Life in the Labyrinth
A Reflexive Exploration of Research and Politics

AKADEMISK AVHANDLING

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Abstract

This thesis is about exploring the politics within and around research. The starting point is a European project which ran from late 1997 to the end of 2000. It was called “Self-employment activities concerning women and minorities: their success or failure in relation to social citizenship policies” and had as its objective to provide the EU-Commission with recommendations for improved self-employment policies. Background material was complemented by interviews with “experts”, but the main source of information was in the form of biographical interviews with the self-employed, or formerly self-employed, themselves. The qualitative method was used as a way of researching how individuals’ background and experiences influenced their decision to become self-employed as well as their tendency to use labour market policies available for starting businesses. It was also a way to find out how those policies impacted on the individuals’ lives. The consequent recommendations included a suggestion for broadening existing policies to comprise social aspects as well as financial allowances, and also the caution that self-employment was perhaps not the best solution to labour market and social exclusion.

This latter doubt arose during project work, as did questions about methodology, the role of the researcher, and eventually about the politics that inform research. Only briefly touched upon in the project reports, these issues instead became the basis for the thesis. A reflexive rereading of the Final Report led to a critical examination of the political uses of concepts and categories, of how stereotypes affect research, and of the embeddedness in ethnocentric discourses of both research and researcher. The use of postcolonial and feminist theory, discourse analysis and a social constructionist perspective broadened the analytical possibilities and furthered understanding of the connections between politics and research. A conclusion is that a comprehensive change in the social order as well as in people’s conscience is required to stem ethnic discrimination in society and the perpetuation of stereotypes and preconstructed categories in research.

Key words: labour market policies, self-employment, immigrant women, discrimination, politics, research, reflexivity, gender, ethnicity, ethnocentrism.
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# Etnologiska skrifter
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Theseus and the Minotaur

MINOS, KING OF CRETE, loses his son Androgeus in a war against the Athenians. Grieving, he returns to Crete only to find that his queen, Pasiphae, has been unfaithful with his gift bull. The bull had been presented to Minos by Poseidon, but rather than sacrificing it, he had kept it for himself. In revenge, Aphrodite had visited Pasiphae with a monstrous passion for it. As a result of her desire the Minotaur is born. King Minos, in his shame, has an impenetrable Labyrinth built into which he retreats and in the heart of which he conceals Pasiphae and the Minotaur. The half man, half bull feeds on human flesh and thus requires a supply of victims to regularly be sent into the den. Minos punishes the Athenians for the death of his son by demanding a sacrifice.

Every nine years, Athens is obliged to send seven youths and seven maidens to Crete as a sacrificial quota. The third time, Theseus, the formidable son of King Aegeus of Athens, becomes one of them — whether by choice or by lot is disputed. King Minos nevertheless mocks him and challenges him to a difficult task which he carries out splendidly. At the sight of this heroic feat and his good looks, Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos, falls in love with Theseus. The feeling is mutual.

In secret, and in return for a promise of marriage, Ariadne gives him a ball of golden thread with which to find his way in and out of the Labyrinth, and a sword with which to kill the Minotaur. During the night, Theseus ties the thread to the lintel of the entrance door; the ball then rolls along, diminishing as it goes, toward the innermost recess where the Minotaur lies sleeping. To find his way back, all Theseus has to do is to roll up the thread into a ball again.

Theseus accomplishes his task, kills the Minotaur, and saves the Athenian youths. With Ariadne on board, he sails off and goes on to a life of further adventures.

This thesis is a project about a project. The first project (which I call the project) was a European TSER-project called “Self-employment activities of women and minorities: their success or failure in relation to social citizenship policies”. Six countries were involved: Germany, Denmark, England, Greece, Italy and Sweden. Each country had a team consisting of at least a professor and a research assistant/Ph.D. student. The aim of the project was: “to contribute/ to the knowledge on the problem of social exclusion and social integration. It focused/ on the biographical evaluation of social citizenship policies in relation to self-employment activities implemented by member countries of the European Union. The results of this policy evaluation study were to be the basis for the formulation of concepts of appropriate social integration policies through the strengthening of existing attempts at extending self-employment opportunities relevant for a broad European dimension” (Final Coordinating Report 2001:8, 21). The second project, this thesis, is a reflexive and critical study of the first one. It is an attempt to go back and look at what actually happened, to go through the process again, but with hindsight and new perspectives. What were the forces within and behind the project? What role does the researcher play in a politicised field of study? What paths are taken, which are ignored, and why? Ultimately, the second project was also about turning the material from the first project into an ethnological thesis.

I joined the EU-project without any real idea of what I was getting into. My tutor in ethnology called me at home one day with the exciting news that she had just been asked if she had a Ph.D. student available for a sociological EU project. According to her, I fit the bill. She explained what the professor in sociology had told her and I took muddled notes on the back of an envelope. The words that lingered when I had hung up were “ethnicity”, “gender”, “paid work”, and “international” – though not necessarily in that order. It cannot be denied that for a relatively fresh and under-financed Ph.D. student the prospect of three years’
regularly paid work was attractive. Nevertheless, the fact that my two main academic interests, ethnicity and gender, would be addressed throughout the project excited me even more, as did the general international aspect of the project – it would perhaps give me an opportunity to use the advantages gained through having lived the greater part of my life as a sort of migrant. All in all it sounded like an interesting and rewarding venture and I acceded to being considered for the job. Having shown that I had the necessary prerequisites I was accepted and started work together with the sociology professor who had extended the invitation and who now became my project tutor.

With hindsight I can discern a parallel development of the project process and of myself. In the beginning there was an interest in ethnicity and gender – a fascination perhaps born of my own background and experience and refined during my student years. The project was also to a large extent based on these two concepts. As time went by and the project phases succeeded each other, other issues and wider perspectives entered the picture. A strong need for reflecting over, and even analysing, my own position, my role as a researcher and the role of research itself arose at around the same time as the project participants were most heatedly debating the pros and cons of the project set-up and methodology. By the time the project was drawing to an end, the broader political aspects of our work, ceaselessly but hazily present in wisps of thought and fleeting phrases, crystallised and revealed themselves to be the link between myself and the consequences of the project.

