Learning to be swedish: governing migrants in labour-market projects

Viktor Vesterberg

Journal Article

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Learning to Be Swedish: Governing Migrants in Labour-Market Projects

Viktor Vesterberg[*]

Institute for Research on Migration, Ethnicity, and Society, Linkoping University, Sweden

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[*] E-mail: viktor.vesterberg@liu.se

Learning to Be Swedish

Abstract

This article focuses on adult learning in labour-market projects targeting unemployed migrants in Sweden. Drawing on a Foucauldian analysis of governmentality, the results of the study problematize the ways that such projects produce individualizing discourses—targeting individuals, constructing them as responsible for their position as unemployed. The project's target groups are generally defined not on the basis of ethnicity as such, but rather using terms such as *non-Nordic background*, *foreign born*, and *immigrants*. However, two groups considered especially problematic *are* constructed through ethnicity: Somali and Roma people. The notion of social competency is analysed here as a way of constructing the unemployed migrants as not yet employable. Another significant result concerns the notion of gender equality, which makes migrants governable because it constructs boundaries between Swedishness and Otherness. In line with this rationality, the targeted migrants are governed towards Swedishness through learning gender equality. These results raise a number of issues of great concern for the inclusion of migrants in the labour market, as they highlight a paradoxical relationship between the inclusive ambitions of interventions targeting unemployed migrants and the ethnicized discourses of 'Othering' that imbue these learning practices.

Keywords: integration; migrants; learning; employability; governing

Introduction

In the contemporary European Union, the concepts of employability and lifelong learning are part of the dominant discourse in a range of policy debates. In this discourse, the individual is constructed as responsible for continuously working on herself in order to become employable and be included in society (Fejes 2010; Fejes and Nicoll 2008; Garsten and Jacobsson 2004; McQuaid and Lindsay 2005; Olssen 2006). The discourse of lifelong learning broadens the understanding of education, expanding its reach from that of school and 'formal education' until 'learning becomes an individualized and all-embracing activity' (Fejes and Dahlstedt 2013: 19). This discourse constructs as the norm a highly skilled lifelong learner thriving in the knowledge economy, in contrast to the problematic low- or unskilled learner who not

only is *at* risk (of, for example, poverty) but also is *the* risk (for example, threatening social cohesion). Migrants are often constructed as such problematic learners (Brine 2006).

The discourse of lifelong employability features prominently not least in contemporary policy debates on migration in multiethnic Europe—where the pressing issue is *how* and *what* migrants need to learn in order to become employable and thus be included in society (Schierup, Hansen, and Castles 2006; Guo 2010; Vesterberg 2013). Research has shown the pervasiveness of lifelong-employability discourse targeting migrants not only in Europe but also in a wide range of countries throughout the world. Guo (2010: 144) argues that lifelong learning targeting migrants in multiethnic societies has translated into the practice of teaching migrants the norms and values of the host country rather than into practices of mutual learning and mutual integration. Further, Ng and Shan (2010) have pointed out racialized and gendered constructions of migrants in discourses of lifelong learning and employability that produce certain subjects who meet the needs and demands of postindustrial knowledge economies.

The focus of this article is the learning of migrants in a particular empirical context—labour-market projects co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) targeting 'people of foreign background.' These specific projects are part of broader ongoing changes in the organization of welfare, where welfare is increasingly organized into projects—this is, for instance, the case in the field of adult education (Hodgson and Cicmil 2006; Brunila 2011). This ongoing 'projectification' of welfare involves different actors: public-sector and private-sector actors, as well as civil society actors (Field 2000), such as the temperance movement, the Swedish Red Cross, and folk high schools.

In a Scandinavian context, ESF labour-market projects targeting unemployed migrants have been studied by researchers such as Lundstedt (2005), Wright-Nielsen (2009), and Åse (2010), focusing particularly on the construction of immigrant women in relation to white femininity. One important finding in these studies is that the projects mobilize various techniques, problematizing the targeted migrants and constructing them as requiring specific interventions that would render them Swedish and include them in Swedish society. The question then is *how* the targeted migrants are supposed to learn to become Swedish, employable, and part of society.

