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STATIONARITY AND NON-STATIONARITY IN IMMIGRANT PROBLEM DISCOURSE

The politics of migrant youth

Abstract
This article dissects debates about the "immigrant youth" over time, using the difference between stationary and non-stationary processes as the primary analytical tool. Using Sweden as an example, we show that the Swedish debate for decades was non-stationary, basically consisting of a number of independent and largely uncorrelated debates. The stationary, firmly placing immigrant youth as an originating principle in the debates, thus basing it on essentializing principles, is seen as a recent phenomenon. The wider implications of this change, for example with respect to multicultural ambitions, are outlined.

Keywords
Migrant integration discourses • migrant youth characterizations • stationarity

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1 Introduction

The immigrant situation in Europe is perhaps more topical today, 2011, than ever before. The former Norwegian Prime Minister, Thorbjørn Jagland, from his present position as Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, the guardian of the European Convention on Human Rights, recently declared that "as we understand it now, multiculturalism allows parallel societies to be developed within states…This must be stopped." He is described as "coming to the defence of Angela Merkel, … David Cameron, … and Nicolas Sarkozy," as the Council of Europe has "backed the growing number of government leaders denouncing multiculturalism as a failure, warning that it poses a threat to security" and it has also "damaged national identity" (Financial Times 2010). No wonder Sarkozy, running poll points behind Le Pen (the daughter) has declared it his wish to leave as his permanent legacy a history museum celebrating French identity (International Herald Tribune 2011b), and Cameron embarks on a program of "muscular liberalism" (International Herald Tribune 2011a).

Let me add a personal note. In the late 1980s, I had spent a good decade on international migration and ethnic relations (i.e., IMER) issues in Sweden, when I was invited to work at a Canadian university. One of the reasons I went, albeit only for a year as it turned out, was that I thought European IMER issues and research would probably become less and less interesting. Overall, I believed, most stuff in this field would henceforth be pretty mundane.

If there ever was a competition for the most magnificent misjudgment by a social scientist, I would indeed be a contender for the top prize. Looking back, it is easy to see how I missed the specific dynamics in the IMER field. My work in the 1980s had in large measure dealt with aspects of the overarching question of what was needed for immigrants and their offspring in Sweden to have good lives. In what some would perhaps describe as a typically Swedish instrumental way, my collaborators and I looked at political participation and citizenship principles, migrant youth's educational, linguistic, and socialization issues, communication between Swedish society and immigrants and their organizations, and a variety of other issues. Important stuff in its days, and some of our findings one may claim made their way into decision-making premises. My understanding was that some dragons, such as that migrant youth was a ticking time bomb or that there was an irreversible trend to push immigrants to the bottom of society, had been intellectually felled. The idea that Sweden was threatened by immigrant apartness could also be shown to be fundamentally baseless. What problems existed, I believed, would be pretty effectively addressed through general social welfare and labor market policies. To my mind, this was not a terribly fascinating social science field.

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The purpose of this article is not biographical, but the lines above serve to illustrate that the IMER field, with respect to both policymaking and research, has not been marked by continuity and step-wise progressions. In fact, examining IMER research and policy-shaping in a perspective spanning the last 30 to 40 years reveals that understanding this history requires more than a prosaic focus on actual immigrant situations, their "problematics," and their possible policy solutions. As I will try to illustrate in this article, in the IMER field, neither policymaking nor research can meaningfully approach its task as if it were a stationary target. For reasons of space, the empirical material will be largely confined to migrant youth concerns and with Sweden as a geographical pivot point. However, the argument is meant to have a much wider external validity.

2 Stationary and non-stationarity in IMER issues

The distinction between stationary and non-stationary processes is fundamental to the argument presented here. A stationary process has something that makes the process revert to values expressing its essential qualities. The stationary therefore expresses itself constantly; it can be seen as an "originating principle". The non-stationary, on the other hand, stands for a process where for example, some elements in what used to govern the process are discarded and others are added. Utilizing this simple dichotomy on immigrant issues, as objects of research and policymaking, will help elucidate some important features of conceptualizations in discourses about migrants.