So what then? What did it mean or matter to anyone other than myself? The Final Report had been sent in, the EU-commission had accepted it, and that was that. I have small hopes of ever being informed of what, if any, effect our hundreds of report pages had on those who read them, or on any legislature, rules or regulations. I did, however, still consider both the results of the EU-project itself and the results of my personal learning process to be important. There were lessons to be learned about politics, research, and the way they interact, and I wanted that knowledge to be accessible to more than a limited few. Naturally, there were various ways of making use of the project material as well as of the project experience itself. I meandered for a while and could just not choose an aspect, one perspective, a particular angle. In the back of my mind, there was the constant rumble of thunder – I often found myself telling others about how I felt concerning the project method, the political implications, my sense of entrapment. I wrote a little here and a little there, but nothing much came of it until someone, finally, said “just write what you keep talking about!” That “someone” was not in actual
fact one person, but many individuals with the same message to me, only it took a while before I caught on, before I took the suggestion to heart. I started writing from the personal and found the personal leading to the political at almost every turn. So there it was. My thesis began to take shape and looked as if it would become a comment on the project process, the connections between research and politics, and the role of the researcher.

The project and the thesis – transforming one into the other

The process of actually finding a form for the thesis is a story in itself. It took place after the completion of the project and involved a rather different perspective than that of the method and theory of the project. Therefore, in order to follow that process and the shifts it entailed, the first step is to present the project itself more thoroughly.

The project

The EU-project was financed by the European Commission and ran from the late autumn of 1997 to January 2001. Each research team focused on an area or city – in our case Stockholm – for their fieldwork, which was to consist mainly of biographical interviews with self-employed women and immigrants. A starting point was the research hypothesis: “that active social integration policies aiming at the promotion of self-employment of unemployed women and migrant minority members can only be successful if their specific socialisation under unstable biographical and work conditions is recognised and compensation is provided for their discontinuous working careers. These deficits are hypothesised as the principal cause also of business failure and thus require interventions” (TSER Proposal 1997:9). In addition to challenging that hypothesis, “the project /also/ pursued a distinctive methodological goal consisting of a) supporting the process of interpretation of the biographical interviews through the application of state-of-the-art computer technology, and b) the establishment of a European wide qualitative database on the impact of social integration policies focusing on processes of social exclusion” (Final Coordinating Report 2001:22).

The software used was NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorising). The project was split into six half-year phases from the end of 1997 to the end of 2000. Each of the six
separate, yet connected half-year phases has yielded a report and the text used here – the Swedish Final Report, *Perceptions of Self-employment Policies and Practices* (Mason & Ålund 2001) – is both an abridgement of them as well as a presentation of final findings and conclusions, including recommendations for the improvement of existing policies. The following describes the set-up of the phase reports as presented in the Final Report.

The first phase involved research on background facts and statistics on the state of unemployment, employment and self-employment in relation to the native-born populace and to immigrants. In Sweden the situation was such that in the middle of the nineties the nation was facing an economic crisis expressed by high unemployment, particularly among ethnic minorities, usually defined as “immigrants” in a broad meaning. In official terminology, the word “immigrant” covers not only citizens of foreign countries but also people one or both of whose parents were born abroad. A Swedish citizen can thus be a “second generation” immigrant. Out of a population of approximately nine million, one and a half million are considered to be immigrants (Ålund 1996b). What characterises Sweden, as well as most other EU countries today, is an increase in housing segregation and the development of an ethnic division of labour (Schierup & Paulsson 1994), a phenomenon increasingly defined as social exclusion within the international research community. In connection with this the significance of the complex meaning of citizenship, and the uneven distribution between native-born and so called immigrants, has come into focus. Therefore, although native-born women as well as minorities have been studied in accordance with the project set-up, the Swedish team’s emphasis has been more on the immigrant situation than on that of the Swedish women.

In order to gain additional information concerning the social, economical and political context of self-employment activities of women and migrants, the second phase entailed conducting interviews with five key persons considered to be experts in the field. Their positions in various organisations put them in charge of implementing the various programmes and projects that are part of the Swedish labour market and integration policies. The decision-making and resource distribution of the EU and national programmes are decentralised to a municipal and city area level and thus the policies are adapted to and applied in a local context. The five experts are of different ethnical backgrounds, both sexes, and have distinct personal experiences. Information gathered from them was to aid the mapping of which individuals the policies work best for, how the programmes and schemes are best adapted to suit the
target area and population, and what effect they have on labour market and social inclusion.

The third phase entailed conducting interviews with the self-employed themselves. It was also the start of further analytical work. During this course of conducting the biographical interviews, starting the process of analysing them, inserting them into the NUD*IST computer programme, and thinking further about the aims and procedure of that process, the need to discuss the methodology of the project became more and more important – within the project group as well as for me personally. It is always worth considering what kind of knowledge one aims to get as well as what kind of knowledge the used method will actually generate. A reflexive attitude is important to have in order not to lock oneself into the belief that what the project finds out is the Truth and that its particular method is the only way to carry out the study. One must not forget that in fact a particular qualitative method will yield a certain type of knowledge and one that is prone to problems and deficiencies just as any other method would be. Therefore my third report was a critique and a call for a reflexive methodology throughout the project work.

During the fourth and fifth phases of the project, biographical interviews were conducted, transcribed, inserted into the data programme NUD*IST, and analysed. After the individual case analyses the interviews were variously grouped, categorised and compared. To begin with the focus was on “impact of biography” and “implications for policy evaluation”. The cases were split into the categories of native-born women, immigrant men, and immigrant women. At a later stage the categories were further split into those with policy participation and those without. The focus was also slightly shifted to the themes of “the process of becoming self-employed” and “policy impact on the self-employment project”. The fourth and fifth reports were intimately connected and are here presented as the national cases (Biographical projects and policy measures) with comparisons, conclusions, and recommendations.

In the national comparison of cases it was shown that migrant women face a different situation on the labour market than do both women of the majority population and migrant men. Migrant women in Sweden are stigmatised for being both of foreign background and women. The sixth report examines if the same conditions prevail in Denmark, England, Germany, Greece and Italy as they do in Sweden, though with a case category limitation. Only the cases of migrant women who have become self-employed with policy participation are
discussed. The cases fitting this category from each of the six countries were studied, analysed and compared to each other. In the report a cross-national comparison is conducted based on the themes “the process of becoming self-employed” and “policy impact”. This is followed by a discussion of the implications and a deliberation on possible improvements to self-employment policies.