The aim of this article is to analyse the construction of migrants as learning subjects in ESF projects that target unemployed migrants. Using a governmentality approach, the questions guiding the analysis focus on *who*, *how*, *what*, and *why* (Foucault 1983: 223; cf. Dean 1996): *Who* are the targeted subjects in the projects? *How* are the targeted subjects supposed to learn? *What* are these subjects supposed to learn? *Why* are the targeted subjects seen as in need of learning?

Analytical perspective

The analytical point of departure in this article is based on a Foucauldian understanding of governmentality (Rose 1999a, 1999b; Dean 2010) as elaborated on in the fields of education and adult education (Fejes and Nicoll 2008; Olssen 2006; Sipos Zackrisson and Assarsson 2008). A governmentality approach draws attention to the 'rationalities of government' (Foucault 2004) and to the 'art of governing' (Foucault 1991). The concept itself puts together the two words *govern* and *mentality*, broadening the conventional understanding of government as having to do with the state and the relation between the state and its subjects. The governmentality analysis focuses on ways in which the targets of governing are actively shaped and made governable throughout the entire social body, that is, on governing the mentalities of the targeted subjects in a variety of ways. Using a governmentality approach facilitates an analysis of learning in terms of the governing and the production of certain kinds of subjects (Popkewitz, Olsson, and Petersson 2007; Fejes and Nicoll 2008). In this article, such an approach focuses on discourses that shape the conduct and mentalities of the migrants targeted in ESF projects.

This analytical perspective recognizes the close relations between knowledge and power (Bröckling, Krasmann, and Lemke 2011: 1–2). Here, the notion of *truth* is important because each society produces its own 'regimes of truth,' determining what is accepted as true knowledge (Foucault, 1980). In a governmentality approach, power is understood not solely as something prohibitive and repressive but also as something productive that creates and shapes subjects. Or, as Foucault (2000: 120) puts it, power 'traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.' Hence, the productive aspect of power is central in understanding the shaping of subjects.

Governing can be understood in this context in terms of an 'expertise of subjectivity' (Rose 1999a: 92, 1999b: 2), referring to a wide range of professions

engaged in classifying and measuring the psyche, predicting and diagnosing causes of its troubles, and prescribing adequate remedies. According to Rose (1999a: 189), civil society is one arena where governing is increasingly practiced. Civil-society organizations are particularly attractive when governing populations because they are understood as 'natural' and are not embedded in the 'massive codes and rules of conduct' that distinguish the public sector and governmental authorities. Hence, specific kinds of experts on community have evolved, specializing in governing citizens in civil-society organizations. This strategy of constructing subjects has been conceptualized by Rose (1999a: 190) as 'governing through communities' (Rose 1999a: 190). As mentioned, the discourse of lifelong learning often implies commitment from civil society rather than from the state (Field 2000).

Context

The empirical scope of this article is the labour-market projects co-financed by the Swedish ESF. The fund is the EU's main instrument for establishing social cohesion in Europe, and in Sweden it has hitherto co-financed more than 90,000 projects that have had more than one million participants. These projects are dedicated to combating social exclusion, providing more and better jobs, raising the skills of the workforce, and increasing the supply of labour (Vesterberg 2013). Regarding the projects' funding, co-financing from the ESF can cover up to 40 per cent of the project's total costs. The remaining costs are covered by so-called public co-financing—for example, from the Employment Service, the Social Insurance Agency, local authorities, or county boards. One project can last up to 36 months (Engstrand, Andersson, and Vesterberg 2010). The means of ESF in Sweden are divided into two priority axes. The first is the supply of skills, focusing predominantly on the development of employees' abilities. The scope of this article coincides with the second priority axis—namely, an increased supply of labour. The main purpose of this axis is to 'make it easier for people far outside the labour market to enter and remain in the labour market through non-traditional initiatives.' The projects co-financed by ESF's second priority axis should also have a 'particular focus […] on persons in the target group with a foreign background' (ESF 2007: 35–36).

Sweden traditionally has adopted multicultural politics, granting cultural and political rights to migrants and minorities to a certain degree. In 2010, the state, via the employment office, took over responsibility for introducing newly arrived immigrants

from the municipalities. The introduction activities include courses in Swedish for immigrants (SFI) and the assistance of an 'introduction guide,' a personal guide authorized by the state who facilitates the introduction of newly arrived migrants. Further activities include a civic orientation that provides a basic understanding of Swedish society. These undertakings are recorded in an individual 'introduction plan' produced in co-operation between the newly arrived migrant and concerned municipalities, authorities, and organizations (SFS: 2010: 197).