The stationary in migrant youth discourse(s) in Sweden over the last 30 to 40 years, that is, what has been constant, is in fact very limited. Basically, we find two items of interest. One is that migrant youth has been a matter of political and scholarly concern – issues related to it are a constant, not necessarily very inflamed, feature. The second is that Swedish "normality" is somehow affected by migrant youth. Deciding how this normality should be expounded in any detail is no easy task. Perhaps one good way of putting it is that migrant youth is somehow introducing a measure of unpredictability – what does their presence mean in terms of where Sweden will head? Do we (the Swedes) risk losing control over some things with respect to where our society is heading?

If we look at the non-stationary, a very different situation exists. The significant content of the migrant youth label shifts many times. What these varying "significant contents" share is that they (virtually) all focus on issues that are thought of as problems of one sort or another. However, it is crucial to note that political actors and scholars do not see these problems as growing out of each other, or following some single originating principle – if this had been the case, we would have had a stationary process roughly following this logic: migrant youth is ONE problem, remaining fundamentally one problem over time, and we are dealing with its various manifestations.

3 The logic and substance of the non-stationary

Even if leading politicians in several European countries in the last decade often declared that liberalism, democracy, the rule of law, and perhaps some more items of this nature, are characteristics of their countries' culture, or even European culture, it is striking how nationally specific are the concerns articulated at a less general level (Lithman 2010). Differently put, the causes, manifestations, and remedies with respect to the "immigrant problem" span for example the German concern with parallel societies, French debates about what republican values are, and Norway's worries about its national cohesion given the immigration from "culturally remote" countries. It should be noted, though, that since 9/11 we have had a particular concern that engages on a European level – immigrants as dangers to security. However, in more mainstream debates, no one seems to have openly suggested that the average immigrant is a terrorist.

Varying notions between countries with respect to the understanding of immigrants and the problem(s) they represent is just one aspect of the multitude. Also within countries, we find over time a great variation of the same understandings. As will be illustrated with the concerns over immigrant youth in Sweden, we find that the problem dimension of this category has varied widely over time. This history is illustrative of a non-stationary process. Most importantly, immigrant youth do not – apart from a purely descriptive demographic delineation – stand as what sociologists would call a "dependent variable," whose content and processual qualities get increasingly defined and understood. Instead, as will be illustrated below, migrant youth is better understood as a label to which different qualities get ascribed, and which is not derived from a cumulative process of better understanding the characteristics of immigrant youth. One may even go so far as to suggest that at each time period, this category is largely defined by the problem(s) seen to be characteristic for it. The shifting understanding of the situation of immigrant youth/second generation therefore has characteristics of being a non-stationary process.

4 The problem history of migrant youth

In Sweden, there have been a number of debates about immigrant youth, starting in the 1970s. To some extent they have superseded each other, to some extent they have run co-terminally during specific time periods. To put keyword labels on these debates, as will be done here, will perhaps tend to reduce the appreciation of how intense and occasionally sophisticated they were, and of the amount of research spent on elucidating them. However, the purpose here is not to give a detailed description of these debates, but to define some premises for how our understanding of specific

migration-related issues is shaped. It must be remembered, that *the issues below were topics of debate, and there were different positions in these debates*.

4.1 1975/1985: identity development and semi-lingualism

This debate was instrumental in creating and shaping one of the best-known features of Sweden's presumed multiculturalism. The arguments were squarely initiated from scholars, where names such as Skutnabb-Kangas in Stockholm were extremely prominent. Building on their own work and also authorities such as Cummins in Toronto, the issue was the importance of the mother tongue as the basis for a fully formed identity that also included emotional development. A connected, equally important part of this argument was that proper mother-tongue knowledge was essential for being able to appropriate Swedish. (At this time I applied for a social anthropology faculty position at another Swedish university and my book about First Nations people ("Indians") in Canada was dismissed by the faculty advisor since I had not understood that these people were semi-lingual.)