The main method used within the project was that of carrying out biographical interviews and then interpreting, analysing and drawing conclusions from them. As the work progressed and the number of interviews increased, comparisons were made within and between the national samples. In the first phase of gathering background information there was an element of quantitative research, but on the whole the project had a qualitative character. A much debated feature was that of transferring the interview transcriptions to the computer programme in which the material was dealt with following the method of Grounded Theory as developed by Anselm Strauss (Glaser & Strauss 1967, Strauss & Corbin 1990) and later Fritz Schütze (1992). This particular aspect of the project work was problematic in several ways and a personal point of contention for me. Grounded theory is, as the term infers, a theory as well as a method. In the project work, this theory of step-by-step analyses and accompanying hypotheses eventually leading to a formulation of the Theory laid the foundation for how we were supposed to work with our interview material. I say “supposed”, as several of us found the method and theory inadequate for, or even incompatible with our qualitative ambitions. Nevertheless, rather than work exclusively with a deductive (allowing theoretical assumptions to lead) or, alternatively, with an inductive (hypotheses emerging from empirical data) method, the project accepted the intertwining of these two methods and worked abductively (Final Coordinating Report 2001:27). This allowed for the obtaining of data from empirical material while at the same time remaining aware of theoretical aspects throughout the process. It also allowed me to bring my “mobile searchlight” with me.

The concept of the “mobile searchlight” in ethnology is not new. It is based on the idea that one does not go into a study “knowing” what one will find, but that one actively seeks out knowledge on the way. The empirical material will teach one what there is to know. For me, this torch illuminated areas beyond what I had expected to see. During the time of the project, however, I more or less limited my extracurricular probing to basic questions of methodology, which I addressed in my third report, and left the exploration of deeper issues for later. The reason for this was partly the rigidity of the project and thus the lack of
“space” for any extensive digressions, and partly the conviction that as I had joined the project agreeing to its stipulations, I could not misuse the reports as a personal forum for the discussion developing in my mind. Instead, I followed through with the project as well as I could and kept my considerations relatively low key. Looking back it appears to have been an apt strategy, although dictated by a sense of duty rather than ingenious foresight. Had I raised my voice too much at the time, the message would either have been lost in the midst of the greater project material, or would have served only to distract from the more immediate issues. Nevertheless, the ethnological method of “searching for blind spots in the empirical field of knowledge” \(7\) (Bringéus 1981:63) led to thought processes and further reading which since have helped me put a finger on what was already starting to trouble me at the time. The opportunity to explore further came with the writing of this thesis.

A space in time

How could I combine the project results with the project process to write an ethnological thesis? It was during the project work that many of the surrounding issues and aspects I found important first came up, but in the formality of the reports there was little opportunity to address them more than on occasion and then only briefly. Also, with hindsight I can say that my thought processes around these issues needed the incubation time and the additional input the extra time provided anyway, in order for me to be able to discuss them more strictly in this work. By keeping them on hold until the project was ended, a space was created for my subconscious considerations to develop and perhaps to mature into conscious thoughts. In this time, the focus was shifted from a preoccupation with mainly the project results to those processes that preceded and surrounded the production of knowledge, and thus also to the practice of science. As a rule, the study of practices includes personal experiences and other subjectively coloured insights and actions (Hallberg 2001:100). These I eventually put into writing, revealing them to myself as I went along.

However, even after having found a starting point in my “comment” and perhaps a main thread for the thesis, there were too many things I wanted to say at once. Shout. I wanted to shout about the “plight of immigrant women”, the “ethnocentric discourses behind political projects”, the “effects of stereotypes in research” and so on. None of these issues would reveal any earth-shattering new insights individually, but they were particularly important to me in combination. During my
development process within the project I had discovered them and their correlation and wanted to share that knowledge with others, especially with people whom I felt could use it. I believed I could discern a bigger picture, a tapestry of tangles and interweavings, and was loathe to let any of the threads go. The question was how to present this picture without emphasising one or the other aspect too much, blurring or even warping the total image. I had to find a satisfactory form that could address each main aspect, or topic, and still allow for digressions into the personal, the details, as well as the connections between the small and the big issues.

In the beginning, I just wrote. Once I started drawing from the well of thoughts and ideas that had filled up over the project years, my so called “comment” in turn swelled and became almost as lengthy as the Final Report itself. I ended up with a sort of ethnography of the project process with my personal reflections and learning process as the starting point for deeper and more theoretical deliberations (cf. Hallberg 2001: 102). Norman K. Denzin writes of two groups of “new social science writers”: The ethnographic realists and the cultural phenomenologists (1997:201). “The realists see stories in society, waiting to be written, and the phenomenologists write from the inside out, their own stories become cultural texts”. But “/b/oth groups situate themselves in the stories told so the new writing always carries traces of autoethnography, the personal memoir, and the confessional” (1997:201). This was certainly true of my “comment”. The comment was not, however, clearly connected to the Final Report, to the actual end product of the project. One reason for this was that once the final version of the Final Report was sent off, I felt it was a finished job and even the idea of poking about in it verged on breaching some sort of self-imposed taboo. Nevertheless, as time went on it became clear that the best way to use the project work in my thesis would be to turn the results into empirical material. I did, after all, have an ambition to do more than just tell my own story. “Self stories should answer, at one level, to the criterion of cultural criticism /.../. Such works should be a stimulus for social criticism and social action – a joining of the personal, the biographical, with the political, the social. That is, the tale being told should reflect back on, be entangled in, and critique this current historical moment and its discontents” (Denzin 1997:200). By taking on the challenge of closely rereading the Final Report, I found a structural form that allowed me to carry out the intention of drawing lines between myself, my discipline, the project, the knowledge produced, politics, and the all-encompassing discursive fabric of our society.
Once again, I started from the beginning. The Final Report was on the computer screen and taking a deep breath, I started reading. Every time I reacted to the text, for whatever reason, I wrote in my questions and comments. As the original text started to break up before my eyes, there was a deep sense of relief as well as enthusiasm. How often do we really get a chance to go back and review earlier work? Memories came flooding back – thoughts I had suppressed, ideas I had lost, incidents that affected me emotionally or intellectually, experiences that confused and elated. With the positive, however, came also the negative. Unfortunately, it is always easy to look back on a particular phase or incident in one’s life and think “why didn’t I do this instead?” or “if only I had seen that at the time” and perhaps even feel discomfited by the memory of what one actually did do, say or write. “With hindsight” is a useful expression when applying more recent experience, insights or knowledge to earlier actions. With hindsight I could have seen things differently during the project time. With hindsight I could have been more critical, more knowledgeable from the start. However, there is no gain in that kind of retrospection unless one sees a lesson in it and learns how to apply that lesson to future contexts. After the conclusion of the project I found the space to address those doubts, thoughts and latent discoveries that were there throughout the three years, but which were more often than not suppressed in order to get the job done. Now I had the chance to go back, to rethink, reread and remember, and to convey the lessons I saw in the multiple processes that took place within and parallel to the project work and which, in writing this, are in fact still taking place.