For decades, Sweden has been a country of immigration. From the 1950s to 1970s, the most migrants came to Sweden as labourers from Scandinavia, Turkey, Greece, and Yugoslavia. The Nordic countries constitute a particular case regarding migration, since they have had an agreement of free intra-Nordic mobility since 1954. Swedish migration policy from the 1950s to the 1970s has generally been described as expansive and as aimed at permanent settlement for migrants. The political context of the time was that of an expanding economy and a universalist welfare state. Owing to the high demand for labour, both the government and employers saw immigration as necessary. But when the economy started to decline, migration came to be perceived as a greater threat to Swedish welfare, resulting in a more restrictive labour-immigration policy (Frank 2014).

The characteristics of immigration to Sweden changed from labour migration to refugee migration during the 1970s (Johansson 2005). Up until the mid-1980s, almost all refugees were granted asylum, and granting permanent-resident permits was considered to be the norm. As Sweden entered the EU in 1995, the politics of migration in Sweden aligned more with common European policies in the area (Abiri 2000; Lidén and Nyhlén 2013).

In 2008, the labour-migration policies were renewed, resulting in a more liberal labour-immigration policy based on employers' own assessments of their labour needs (Frank 2014). The proportion of people residing in Sweden but born in another country has increased steadily since the mid-twentieth century. In 1960, some 4 per cent of Sweden's population was foreign born, compared to almost 16 per cent in 2013 (SCB, Statistics Sweden website). Allan Pred (2000: 34) describes the experience of 'multicultural' Sweden as follows:

> Whatever local circumstances may have been in the past, reminders of somatic,
> behavioural and cultural difference are now almost inescapable, an everyday

matter, throughout most of Sweden. […] Swedes at present cannot easily imagine themselves as members of a virtually homogenous national community.

In Sweden, discourses on multicultural society have centred, since the end of World War II, on categories of culture and ethnicity rather than of race. However, this does not mean that racism is nonexistent (Hübinette and Lundström 2011). In spite of the difficulties involved in talking about race and racism, structural differences in labour-market participation are obvious in Sweden, where migrants have a significantly higher degree of unemployment than those born in Sweden (Behtoui 2006). In 2011, unemployment among migrants was at 16.8 per cent, whereas among those born in Sweden it was 6.6 per cent (Statistics Sweden 2011). Migrants also tend to be occupied in jobs with lower wages, poorer working environments (Hjerm 2002), and poorer employment conditions (Jonsson and Wallette 2001).

Thus, the ESF projects operate in a multicultural milieu, aiming to combat unemployment among migrants and to thereby promote integration as well as social cohesion.

Methodological considerations

The projects analysed in this article were all active during the ESF program period 2007–2013, one of the overarching aims of which was to combat social exclusion. A mapping of all projects that were granted funding during 2008 (Engstrand et al. 2010) has shown that nearly half the projects were preoccupied with the integration of migrants, indicating that ethnic and migrant integration is an important issue for the ESF. The three most frequently used approaches for enhancing the employability of participants in these projects were education, work placement, and job coaching, usually in combination (Engstrand et al. 2010). The previous program period, dubbed *Equal* (2000–2006), had a similar policy agenda: the financed projects aimed at overcoming discrimination in working life, increasing employability, and facilitating learning in order to 'maximise the contribution of every individual to the economy' (European Commission 2005: 3).

The empirical material of this article consists of, in total, 107 project descriptions taken from projects targeting unemployed migrants. The descriptions were selected from the Swedish ESF's online project bank[1] using the search words *foreign*,

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[1] ESF online project bank: http://www.esf.se/en/Projektbank/Search-project/.

immigrant, and *refugee*. This search resulted in 107 individual projects concerned with the problem of labour-market integration among migrants. The project descriptions are generally between three and ten pages long, structured around mandatory headings set by the ESF.[2] The project descriptions are not as lengthy as the project applications but could be viewed as shorter versions of those. Coherent empirical material from the project description was constructed through a systematic reading of the 107 project descriptions.

