required high level of proficiency in Swedish might also constitute a real barrier for those Arab immigrants who just want to work.

The rate of attendance among my Arab respondents in the Swedish course at Lernia was very high, mainly because they are paid in order to attend the introduction programme. It did not, however, receive a high evaluation from my respondents in terms of its importance in immigrant integration. Many emphasised the uniformity of the Swedish educational system. Newcomer Arab immigrants who tried to finish the language course sooner could not do so because of all the red tape.

The Arab family counsellor from the Islamic Centre thought that the state policy creates a kind of dependency among immigrants on social benefits by obliging them to learn the language before they can even think about getting a job in Sweden. Yet, the majority of Arab immigrants come as refugees, so getting established in Sweden is not their immediate concern. Moreover, because of the language difficulties, many Arab immigrants end up working on the black market even while doing the language course. This (illegal) strategy allows them not only to get more money, but also to work.

### *2.7. - Cultural identity and prejudices*

Arab people, even refugees, prove to be strongly connected to their culture (religion), which they try to protect, preserve and perpetuate. Hence, the issue is not only the Arab immigrants' motivation in integrating into Swedish society but also the Swedes' disposition to incorporate the 'foreigner' and understand his or her Arab (Muslim) culture. Only if integration is seen as a two-way process can a certain criticism and self-criticism take place, thus opening up the way to dialogue and intercultural exchange (Santos 1995; Stavenhagen 1995; An'Na-im 1992).

Looking more closely at my sample, the majority of the Arab respondents identified themselves in terms of cultural identity and less in terms of national identity. When asked about their religion, the majority identified themselves as Muslims and only a few as Christians. The responses reflect the significant role Arabs give to cultural (religious) identity and their clear desire to protect, preserve and develop this, which is their right. This might explain a possible (cultural) self-segregation.

Swedish people often cite cultural differences or cultural prejudices to explain the lack of interaction between Swedes and Arab immigrants, with particular emphasis on Islam. Thus, some Lernia teachers talked about real cultural barriers, while others spoke more in terms of the need to accept the diversity and, thereby to interact and exchange cultural codes and values. Sweden's lack of tradition in dealing with immigrants was also used to explain the integration problems of Arab

immigrants. A so-called “Swedish segregating way of thinking”, certain legal barriers in acquiring citizenship or the need “to fit into the system” were also emphasised.

Even though most respondents felt generally satisfied with the standard of living in Sweden in terms of personal wealth and security, democratic practices and respect for human rights, they did denounce practices of discrimination and racist behaviour that were experienced mainly in their relations with housing agencies, unemployment and immigration offices.

A Swedish person converted to Islam said that most Swedes see Islam as a ‘fanatical’ religion. Yet, the Social Democrat representative on integration issues at Malmö City Council did not consider Islam or cultural differences as the main barriers to Arab immigrant integration but preferred to explain this in terms of personal motivation and economic inequalities, though he did not altogether dismiss the importance of cultural differences, a different physical appearance or name.

The desire of Arab immigrants to keep their traditions, culture and religion appeared in most of the interviews. This desire was defended in reasonable terms as a right and part of normal respect between two different cultures and religions. Most of the Arab respondents were aware that Islam means different things to different people but that, in the end, respect and dialogue between the different cultures and religions should predominate.

## VI. - CONCLUSIONS

There is continuous debate in many host societies concerning what kind of policies should be adopted in order to respect, protect and develop immigrant rights. Many states have adopted different multicultural policies designed to combat the marginalization of and discrimination against minority groups. But these frequently tend to become ‘assimilationist’ or try to impose the cultural model of the dominant group without taking into account the cultural differences within the society. At the same time, the simple tolerance of different groups seems to lead to a segregated society with minority cultures living at the margins of the dominant culture. Multicultural policies need to be reconsidered not also in terms of non-discrimination and equality before the law, but also of specific immigrant rights and positive intercultural exchange.

Immigrant integration is a complex process that can be influenced by many factors. Some have to do with immigrants’ socio-demographic characteristics like age and stage of life, gender, cultural differences, class and educational or professional background; some with immigrants’ motivation to stay in the receiving country or their desire to live among their group in order to feel secure and have access and support; others with attitudinal factors like immigrants’ response to individual or institutionalised practices of discrimination in different spheres of social life. Structural factors in the receiving country like the general situation of the labour

and housing market, or the national and international law formulation and implementation might also influence to a certain extent or, in varying combinations, the process of immigrant integration.

The general population of Malmö is significantly differentiated with regard to jobs, economic resources and access to culture and education, social networks and civic or political participation. Ethnic and socio-economic segregation between different neighbourhoods is a crude reality that hinders social integration and participation for many foreign residents. High unemployment due to structural changes in the labour market triggers negative attitudes and discrimination against people of foreign background. Neither does advanced education or previous work experience for immigrants automatically increase their chances of finding a job. Moreover, Swedish integration policy does not seem to work well and uniformly for all immigrants living in Malmö. Arab immigrant groups are the most territorially segregated and discriminated against in terms of access to work, housing and other public services.

This study was a comparative one with regard to Arab immigrant groups. The Arab respondents were newly-arrived, with a relatively high educational level and a desire to stay in Sweden but a low access to information. They were relatively homogeneously gender and age distributed, unemployed and so living on introductory or social benefits. The results demonstrate that: newly arrived Arab immigrants lack access to social information and networks; a significant segment of the older population encounters higher barriers to getting a job; the homogeneous gender distribution of the sample does not compensate for the cultural impediment to two-income families; territorial segregation leads to a further social segregation; the highly standardised, rigidly structured and bureaucratic Swedish administrative system makes individual or group participation of Arab immigrants more difficult; the problematic definition of refugees and immigrant groups and rights in the international instruments favours practices of discrimination and human rights violation; racist explanations can also throw light on the exclusion of Arab immigrants from the labour market because of their foreign surnames, physical appearance and way of dressing, skin colour and strange accents.

Throughout the interviews, I had a clear feeling that most Arab immigrants were willing to give up something of their own selves in order to be accepted or more easily integrated into Swedish society. Most of them had already decided to stay in Sweden. This demonstrates a clear positive motivation towards integration but, as I have remarked, their participation in Swedish social, political and cultural life was very limited. Yet, most seem to find ways of coping in Swedish society. They discover different strategies for survival like black market jobs or living a segregated life within their own community, with the help of the community. They would nevertheless like more understanding, respect and openness from Swedes. Demands for special cultural rights were raised up mainly in terms of representation and recognition and in response to various practices of cultural (religious) discrimination.

To conclude, we could say that multicultural policies cannot impede the perpetuation of practices of discrimination and marginalisation of culturally distinct immigrants in spite of their high level of education or good work experience. This is mainly due to the vague formulation of collective minority rights in international and national laws, the problematic implementation of those that do exist and the failure of multicultural policies to achieve positive intercultural exchange. Nevertheless, Arab immigrants' problems of integration are overdetermined by a combination of many factors like individual characteristics, Sweden's lack of tradition in managing cultural diversity along with the economic crisis of the 1990s and increased unemployment, the highly bureaucratic and standardised Swedish administrative system, and last but not least important, the weakness and ambiguity of national and international laws on immigrant or ethnic minority issues.

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