Articulating reflexivity

When reflexivity first became a topic for discussion within ethnology, there was “a tendency to interpret the word reflexivity in personal terms. Being reflexive in the practice of ethnology became synonymous with critically scrutinising oneself as a human being in a more or less uncomfortable role of researcher, with commenting on one’s experiences, reactions and relations in the field, and with brooding over the transformation of field experiences into scientific text as a next to existential problem” (Blehr 2001:9-10, cf. Ehn & Klein 1994, O’Dell 1999). Despite later criticism against this form of reflexivity, it was a good start – for me too. By experiencing doubts about what I was doing I was forced to think further, toward the question of concepts, their use and definitions, toward the project methodology as well as the epistemology of my own discipline. Perspectives of power and politics became clearer and the
permeation of discourses on all levels of society came up too. In considering my own role and that of research itself, in looking into and beyond the surface impressions of what I heard, saw, and read I developed a critical stance. As mentioned earlier, my “mobile searchlight” lit up several areas that troubled me, ones I felt needed to be exposed and, ultimately, changed. “The feeling that the world could be better than it is, is one of the supreme motive powers of critical research. It could also be a link between criticism and politics” (Blehr 2001:18). Indeed, the aspects of politics that kept materialising regardless of current subject matter became more and more important to me. “Politics” became one of the main threads in my own development as well as a force connecting all the aspects of the project and eventually the writing of this thesis. Politics was not the first thing I thought about, however. It was a learning process like everything else, to realise that politics did play a significant role, that it in fact suffused the whole field of work and was not just a word connected to the financing and commissioning of the project by the EU. With time, I found that much of the work in the project involved politics. Not politics in the common party politics sense of the word, but politics of a wider definition, encompassing, for example, the concepts of policy, measures, action, standpoint, compromise, representation and power relations. This broad, and more flexible, usage of the term implies not only that politics pervade our everyday lives, but also that almost everything we do can be interpreted as being of a political nature or as having political consequences. But then ”everything is politics”, and once said, that truism can just as quickly be forgotten. My intention is not to revive an old platitude, but rather to look into the personal process of becoming an aware political subject. It is perhaps with the awakening of political consciousness in a specific situation that one can find a place, a standpoint, to act from in a more informed manner.

The above mentioned style of reflexivity, which in Denzin’s terminology would be “subjectivist reflexivity” (1997:217), is, though it can perhaps be considered the first within the discipline of ethnology, only one of many identified. One of the others is “standpoint reflexivity” (1997:220). There is of course a “standpoint” to every researcher’s text – we are each located within a culture, a history, within the “structures of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, family, and nation” (Denzin 1997:220). But whereas in the beginning it appeared enough to “write oneself into” the text in the form of a “testimony” in the Introduction in which the researcher placed him or herself into a social class, a gender, a discipline, an experience – whatever one felt would have an impact on the know-
Beginnings

Knowledge produced – it later became more important to pay attention to the political implications (Blehr 2001:10). Standpoint reflexivity, long associated with feminism and more recently with research in ethnicity (Blehr 2001:10, Denzin 1997:221, Wolf 1992:132ff), asserts that in order to carry out critical research, one ought to start from a marginalised or subordinate position. Only from there can the system be “objectively” seen. The researcher does not have to be in the marginalised position herself; one can see from a position in which one has not lived, provided one actively seeks a basis for that seeing (Blehr 2001:26). Sandra Harding points to the possibility of renouncing the aim of trying to create unity around shared social experiences in favour of a solidarity around the goals that can be shared (1987:16). By listening to many different respondents, I found myself starting to see from that place, or rather, from those places. As Blehr says, “it is easy, too easy, on the basis of language to imagine that standpoint research is about taking a position once and for all, about upholding and defending a specific standpoint more or less independently of empirical and analytical challenges” (2001:25). Instead, as the point is that one cannot find the answers where one starts asking the questions, standpoint epistemology shows “beyond any doubt that we can do more as researchers than to represent a fixed position (whether it be someone else’s, or our own as it turns out in the initial stage of research). Our mission should rather be described in terms of a controlled and critical changing of perspective, which aims at exceeding all involved positioned understandings” (2001:25). I do not know that I would call my experience either “controlled” or even consciously “critical” at the time. Rather I was flung from one position to the next, eagerly absorbing each position’s particular perspective, seeing the “truth” presented by each. It was only in the developing awareness of the political embeddedness of each of those positions, including my own, that my reflexivity could continue to develop and a search for answers elsewhere be pursued.

Sometimes a good start, before immersing oneself in a deeper analysis, is to look simply a word up in the dictionary. The definition of ”politics”, or in Swedish ”politik”, in Bonniers Swedish Dictionary is as follows: “management of governmental and municipal operations; the activities of parties and lobby organisations in order to influence the development of society; the means and methods of parties etc. for realising their programme; (more in general) course (line) of action, procedure” (Bonniers Svenska Ordbok 1994). Though all the entries were relevant to the project, the last one is most interesting on a personal level. The definition ”course of action, procedure” indicates two things. One, that
there is a possibility of choice, and two, that in making that choice one is acting politically. On an everyday basis, however, it is not until one sees a connection to the "big" politics that one can make politically informed decisions or even discern one's place and possibilities in the scheme of things. "Reality" is all too often defined by others, those who have the precedence of interpretation and the power of definition. "When people assume the right to define their own reality and act in order to reach /common/ goals, they behave as political subjects" (Hansen 1999:39).

This applies on an individual as well as on a group level, but can also be considered in an academic context. For me personally it entailed a questioning of naturalised representations – I had to find my own reality among the ones presented to me by various sources.

Intertextual reflexivity "locates any work within a larger field of discourse while drawing on, elaborating, and commenting on that discourse" (Denzin 1997:219). A basic definition of discourse is "a certain way of speaking about and understanding the world (or a section of the world)” (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:7). Developing this concept a little, one can say that discourse is "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (Hall 1997:44). And further: Discourse “defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others” (1997:44). Intimately connected to the concept of discourse is the combination of knowledge and power. “Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has real effects, and in that sense at least, ‘becomes true’” (Hall 1997:49). Power thus “circulates within discourses by creating ‘truths’, through us taking certain matters for granted or accepting them as ‘natural’, and by us consequently making them our own” (Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz & Thörn 1999:19). Applying intertextual reflexivity thus entails probing beyond the “truths” we are presented with. What knowledge is that “truth” based upon and what knowledge does it in turn lead to? “Intertextuality denotes the fact that communicative events are based on earlier events; one never starts from the beginning again” (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:77).