As argued by Miller and Rose (2008: 29–30), analysing discourse is important in the study of governmentality. Thus, in line with the analytical perspective just presented, the project descriptions have been analysed as discourses that construct the unemployed migrants as learning subjects. All of the project descriptions were analysed following these analytical questions: *Who* are the targeted subjects? *How* are the targeted subjects supposed to learn? *Why* are these subjects in need of learning? *What* are the targeted subjects supposed to learn? In the first step of the analysis, the empirical material was categorized in line with these questions, resulting in an empirical body of material comprising 175 pages of text. In the second step of the analysis, reoccurring discourses concerning the formation and learning of the targeted migrants were identified. Of these reoccurring discourses, a smaller number of projects (14) were strategically selected for more thorough analysis as typical of the reoccurring discourses identified.

Regarding the kind of institutions that own and run the projects, it should be mentioned that 33 projects are owned by civil-society and private organizations, whilst 68 projects belong to the public sector; six projects did not mention an owner in their descriptions.

Constructing the learning individual

One crucial aspect of governing is naming and defining the targets of governing (Gordon 1980). In the ESF projects analysed, the target group—unemployed people of foreign background—is generally defined not on the basis of a specific ethnicity but rather by terms such as *non-Nordic background*, *foreign born*, *immigrants and refugees*, and *foreign background*—in other words, not Swedish.

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[2] The mandatory headings are as follows: summary, background, purpose, objective, accessibility for people with disabilities, gender mainstreaming, co-financiers, partners, and municipality.

The overarching aim of the ESF projects is to increase the supply of labour in order to enhance economic growth (ESF 2007). According to this economic rationality, the aim of governing is to increase the productivity of the population (Oksala 2013). Thus, the unemployed migrants are construed as a socioeconomic problem in need of interventions. The following quote illustrates this concern about the (lack of) productivity among migrants in Sweden.

> Amongst immigrants to Sweden, there are many whose skills and expertise are not utilised. These people could contribute to economic growth if they had gainful employment. Negative attitudes and a lack of knowledge are obstacles to this[3].
> (ESF 2007: 26)

Although this economic rationality of productivity and growth pays little attention to the individual as such, the projects always target the migrants as individuals. In the project descriptions, the targeted migrants are constructed as individuals *responsible* both for their position as unemployed and for learning the skills needed in order to become employable. This rationality becomes clear in a formulation from the project called *The Meeting: The Road to Work*,[4] which states that the project participants shall learn 'to take responsibility for their own development and find their own way to find a job.' Previous research has shown that in this individualizing discourse, the focus is often on personal problems such as overweight, untidy appearance, smoking, drinking, drug abuse, laziness, lack of language skills, and lack of cultural competency (Lundström 2005; Vesterberg 2013). These personal problems are construed as having a direct causal effect on the individual's unemployed position. In the description of the project *Your Turn*,[5] individualizing discourses explaining the participants' position as unemployed are produced in the following way:

> for the individual that is unemployed long-term, […] [there is] a change in life situation that can be compared with a personal crisis; for example, low self-esteem, lethargy, apathy, deteriorating health, depression, social isolation, lacking belief in the future, and weak initiative. […] Internal factors that contribute to a person's

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[3] All translations of empirical material are made by the author.

[4] Swedish name: *Mötet. Vägen till arbete*.

[5] Swedish name: *Din tur*.

ending up in long-term unemployment can be that the individuals have […] unrealistic views of themselves and possible job opportunities, are uncertain or lack trust in their own ability, ignorance about their strengths and weaknesses. (Project description, *Your Turn*)

Regarding the individualizing techniques in the project descriptions, techniques such as individual action plans, individual guidance, and job coaching recur. Such techniques individualize the problem of unemployment in that they aim at 'strengthening the participant'—as the goal is formulated, for instance, in the project *Mabi Dot Now*.[6] This individualizing discourse is also prominent in the description of the project *The Star*,[7] which initiates a range of individual activities that are supposed to make the participants 'feel that they have increased self-esteem, feel that they can influence their situation […] and are ready to enter the labour market; they will experience a higher degree of empowerment.' An important concept mobilized in the projects is that of empowerment. One project called *The Moonlight Workers*[8] explicitly mobilizes the concept of empowerment when constructing the targeted migrants as learning subjects in the following way: 'Empowerment shall take each individual's […] potential and choice as a point of departure' and 'with empowerment as working method […] create a possible path into Swedish society and to self-sufficiency.' The targeted migrants are here constructed as non-Swedish and thus as needing to be empowered to learn how to become Swedish as a means of being included in society.