4.2 1980s: the economic dimension

This was not really a major issue with respect to migrant youth concerns, but still there were two aspects worth mentioning. One was if immigrants contributed to the economic wellbeing of Sweden, and the other was if Sweden was developing a dual labor market or moving towards a "vertical mosaic." Here, the prospects for the coming generation were significantly addressed, and social scientists and economists showed that such things as school statistics and Swedish wage formation processes (with strong labor union input) alleviated the concerns.

4.3 Early 1980s: time bomb

Inspired not least by products from German researchers (and not necessarily closely read), such as Wilpert, and US ghetto studies, the notion emerged that immigrant youth were, due to dismal school results, employment prospects, etc., in the process of becoming a marginalized part of society, and this marginalization would in due time translate itself into very massively destructive acts directed towards the surrounding society.

4.4 Mid-1980s: Swedish values

By this time, refugee reception, as opposed to labor migration, had started to become the overall defining feature of the political and scholarly attention to migrant youth/second generation issues. The "Whole of Sweden" was the major policy development, aiming at dispersing refugees to all parts of Sweden, and all municipalities would get significant grants for each refugee they agreed to settle from reception facilities. In addition, the huge number of empty council-owned flats in virtually every municipality except the major cities would also get let. The philosophy accompanying this policy was that immigrants, and here the focus was also on youth, would by living outside the major cities come closer to true Swedish values. The emphasis was not expressed in the dramatic terms of democracy or liberalism, but predominantly on just getting the hang of how things are done in Sweden. Once established, and onwards, especially when the number of new refugees has decreased, elected representatives of Swedish municipalities have petitioned the government to increase the number of new refugees.

4.5 1990s: ghettoization

The driving issue with respect to immigrant youth/second generation was the overall concern with what happened in the suburbs of the major cities. In a style which I believe many would find pretty typical of Swedish "applied" social research, the main bulk of the results from a governmental inquiry produced the "facts" and suggested remedies. Although giving some space also to other issues, by far the most importance was attached to standard-of-living indicators and their significance.

4.6 1990s–2000: underclass formation, disintegration, gangs, and crime

In this period, perhaps not the first but at least more sustained and powerful arguments about something being fundamentally wrong with immigrant youth come to the fore. A major concern with this category having a major propensity for crime peters out as a report from the Crime Prevention Council (Brottsförebyggande Rådet 1998) finds that second generation immigrants from non-European countries are the least crime-prone statistically identifiable category. The first "populist" party formed around negativism against immigrants makes it into Parliament. It must be seen as initiating a highly energized debate about "Muslims." However, it lasts only one electoral period. Now for the first time, albeit with limited success, the idea of a fundamental incompatibility between Swedes and immigrants, and something the passing of time will not take care of, becomes a feature of public discussion. It is also worth noting, that the label immigrant now really has wandered from being applied to all immigrants, to people of non-European backgrounds and also to people from former Yugoslavia. This period is thus the first where populist politicians have had a very significant breakthrough in moving the conceptual signposts in immigration-related public debates.

4.7 2000: multiculturalism backlash, parallel societies, Muslims

What may well be termed the multiculturalism backlash should be understood as a phenomenon with at least seven more specific components, reflecting that migrant youth issues are now becoming totalized. Topics of debate in this period include (1) the legitimacy of state policies are incomparably more openly criticized, and not just in terms of specific activities but in terms of fundamental premises (with the open or implicit understanding that immigration is a doomsday machine), (2) immigrants intentionally create their own apartness from the rest of society, (3) Swedish society buckles under the problems represented by immigrants, (4) immigrants are essentially different from Swedes (and now the "immigrant" is not just from outside Europe, but primarily a Muslim), (5) immigrant problem issues are seen as having become static in the sense that change over time, be it integration or assimilation, is not taking place, (6) the only sensible policy response is to "demand" that the immigrants become Swedes, (7) immigrants are a drain on the economy. The newly formed "Sweden Democrats" party, with a clear historical connection to the "White Power" movement, entered Parliament in 2011.