Not only is my work, this thesis, located within a “larger field of discourse”, but the “texts” – the statements of the various respondents, the official documents regulating the implementation of policy, the project proposal, my own perspectives and so on – upon which it is based
are also located within discursive formations. So from having started with a subjective reflexivity and an examination of my personal trials and tribulations, the discussion has moved via an understanding of there being many positions from which “reality” can be viewed, standpoint reflexivity, to a need to look even further. What are the discourses that determine how we understand and speak of those realities? And how does the academic field of discourse tie in with the political discourses to which each of us has to relate, consciously or not, in our understanding of ourselves and others?

If asked to describe what political processes are, a basic and common definition from ethnologists would probably be “Politics is about people’s struggle for their interests” (Højrup 1999:136). Højrup contends that more or less all modern social and cultural theory shares the understanding that “politics deal with conflicts of interest and distribution of power in society” (1999:137). The way ethnology has traditionally approached the subject is by analysing the struggle of weaker groups in society to participate in the distribution of power, by making subordinate groups visible, and by describing those processes whereby cultural practices hold people in relationships and situations that become consolidated as locked positions. Modern ethnology has quietly critiqued power structures and government actions from the sidelines, but made “culture” and “society” the concepts that give meaning within and to the discipline, not “state” or “politics” (1999:137). The ethnologist Lena Gerholm describes this way of doing research as “studying down” (1985:25–26). Not only are “the people” central to the identity of the discipline, but the common ambition of critiquing or even changing society is founded in the researchers’ identification with those people. Nevertheless, there is reason to consider “studying up” a valuable complement to information intended to improve the lot of “the people”. Inspired by the anthropologist Laura Nader, Gerholm finds a “democratic value in writing ethnography for the people about ruling groups” (1985:26). By realising “when the character of the problem is such that it becomes expedient or entirely fundamental to extend the field of study upwards, downwards or sideways” (1985:26 and 171 footnote 8) one can combine the act of educating “leaders” (by presenting them with social reports about the circumstances of the people) with the act of educating those “to be led” about the institutions and authorities affecting their lives (1985:26). In my opinion this is a lead in letting the questions posed from marginalised positions (standpoint epistemology) “point further – that is, given the starting point, inward and upward – toward the system and the processes that create marginalisation, hierarchies and periphe-
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ries” (Blehr 2001:25). As a researcher mired in the same social structures as both “the people” and “the leaders”, I am both affected and have the possibility to affect. “Politics is about the power to influence the world we live in” (Blehr 2001:9). Therefore I studied both “up” and “down”, and in examining my own embeddedness and that of research in discursive contexts, I also studied what I would consider “sideways”. By taking the reader along on the research journey and describing the process of knowledge, one provides a research history (Liliequist 1996:13). This task – divulging as much as possible about the researcher’s production of knowledge – is important for the reader to be able to make his or her own decision as to the reasonableness of my interpretations and analyses (cf. Nilsson, B. 1999:225).

The thesis

This thesis is, I hope, an example of a “messy text”. “Messy texts are many sited, intertextual, always open ended, and resistant to theoretical holism, but always committed to cultural criticism” (Denzin 1997:224ff). My ambition has been to alternate between the Final Report of the EU-project and a more descriptive ethnography of the project process as well as to weave into the text a reflexive and personal account. This style of writing makes it possible to “expose/ those institutional and cultural apparatuses that insert themselves in between the personal and the political and the individual and the social” and thus to practice “the craft of cultural criticism” (1997:226). The thesis is also, however, an ethnological text and as such must be defined within a certain framework. In the following paragraphs I will place myself and my work within a web of theory, method and concepts. I call it a web because I find it impossible to discern any distinct beginning and end. Each concept is used within various theories, each theory finds its complement in more than one method, and so on – there is no apparent logic of one following onto the next; instead each part leads to several others and then back unto itself in an intricate pattern. To establish some kind of centre for the web, however, I will start with the concept and theoretical perspective of constructionism,11 and go from there.

The paradigm of constructionism is not only “well established within ethnology, but also so well integrated that it most often appears as a next to basic assumption” (Runfors 2001:31–32). At the risk of explicitly exposing the level of my embeddedness in hegemonic discourses, I have to confess to my adherence to this perspective. Understanding phenomena, concepts, definitions and discourses as socially and culturally...
constructed is namely a prerequisite for deconstruction. And the deconstruction of “those structures that constitute our ‘natural’ world” is an attempt to show that “the given organisation of the world is a result of political processes with social consequences” (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:56) – or to carry out a cultural critique. The strategy in the thesis is to apply a reflexive perspective to the project material as well as to related aspects. One can perhaps envision it as a spiral process: The EU begets the project begets the knowledge I produce. I in turn lay a screen of reflexivity on that knowledge and analyse it. This produces new knowledge. In the critical deconstruction of methodology, political discourse and personal knowledge it becomes possible to reveal the interconnectedness of politics, research and culture. In addition, the review and revision of my project work exposes how embedded I, the researcher, am in my culture and its politics and hence how hegemony is continuously recreated, even when contrary ambitions are held.

From this centre, or point of departure, of construction/deconstruction, filaments lead to the encircling threads of the web. Some of these filaments are “ethnicity”, “Swedes”, “immigrants”, “politics”, “racism”, “sexism”, “culture”, “discourse”, “research” and “cultural criticism”. The encircling threads can be designated “ethnography”, “reflexivity”, “discourse analysis”, “feminism” and “postcolonialism”. Naturally the web is far more complex than this, but for my purposes, and in order to keep this discussion within manageable limits, these parts will suffice to present the eclectic tools of ethnological trade and to place the thesis in a disciplinary tradition. Many of the connections will become clearer in further chapters, but some will have to be expounded on here. Reflexivity, discourse analysis, ethnography and the linking filaments politics, discourse, cultural criticism, and to a certain extent research, have already been touched upon and will be put aside for the moment. Left to grapple with are feminism, postcolonialism and a few concepts empirically crucial to this particular study.