In this 'will to empower' (Cruikshank 1999) unemployed migrants, the main reasons for unemployment are located within the individuals themselves, in the forms of low self-esteem, personal deficits, and weaknesses. In this discourse the targeted migrants are constructed as responsible for changing their position vis-á-vis the labour market, as in the case of the project *Meeting Place in a New Form*.[9] The goal of this particular project is that the unemployed migrants 'shall be strengthened in their ability to handle and change their own situation.' Here, unemployment is construed as an

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[6] Swedish name: *Mabi punkt nu*.

[7] Swedish name: *Stjärnan*.

[8] Swedish name: *Svartjobbarna*.

[9] Swedish name: *Mötesplats i ny form*.

individual problem that needs to be dealt with by the individual. Individuals are encouraged to understand themselves as active agents in their own lives.

Individualizing the problem of unemployment among migrants operates as a way to responsibilize (Rose 1999a) the project participants, for they are encouraged to work on themselves and change their situation through techniques of empowerment. In the projects a range of individualizing techniques is directed at the individual and at making them able, willing, and motivated to learn certain skills deemed desirable in order to become employable. One of these skills is social competency.

The learning of social competency

One prominent notion in the empirical material is that of social competency, which has been of increasing academic and psychological interest since the late 1960s. Social competency has been used to describe a set of desirable skills, including 'effectiveness in interaction' and the capacity to 'work effectively with others,' of which communicating, listening, perceptiveness, and instructing and helping others are key components (Morgeson, Reider, and Campion 2005: 585). The notion of social competency occurs in a range of academic fields as well as different policy areas, including the integration of migrants. In the following paragraphs, the focus will be how the project participants are supposed to learn to become socially competent subjects. One project fostering social competency among participants is *The Moonlight Workers*, which aims at 'practicing social competency and communication skills in order [for participants] to better cope with both social life and working life.' According to this rationality, the shaping of social competency is important not only to enhancing one's position on the labour market but also to improving the entire social life of the unemployed migrant. In this way, the lifelong learning of social competency blurs traditional boundaries between private/public and social/economic spheres, for the entire life of the unemployed migrants is made governable and is constructed as a target for learning.

The discourse of social competency that is mobilized in the project descriptions relates to changes in the understanding of the relations between *education* and *learning*. The concept of learning expands the understanding of formal education, given that virtually all activities in society can be understood in terms of learning. This distinction between

learning and education is evident in the project called *Navigator*,[10] when social competency is constructed as an *informal* competency related to lifelong learning—in contrast to education, which is described as something formal. Another example of social competency as constructed in the discourse of lifelong learning is the project *INFRA*.[11] In its project description, unemployed migrants are constructed as subjects lacking social competency; hence, the project aims at 'increasing social interaction and developing the individual's social competency.' In this description, learning social competency is presented by raising a set of questions ranging from the individual to the societal, inviting the participants to reflect on themselves and their existence in organizations as well as in society at large:

> Why do we exist? What common interests do we have? How can we develop our interests? Who am I? How can I contribute? Do I want to be part of the group? What does the association want with my involvement? How shall I act here? How do we work together? (Project description, *INFRA*)

These questions encourage project participants to reflect upon a range of areas of life, making learning social competency an 'all-embracing activity' (Fejes and Dahlstedt 2013: 19) and reworking the ethical substance of the unemployed migrants. This set of questions is described as a crucial part of the project activities, as 'all these questions are trained and answered in social interaction.' Learning social competency is constructed as something that needs to be practiced with others and not something that can be learned in solitude. In *INFRA*, learning social competency is constructed as necessary if unemployed migrants are to become employable.

> Most important when it comes to obtaining employment is that the person has a strategic competency, that they can think with a 'corporate logic,' a personal competency, to be able to show who you are and a social competency, where the ability to cooperate and interact is decisive. (Project description, *INFRA*)

In the quote, social competency is constructed as part of a set of an individual's competencies—strategic, personal, and social—making her employable. This

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[10] Swedish name: *Navigator*.