The above account could, of course, be greatly expanded. Still, however, it illustrates the main point about the non-stationarity of the immigrant youth/second generation debates in Sweden. Various actors, at various times and in different issues, have been most prominent. Representatives of different academic disciplines have been important in initiating and supporting roles in some of these debates, especially perhaps linguists in the first major issue, welfare state specialists in the ghettoization debate, and more recently for example, anthropologists in the interpretation of immigrant separateness. Municipal politicians and their allies in Parliament and government were the key actors in both the Whole of Sweden program and also in the ghettoization debates. Populist anti-immigration political parties significantly initiated, hijacked, or rode to prominence on the "Muslim" presence.

Perhaps the most important government activity, especially in a "multicultural" context, was that in the early 1970s it established the "goals" for Swedish immigrant policies, defined as freedom of choice (for immigrants to define their own identity), equality (primarily interpreted as socio-economic comparability with Swedes), and collaboration (between immigrants and Swedes). This took place without any negative public debate. Over the years, the government has of course had to deal with any number of immigrant problem issues. Even if for example, a leading government representative at a seminar at Stockholm University declared that the Whole of Sweden was the only true Stalinist government program in Sweden, the government must by and large be seen as having had a mediating stance between the parties to various debates. Actually, and this is really noteworthy in a comparative European context, one is hard pressed to find leading politicians from the non-populist parties engage in racializing discourse. Items such as citizenship requirements and dual citizenship legislation, which in other countries, such as Denmark, provoked significant debate, were in Sweden largely dealt with in a non-symbolic and pragmatic way – without much inflamed debate.

The non-stationarity of debates about immigrant youth is evident from the account above: different issues are not seen as generically tied together and there are different actors from different platforms. Over time, the *various* debates seem ad hoc in relation to each other.[1] In the latest period, however, something of a quantum shift has occurred. Stationarity has arrived. No longer is "the problem" (by vocal debaters) seen as something that is amenable to social or economic gradual improvements – the "immigrants" themselves are the root problem. Their fortune, in carrying on not being Christians and not embracing in a totalizing manner the identity of the host country, is seen as an unacceptable misfortune by others (Swedes).

5 What happened?

Why did we see this dramatic shift in the debates about immigrants? The "common sense realistic" argument would of course be that "the Swedish people" has finally woken up to the realities facing it, and finds the situation unacceptable. This, at least, is the way that some put it. However, even a cursory perusal of for example, attitude surveys, casts doubt on this argument.[2] More than half of all Swedes think the refugee admission rules should be unchanged or less prohibitive. More than 80% think that Sweden should admit more refugees from the poorest in the poor countries. A long-term look at opinion polls shows over decades a pretty constant rate of between a quarter and a third of the population having what may be characterized as xenophobic orientations. It is worth remembering that the Sweden Democrats, who entered Parliament in 2010, got somewhat more than 5% of the vote – significant but not exactly representing a groundswell.

If the common sense realistic argument doesn't hold, what other explanations can there be? This seems likely to point to three converging tendencies. One has to do with the increasing Europeanization (for lack of a better word) of issues which were previously handled as domestic concerns. The second has to do with the (re)articulation of the social contract, especially its identity formation powers in times of economic squeeze. The third relates to the introduction of immigrant issues into the political life in new ways.

While researchers may have occasionally introduced material from various countries into migration debates, it is remarkable to see the extent to which the Swedish immigration debates now, since some years, starts to reflect a European pattern manifest in Germany, France, Austria, the UK, etc. With what to the bystander may look astonishing speed, the issue of Sweden and its

relationship to immigrants is now being couched in terms of Europe and its immigrants. Immigrant issues are leaving the domestic realm, and the issues are less and less seen as problems to be approached through domestic instrumental policies. This also means that Swedish immigrant debates over the last decade, as illustrated above, have become increasingly shaped as a bipolarity, where a general cosmopolitan and global orientation stands against a nationalistically argued delineation of the political community. The questions are no longer of the type "what shall we do with Rinkeby?" (one of the immigrant-dense suburbs). Instead, there is a strong tendency for the debates to end up in strange and abstract debates about being Muslim, being Swedish, culture as a human right, etc. But when there are significant local problems, as for example in Rosengård outside Malmö, it is heartening to see local politicians having no problem seeing that this is something which they have to cope with in an instrumental fashion.