In my image of the web, I see postcolonialism as the outermost encircling thread. It is not the core of my ethnological ambitions, but it inspires, clarifies and strengthens the ties between the various threads. Feminism is for me closely associated with postcolonial theory. Not only are there “striking parallels on different levels in the ways in which one describes and excludes both the Others and the feminine” (Tesfahuney 2001:208), but racist and sexist discourses also overlap in the marginalisation of “third world women” in a European as well as a global context (cf. Mohanty 1999). A core ambition in both theory formations is to critique “essentialism”, a belief in unalterable biological
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and/or mental qualities (Eriksson et al 1999:29) dependent on gender or ethnicity, and to instead understand identity relationally (1999:34). Ethnologists studying ethnicity have long accepted the fact that cultures, or cultural identities, are neither static nor isolated, and that “culture” as well as “ethnicity” is a process, a production and reproduction in social interaction, and that it is relational, relative and situational (cf. for example Ehn 1993, Liliequist 1996, Pripp 2001). The “notion of a cultural essence is a political myth / / yet upheld continuously in various discursive practices” (Eriksson et al 1999:42). As Hall says “It is all too easy to draw the faulty conclusion that, as essentialism has been deconstructed in a theoretical respect, it has also been rejected in a political respect” (1999:88).

In this thesis, the terms “immigrants”12 and “Swedes” are used. Both are problematic concepts. Based on these categories people are ascribed cultural belonging, “as if the categories exclude each other and designate separate groups in society. On the basis of notions of identity and difference, the national community of the Swedes is taken for granted at the same time as the immigrants are excluded from this community” (Mattsson 2001:259). In addition, these “classifications are grounded in the idea of the homogeneity of Swedishness and the utter difference of being immigrant” (2001:259). Not to mention the fact that an idea of homogeneity within the category “immigrant” is also absurd. There is a need to emphasise that I do not use either of the terms unaware of the complexity, and danger, in doing so. They have been “subjected to a thorough criticism where it has been shown that their idea-content builds solely on theoretical assumptions”, and yet they “appear as the only conceptual instruments available to at all be able to reflect on the present, provided they are used in their deconstructed form” (Hall 1999:94, my italics). It is not always possible to make clear that that is indeed how one is using them. Nevertheless, that has been the ambition and intention in the following text.

Aim and intentions

So how do I formulate the aim of my thesis? The results of the project work are important to me – I believe significant issues were ascertained. At the same time, the need for research to examine its own premises and the consequences of them is something I want to address. An inspiration for the solution to this “split aim” was the ethnologist Lena Gerholm’s Kulturprojekt och Projektkultur (Culture Project and Project Culture 1985), a
critical study of a project she was engaged to evaluate. Though our positions or roles in the world of projects were quite different, our experiences to a certain extent overlap. Her reservations, her critique, her position somewhere between the centre and the periphery, between the top and the bottom, ring a bell with me. Gerholm chose to give her study two purposes. One was to describe the project results and one was to expound on her personal insights born during the evaluation work. In a similar way my ambition is to present my Final Report as it was submitted to the project leadership, but also to take the reader through the actual process of those three years of work. This journey will illustrate the more informal but nonetheless consequential aspects surrounding the methodical following of pre-set steps. It will describe how in workshop discussions and solitary ruminations new angles turn up, how fears and worries surface and are addressed, and demonstrate how the Final Report became what it is but could have been different. Presuming this is a messy text, it should not, however, just be a “subjective account of experience; /it should/ also attempt to reflexively map the multiple discourses that occur in a given social space” (Denzin 1997:225).

My aim therefore, is to present the results of my project work, hoping they will inspire political and practical change, but also to critically and reflexively scrutinise those structures, processes and discourses within which the shaping of both research projects and political programmes take place and within which the researcher by necessity also operates.

Changes and reading instructions

The method of rereading the Final Report led to a phenomenon I suspect had something to do with converging time axes. Reading the first phase report I had comments or, even more, questions about almost everything I had written. As I approached the end of the whole Report, however, I allowed more and more of the original text to stand unchallenged.

The first phase report was written in the spring of 1998 and the last one during the winter of 2000–2001 – making the time axis nearly three years long. The rereading of and commenting on all of it has been accomplished in less than a year; in fact in about five months, due to the lengthy period of organising and trying various ways of writing a thesis that avoided breaking up the Final Report (though much of that “experimental” material was eventually used in this text). By taking five months
to read and comment on a project which spanned three years, however, the two time axes converged. By the time I read the last phase report I was much closer in time to it compared to when I, five months earlier, read the first phase report which was written over three years previously. I chose to take this as a sign that I did indeed develop during those years and that I therefore had less to critique or comment on towards the end (this being preferable to “feeling foolish and quickly becoming bored” as Wolf did with her last text in A Thrice Told Tale (1992:117)). Following this thought through, however, means realising that the practice of reflexivity is never ended. Should I reread my rereading in time to come, there would be just as much to comment on then as there has been this time around – “a reflexive analysis can never be finished” (Nilsson, B. 1999:42). Once the thought process is started, it becomes a “never-ending job of understanding one’s own understanding” (Ehn & Klein 1994:12), and even with the ambition to be thorough in this text, there is no level where “all perspectives, concepts and statements are completely illuminated” (Nilsson, B. 1999:42).

Interweaving the Final Report with new text without losing the distinction between them has required a few changes, both visual and stylistic. In the following chapters, the sections of the Final Report have headings in italics. The new text is either headed simply with “Commentary” or, in the cases where topics have required longer passages, with its own normal style heading. In order for the textual flow not to be too compromised, some sentences have been slightly, but only aesthetically, changed in the Final Report. On the rare occasion a complete sentence has been removed, but only if it was purely report-bound and therefore confused more than supported the present context. Some words have been changed: “paper” has been changed to “chapter”, for example, in order to reflect the new format. In addition, the Introduction from the Final Report has been removed and instead incorporated under the heading The project in this Chapter. Other than that, I have only corrected grammatical or spelling mistakes that slipped through in the proof-reading of the Final Report. In other words, the Final Report can be read in full if the commentary is omitted.
I was attached to the TSER project “Self-employment activities concerning women and minorities: their success or failure in relation to social citizenship policies” (henceforth referred to as simply the project) in the late autumn of 1997, and the starting date of the first phase was the first of December. During that first phase the main assignment was to gather demographic and judicial material regarding the national and local situations, statistical data on employment, unemployment, and self-employment among the target groups, as well as other background and general context information. Two to five explorative biographical interviews were also to be carried out, if possible. In my opinion, gathering statistical data was the only non-ethnological, non-qualitative part of the project and therefore relatively uninteresting. I was looking forward to getting down to some real work later on. Statistics never having been my strong point, it took some concentration to even understand what it was I was compiling. As the fog cleared I nonetheless found the information before me to be very enlightening. The situation for immigrants was appalling compared to that of Swedes. Not only was the ethnic residential segregation obvious but the labour market situation appeared to be divided along the same lines. Unemployment figures had steadily risen for persons with foreign backgrounds even as the curve for the Swedes went down. Most interesting was the fact that there seemed to be no logical correlation between the ups and downs on the labour market for native women and those for immigrant women. These first glimpses of issues to be investigated in the following three years intrigued me and also triggered a lasting interest in and emphasis on the situation for immigrant women.