[11] Swedish name: *INFRA*.

employable subject is further portrayed as embodying a 'corporate logic.' This kind of corporate subject can be seen as driven by a will to maximize his or her human capital and to conduct life based on 'maximum output for minimum expenditure' (Read 2009: 31). In this way, a market rationality is expanded beyond the traditional domains of the market economy (Oksala 2013), as the aim of the project is to guide the conduct of the unemployed migrants towards a 'corporate logic.'

As noted, the project descriptions emphasize the importance of learning social competency. Because participants are positioned as migrants, it is presented as particularly important that this development of social competency be practiced in interaction with 'Swedes.' For instance, in the project *Green Integration*[12] the learning of social competency is to be facilitated through 'networking between Swedes and Arabic-speaking people.' In the project descriptions, civil society is constructed as one of the most crucial domains in which such interaction is to take place.[13]

The project description of *INFRA* focuses strongly on learning social competency through interaction with 'Swedes' in civil society, concluding that 'civil society will develop through cultural exchange,' emphasizing that 'civil society is the golden key to create comradeship […] that gives everyone an enriched life through community.' One of the crucial means of making the targeted migrants employable in *INFRA* is to 'create platforms for meetings [between Swedes and migrants] by utilizing the resources of civil society' in order 'to create a good introduction for increased social interaction and a development of the individual's social competency.'

In concluding this section, we can see that learning social competency is constructed as an all-embracing activity that involves civil society as an apparently 'natural' domain of governing (Rose 1999a), where migrants through interaction with 'Swedes' are to be incorporated into the Swedish societal community.

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[12] Swedish name: *Grön integration*.

[13] Roughly one-third of the projects analysed (33 of 107) are run by private and civil-society organizations. The ESF stresses the importance of involving partners from different sectors—public, private, and civil society. Here, there is a strong focus on co-operation and partnership: 'a successful partnership is based on a strategically relevant composition of players from public, private and non-commercial organizations' (ESF 2007: 96).

The learning of gender equality

Another reoccurring discourse constructing the targeted migrants as learning subjects is that of *gender equality*. This is an issue of high priority for the ESF, as all projects are required to reflect upon it under the mandatory heading of 'gender mainstreaming' in the project descriptions. The Swedish ESF council emphasizes the importance of gender equality thus:

> The objective of gender equality policy is that women and men should [have] the same power to shape decisions that affect society and their own lives. A precondition for achieving this is that women and men have the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities in all areas of life. Gender equality policy involves all sectors […]. Conditions for women in working life and their opportunities to run businesses must be improved, and all forms of male violence against women must be combated. (ESF 2007: 17)

Thus, according to the Swedish ESF council, the issue of gender equality is to be mainstreamed, and it is discussed in mandatory terms as something that *must* be taken into consideration. The issue is dealt with in close relation to questions of integration and diversity.

> Special focus *must* be placed on equality between women and men, integration and diversity […]. Equality between women and men *must* be promoted at all levels, when drawing up and implementing structural fund […] projects. […] As regards integration and diversity, the influence and participation of the groups involved in the labour market are also to be safeguarded. (ESF 2007: 15, emphasis mine)

These two areas of focus, gender equality and integration and diversity, are also intertwined in the project descriptions. The relation between gender mainstreaming and the integration of migrants is visible, for instance, in the project description of *Ready for Work*,[14] where Sweden is portrayed as a role model when it comes to gender equality:

> Issues of gender equality [are] an area that we in Sweden have a better awareness of than in many countries that our immigrants come from. (Project description, *Ready for Work*)

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[14] Swedish name: *Redo för jobb*.

In this quote a distinction is made between 'we in Sweden,' who are constructed as having 'a better awareness,' and 'our immigrants.' In this way, the discourse on gender equality draws boundaries between 'us' and 'them' (Anderson, 2013). When gender mainstreaming is practiced in the context of labour-market projects targeting unemployed migrants, it produces hierarchical differences and ethnicized Otherness. Gender equality is, on one hand, part of a Swedish self-image and constructed as naturally intertwined with a certain national belonging—Swedishness. On the other hand, certain subjects, positioned as not possessing this Swedishness, are construed as belonging to patriarchal, religious, and traditional cultures (Vesterberg 2013). Thus, gender equality becomes a prominent marker of Swedishness[15] (de los Reyes, Molina, and Mulinari 2006: 12), indicating that adopting specific norms of gender equality is one crucial aspect of learning to be Swedish.