It is far too common, given the facts available, to suggest that xenophobic sentiments are expressive of economic distress.[3] Also strongly questioned by Sides and Citrin (2007) is the idea that xenophobic sentiments result from interaction with immigrants. Instead, it appears that the Swedish pattern with respect to where stronger anti-immigrant sentiments exist holds more or less true for large parts of Western and Central Europe. The strongest such sentiments are found in rural and semi-rural areas in which local identities are seemingly strong. This pattern appears to hold at least for countries as different as, for example, Austria, Denmark, France, Norway, and Sweden – it is in these areas that the Sweden Democrats are strong. It is, given available data, very tempting to suggest that stronger xenophobic sentiments go hand in hand with an identity formation in the local area/region where a historical distrust of the progressiveness and unitarian force of the nation-state is solidly founded. The irony of the situation is obvious – the distrust of the nation-state dresses itself in a celebration of the unitary culture of the nation-state. Some additional support for this interpretation is found in the populist dimension – the celebration of "the people" is joined by a denouncement of the state as properly representing the people.

What the organized xenophobic expressions have managed is to place a stationary notion of immigrants in the realm of politics. An ontological shift is occurring. Instead of the non-stationary, where immigrant issues were seen as problems to be dealt with through topic-specific pragmatic responses, we now have stationarity: all problems related to immigrants are basically reverting back to qualities and capacities (or lack thereof) on the part of immigrants. This has obvious consequences, and it is really surprising how quickly and successfully this has been achieved in many places in Europe. The history of multiculturalism is illustrative. Multiculturalism, in the sense of cultural enclaves somehow cut off from the rest of society, was never a policy goal in Sweden. Instead, its multicultural policies, as they are usually referred to, were pragmatic solutions to what was seen as fundamentally helping individuals to achieve their potential. In this sense, multicultural policies are actually paradigmatic examples of what Berggren and Trädgårdh (2006) call "statsindividualism," the state-sponsored production of individualism that they see as the carrying *leitmotif* in Swedish political culture.

6 Conclusions: where will it lead?

Prognostications about the future have a bad track record in the social sciences. Nevertheless, we can draw some obvious conclusions about what a shift from the non-stationary to the stationary entails. One of its most obvious qualities is that it actually defines us and them in a much harsher contrastive fashion than is possible in the more pragmatically oriented non-stationary perspective. This will, of course, have repercussions not only with respect to what used to be called the "receiving countries" in terms of strife, but also geo-political consequences, as evidenced by recent exchanges between German and Turkish officials, with respect to both migrants of Turkish background and EU membership. Also in Sweden, where the Prime Minister is perhaps the most supportive of all EU prime ministers of Turkish membership, it is now increasingly taken for granted that the present problems somehow largely emerged as a result of multicultural policies, founded on a mistaken respect for other cultures. This respect, as has been already stated, was marginal in determining what in retrospect has been called multicultural policies. Another irony emerges: policies which were founded on the general state-sponsored individualism policies are now discredited, as they were supposedly based on what now in the realm of politics is seen as the support of group-wise apartness. And this discrediting is in its turn founded on a stress of the apartness principle, both in celebrating "Swedishness" and in essentializing the distinctiveness of immigrants.

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Notes

1 It may be added that debates related to the relationship and equality between the sexes did occur at several periods, occasionally related to immigrant youth/second generation. By and large, however, these debates also had as a fundamental premise that whatever was problematic was to be handled through instrumental means, such as through the education system or extended counseling services.

2 A richer variety of information is available at Lithman (n.d.).

3 Sides and Citrin (2007) is an excellent review of European attitudes to immigrants, and shows clearly that level of wealth, or worries about employment or unemployment, are not factors in shaping attitudes to immigrants.

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