Despite learning something about the big picture there was, however, also an unsettling sensation of not having anything to relate the information to. There was nothing to lend it significant weight, nothing to pin it to. Reading the report again, memories both of vague uncertainties and of feeling proud of what I had accomplished come back to
me. Nevertheless, three years of delving deeper into the subject matter cause the rereading to be an odd experience. The text feels alien to me and I realise how little I really knew. Most of the material was taken from texts, documents and reports made by others and it had not provided me with any anchoring in reality. Without any personally secured knowledge of the subject, I had little choice but to take those others’ word for it and make their knowledge mine. My feeling of discomfort I believe came partly from the subconscious understanding that the material I could present as acquired knowledge was not really my knowledge at all, but a simple reiteration of what others presented as knowledge. The fact that I had no training in statistics meant that I could not see beyond the figures themselves, and being a novice in the field of self-employment and government policies I had no way of relating what I read to any previous readings or experience. The ground I stood on was anything but solid. In the following, my questions and comments to myself and the Final Report, Perceptions of self-employment policies and practices, will reveal both this and the risky business of ever letting go of a text.

**An ethnic division of labour and equal opportunity**

No single EU member-state considers or defines itself as “a country of immigration”. Should it do so, the country would have to perceive of immigration as a continuous phenomenon which has to be dealt with in the present and in the future (Castles & Miller 1993, in Lutz 1994), and eventually a principle of equal treatment would have to be applied. As it is today, European countries have differing policies concerning immigrants and the native-born, policies which lead to gaps in employment and salaries between them. The main focus in this report lies on the discrepancy between the situation of women of immigrant background and that of native-born women.

Various European authorities, for example the European Parliament’s “Committee on Women’s Rights”, have worked hard to bring about an equal opportunity policy for women as well as an active state-involvement for the amelioration of women’s position. It is ironic then that these measures, which have had a tremendously positive impact on native-born women’s interests, have not helped “immigrant” women (Lutz 1994:3). In fact, “the relative success of the women’s policy is probably one of the main reasons why the governments are so reluctant to agree to any legislation on ‘race’ on the level of the EU” (BMWP 1994:13).
Commentary
Wait a minute. What did I know about the European situation or the “differing policies” of its nations? I only knew a little of what went on in Sweden, I knew what affected me. How can such general statements be made – “tremendously positive impact on native-born women’s interests” – when the countries and cultures of Europe differ so much? Whom did they ask? What were the statements based on? At this first stage of the project I was new and, as I realise now, less critical than I am today. The material was new to me – official reports and texts – and the context of Europe and its various authorities a new one also. I was not oriented enough to ask pertinent questions, I had to trust to the “experts” knowledge. I was a little in awe. Rereading this today, I have the time to contemplate a finished text, one that is already compiled, and there are no deadlines impending. Each sentence seems to reveal new levels of information and hence produce new questions. For example, that last quote seems to imply that the governments of Europe really detest giving women any rights or equal opportunities and that “race” is just as distasteful a subject to contemplate. The “relative success” is therefore only positive in whose opinion? I actually do recall feeling uneasy about some of this already at the time of writing it, but it was a bit like groping about in the dark. Without any theoretical tools or broader competency, I had no way of handling it. I was not ready to ask critical questions and did not know how to answer them.

An ethnic division, continued
The Heinrich report (European Parliament 1987), through its call for the abolition of the breadwinner-dependency-principle (which conflicts with the principle of equal treatment) and the discontinuation of the coupling of residence permit and active labour market participation, recognised for the first time the double standard of EC policies concerning immigrant and native-born women (Lutz 1994:8). An important aspect mentioned by Helma Lutz is that “State policy addressing immigrant women is mainly based on a prejudiced image of these women being ‘behind in western standards’ and therefore offers training, education and employment in traditional sectors while, at the same time, encouraging native-born women’s entry into non-traditional sectors, thereby widening the gap between native-born and immigrant women” (Lutz 1994:28). The Heinrich report also stated that concepts of integration should be renounced in favour of genuine equal rights. Sadly however, it can be said that despite all the efforts invested in the fight for an official recognition of immigrant women’s special position, little
progress has been made. An important question therefore is; what are the actual practices in EU countries, from state level to local municipal levels, for reaching inclusion, or rather true citizenship, for immigrant women, and which of them work the best?

Commentary
I started to see something here. The information shocked me, the realisation that educated, powerful, influential people, politicians whom I had assumed would be worldly-wise, actually had this view of immigrant women. That policies actually had been moulded upon a set of prejudiced notions of “the Other”. “State policies” deal with residence and work permits, education, and a piloting of immigrants into a sometimes unfamiliar social order, and these policies seem to rest on notions of gender and ethnicity. Why? And what were the consequences and implications of this? Reading this now it is comforting to find that my indignation is still as easily aroused today as when all this was news to me, news at least that the problem existed on the scale presented by European parliamentary reports. Nonetheless, the comparative calm I have today allows me to go beyond the emotional surface and reflect on how several of the terms used by me or quoted from others would have been interesting to analyse further. In this way I can use “involvement as an analytical tool and a scientifically reflexive method” (Bäckman & Ekström 2001:164). “Equal rights”, “special position”, “inclusion”, “true citizenship” – what do they mean? “It is hardly a far-fetched thought that if we as researchers allow ourselves to become indignant, we can also more easily distance ourselves from the obvious and see the absurd in what is taken for granted” (2001:164).