In the project descriptions, gender equality is emphasized as crucial for migrants who want to become employable, given that breaking traditional gender roles supposedly broadens the labour-market opportunities for unemployed migrants. This way of reasoning is exemplified in the project description of *Vocational Training in Co-operation*,[16] which expresses a will to actively intervene in the occupational preferences of young migrant men, particularly, and to guide them towards 'caring' professions. Thus, the project aims to break traditional patterns in order to create greater diversity.

When it comes to gender equality, two specific ethnicized groups are positioned as particularly problematic—Somalis and Roma. One project specifically targeting unemployed Roma[17] problematizes gender relations by focusing on Roma family life: 'The Roma family structures are hierarchal and patriarchal, with clear predetermined roles for men and women.' Another project targeting Roma youth[18] attests a will to break the barrier between public and private spheres and to intervene in the family life of the Roma youth. The ambition is to 'in all possible ways support the participants, especially women, in withstanding potential pressure from the family.' Here, the

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[15] However, the notion of gender equality is not a marker of Swedishness alone. Research focusing on both Finnish (Tuori 2007) and Danish (Haldrup, Koefoed, and Simonsen 2006) contexts has identified similar tendencies, connecting a specific discourse of nationality closely to the idea of gender equality.

[16] Swedish name: *Yrkesutbildning i samverkan*.

[17] *Romano Zor! Roma Force!* Swedish name: *Romano Zor! Romsk kraft!*

[18] *Project for Roma Youth*; Swedish name: *Projekt för Romska ungdomar*.

families of the Roma youth are suspected of disagreeing with the female youngsters participating in the project. In the project, a range of 'norm-breaking exercises' is arranged, discussing the 'difference between gender and sex and rais[ing] different feminist perspectives, as well as the meaning of the concept queer.' Through these exercises, the Roma youth are supposed to learn how to adopt to norms of gender equality.

Similar distinctions between 'us' and 'them' in terms of gender equality are also found in projects targeting Somalis, such as *Sahil*.[19]

> Somalis in general lack or have few contacts with Swedish society, which motivates [people] to start mapping the individual at an early stage and to quickly involve gender-equal aspects. (Project description, *Sahil*)

These projects illustrate the importance of gender equality in distinguishing between Swedes and Others, constructing 'us' as progressive and equal and 'them' as more or less patriarchal, traditional, and unequal. The last quote also stresses, once more, the importance of migrants' interacting with 'Swedes'. Through such interaction, the targeted migrants are supposed to become more gender equal—that is, more Swedish.

Concluding reflections

The aim of this article has been to analyse the construction of migrants as learning subjects in ESF projects targeting unemployed migrants, along with the discourses shaping the conduct and mentalities of these migrants. Using a governmentality approach, the questions guiding the analysis focus on *who*, *how*, *what* and *why*. *Who* are the targeted subjects in the projects? *How* are the targeted subjects supposed to learn? *What* are these subjects supposed to learn? *Why* are the targeted subjects in need of learning?

Who are the targeted subjects in the projects? The target groups are generally not explicitly defined through ethnicity. Rather, the target groups are defined primarily by exclusion from the category of Swedishness—they are to a greater or lesser extent constructed as non-Swedes. However, two specifically problematized groups *are* constructed by ethnicity: Somalis and Roma. The main argument for pinpointing these

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[19] Swedish name: *Sahil*.

groups, put forward in the projects, is their low participation in the labour market (Thörnqvist 2011).[20]

  How and *what* are the targeted subjects supposed to learn? The project descriptions constructs unemployment among migrants as an individual problem and responsibility that needs to be dealt with by the unemployed migrant him- or herself (cf. Fejes 2010; Garsten and Jacobsson 2004). Here, the migrant is portrayed as a 'problematic learner' (Brine 2006). The projects direct a range of individualizing techniques—such as coaching, individual action plans, and empowerment—at the individual (Wright-Nielsen 2009) with the aim of rendering her able, willing, and motivated to learn certain skills deemed desirable that will make her employable in the postindustrial knowledge economy.

  One of these highly valued skills is social competency, and building it entails enhancing not only the unemployed migrant's position on the labour market but also the migrant's entire social life. Learning social competency is construed as an all-embracing activity, fostering socially competent behaviour. In the context of a continuing projectification of the welfare state, a range of actors, not least civil-society organizations, are engaged in the provision of welfare broadly (cf. Field 2000; Hodgson and Cicmil 2006), as well as in adult education that specifically targets unemployed migrants. In line with this process, interacting with 'Swedes' in 'natural environments,' such as civil society (Rose 1999a), is seen as particularly important in facilitating learning for migrants.

  Another prominent feature of learning to become employable is gender equality. In the projects, distinctions between Swedes and Others are made in the name of gender equality, constructing 'us' as progressive and equal and 'them' as more or less patriarchal, traditional, and unequal (cf. Lundstedt 2005; Wright-Nielsen 2009; Åse 2010). It is seen as crucial that migrants, in order to become more gender equal, interact

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[20] These groups have very different histories in Sweden. The Roma constitute a highly heterogeneous group whose history in Sweden goes back approximately 500 years. Roma populations have arrived in Sweden during several migration periods from the 16th century onwards (SOU: 2010: 55). Somalis, on the other hand, form a relatively new group of immigrants to Sweden. Most Somalis migrating to Sweden have fled the civil war in Somalia. Migration from Somalia to Sweden has multiplied during the twenty-first century (Carlson, Magnusson, and Rönnqvist, 2012).

with 'Swedes.' Such interaction is supposed to influence the targeted migrants, making them more gender equal—in other words, more Swedish.

The rationality behind the interaction with 'Swedes' encouraged in the projects is the following: if migrants interact with 'Swedes' they will develop the social competency as well the gender-equal mentalities necessary to make them employable on the Swedish labour market, and they will, eventually, learn to become Swedish (cf. Lundstedt 2005). According to this rationality, Swedishness appears to be something that is potentially 'contagious.'[21]

Why are the targeted subjects in need of learning? The migrants are constructed as needing learning owing to their ascribed deficits in terms of motivation, self-esteem, power, social competency, and gender equality (Åse 2010; Vesterberg 2013). The targeted migrants are in a way constructed as representing the opposite of an employable individual in predominant western discourse.

These results raise a number of issues of great concern for the inclusion of migrants in the labour market and in education, as well as in society in general, as they indicate a paradoxical relation between policy-oriented ambitions and the specific projects financed to implement them. On one hand, there is the ambition of using ESF funding to promote equal opportunities for all and to create an inclusive labour market, in line with the universalist welfare and integration policies developed in Sweden (Schierup et al. 2006).[22] On the other hand, there is a reinforcement of the construction of migrants as Others who need to change themselves in order to be included in society, further strengthening the boundaries between 'us' and 'them.' The rationality of the

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[21] This discourse about Swedishness as potentially 'contagious' parallels scientific knowledge developed elsewhere, not least in the so-called social contagion theory launched by Ryan and Gross (1943) in the 1940s and in the contact hypothesis, or intergroup contact theory, launched a decade later (Allport 1954; Amir 1969). The basic ideas underpinning both are that 'individuals adopt the attitudes or behaviors of others in the social network with whom they communicate' and that 'interpersonal networks influence the adoption of ideas, innovations, and behaviours' (Scherer and Cho 2003: 263). The main difference between the two theories is that the contact hypothesis was developed within studies on ethnic relations. Both theories—of social contagiousness and ethnic contact—align with the rationale that social interaction with 'Swedes' will facilitate one's learning to become Swedish.

[22] In line with this tradition, the Ministry of Employment emphasizes that 'measures targeting immigrants as a group are to be limited in time after their arrival in Sweden.' Ministry of Employment website: http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/8270.

projects is to render the targeted migrants able, willing, and motivated to learn how to become employable in accord with the current norms and values of the host country (Guo 2010)—in this particular case, Swedishness. Here, there is an explicit targeting of two specific 'ethnic' groups, constructed as particularly problematic in relation to the labour market—Roma and Somali. To gain more knowledge about how and why these two groups have been constructed as particularly problematic, a more in-depth analysis is required.

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