Sweden
Over the last forty years, Sweden has been known for its low level of unemployment (2–5%). This trend was broken in the early nineties when unemployment soared towards 12–13% (SOU 1996:151). The ones to be first and hardest hit by the new unemployment were those employed in industry and manufacturing – men (both native-born and immigrant) and immigrant women. For a few years therefore, Swedish women had a lower unemployment rate than either Swedish men or immigrants. The figures for 1994 show that 7.5% of men and 5.1% of women were unemployed. In 1996, however, the figures had risen to 9.9% for men and 10.5% for women. The total, open and hidden, rate of unemployment was 14.1% (Ohlsson 1997:28). The main reason for this
drastic change was the cut-backs in the public sector, jobs traditionally held by women. Comparing native-born with immigrant women, the figures for 1991 show that 2.3% of the total female population was unemployed, whereas 5.8% of the immigrant women were unemployed (2.7% for Swedes of both sexes, 7.7% for male and female immigrants). Unemployment for immigrant women has, whether economic recession or boom, always been higher, often twice the rate, than that for the total female population (Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet 1993:41). Today the figures for unemployment among foreign citizens can be estimated at approximately 22%, if one takes both open and hidden unemployment into account, compared to 7.5% for Swedish citizens (Statens Invandrarverk 1996). Unemployment during the last five years has, in other words, steadily risen and thus the rate of gainful employment has decreased. The level of unemployment is much higher among foreign citizens than among Swedes and immigrants with Swedish citizenship, and higher for newly arrived immigrants and refugees than for “old” labour migrants (Ålund 1997). Unemployment among immigrants is also ethnically diversified, with the lowest rate among immigrants from Western Europe and the highest among Somalis in Stockholm, who are almost 100% unemployed.

The immigrant situation

In the sixties, ambitious, highly qualified labour migrants arrived in Sweden, primarily from Finland and Southern Europe. These “old” labour migrants enjoyed a high level of participation on the Swedish labour market, considerably higher than the native-born Swedes (Ålund 1997). During the seventies and especially during the eighties this situation changed as unemployment rose, despite the economic boom. Even though Sweden in the late eighties lacked a sufficient labour force in many areas of the labour market, it still got more and more difficult for immigrants to get jobs. When the recession hit in the nineties, the rate of gainful employment among immigrants dropped drastically, and corresponding changes can be seen regarding relative levels of income (Ekberg & Gustafsson 1995:35). Still, in different European reviews, Sweden is considered more open compared to other European countries. This situation has to be critically examined. The country has long been famous for its political immigration goals of equality, freedom of choice, and partnership, but the situation has steadily changed since the beginning of the nineties. As shown above, in 1991 the unemployment rate was 7.7% among foreign citizens compared to 2.7% among Swedish
citizens. Foreign citizens from outside Europe had in 1991 twice as high an unemployment rate as foreign citizens in general (Ålund & Schierup 1993:102). For non-European immigrants who arrived during the late 1980’s, the labour market situation can only be described as catastrophic (Ekberg & Gustafsson 1995:40), with the women being hardest hit. Amongst those who arrived 1980-90, less than half as many immigrant men as native-born men were employed and only a third of the women, compared to native-born women.

An argument briefly discussed by Ekberg & Gustafsson illustrates a common explanation for this situation: The low occupational rate among non-European women, the authors claim, may be due to their cultural tradition. It may not be common for women to be part of the labour market in their home countries, and these cultural patterns may be brought along to their country of immigration (1995:41). However, as Mirjana Morokvasic in her study on access to self-employment of immigrant women in five European countries (1988) has shown, stereotypes are the major obstacle for business creation. Immigrant women are seen as miserable, passive, assisted and seeking assistance, and thus get less support, money and confidence invested in them than do native-born women. In order to break this “vicious circle”, feminists, particularly those of ethnic background, have emphasised the urgent need to counteract stereotyped images, and to rectify the idealised image of western emancipation, to serve as a yardstick in the judgement of immigrant women (Knocke 1991, Ålund 1997, etc.). A study by Wuokko Knocke (1991) into the consequences of these stereotypes about immigrant women shows that many of those who came to Sweden as adults already had completed vocational training and thus had professions. Their professions and skills, however, have never been in demand or even inquired into, and thus have never been put to use. The idea that these women wish to hold on to the traditional female role turned out to be a myth – immigrant men were as men are in general, i.e. some shared the responsibility for the housework and children, some helped, and some did not. Out of the 111 women in the study, only six would have chosen, had they had the choice, to return fulltime to the unpaid work in the home.

It does seem, however, that the situation of immigrant women in the Nordic countries in general is signified by more equality concerning their legal status (Lutz 1994). In her study on the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany and the Nordic countries, Lutz finds that generally speaking Sweden (and Denmark) has the most liberal naturalisation law in Europe as well as generous policies concerning marital sta-
Facts and apprehensions

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tus, residence and work permits. Still, immigrant women in Sweden have been more affected by the recession and to some extent the restructuring of the labour market than native-born women (Knocke 1991, Ålund 1997, Schierup & Paulsson 1994, Ekberg & Gustafsson 1995). In other words, the Nordic countries have not been able to provide an equal share in the labour market or equal participation in society to immigrants either (Lutz 1994:27).

Commentary

So, in studies on what immigrant women say about themselves, they have been found not to be what they are said, by others, by “us”, to be. Why then do “we” still think they are unfit, unwilling or unable to work? What is this about stereotypes? What are they and what are their effects on the lives of immigrants, on the national structures even? How come even scholars get trapped into formulating statements like “feminists / . . . of ethnic background”? Are we not all of ethnic background? The statistical and historical evidence tells us that something has happened in the last twenty or so years, between the “old” and the “new” immigration phases. Before looking closer at this issue, however, I needed to sort out the question of the difference between women and women. As a partial, and unexpected, answer to my perplexity, a friend in the sociology department one day sent over two (then) as yet unpublished articles by internal mail. “This may be of interest to you” she wrote at the top of the first page. And indeed, short as they were, the articles spoke volumes. The author, economic historian Paulina de los Reyes, addressed what she called the “problematic sisterhood” in one and presented an economic-historical perspective on immigrant women in Swedish working life in the other (1998 a. & b.). Naturally, I had no time to verify any of her claims, but even with possible discrepancies the material gave me an insight into processes that both take time and, perhaps because of just that, often produce a subtle “knowledge” that is taken for granted and seldom questioned.

The past elucidates the present

According to de los Reyes, the development of immigrant women as a separate category on the labour market is a result of complex historical interplay between the classifications of “women” and “immigrants” in Swedish society. To reach an understanding of this one must therefore consider the relationship between the positions of native and immigrant
women, between ethnicity and gender, and trace it through time. These categorisations, classifications and relationships are the stuff of (feminist) postcolonialism. One of the main points of postcolonialist theory is that "the stereotypes of colonialism in modified form still to a great extent characterise the cultural processes of contemporary globalisation" (Eriksson et al 1999:38). Consequently, although Sweden was not directly involved in the colonisation process, the attempts to "define and delimit ‘Swedishness’ – and the way we see other cultures – must be analysed in relation to this global process" (1999:17). In following de los Reyes’ economically slanted account, therefore, I will add a layer of complexity by also considering the differentiation between women from this perspective.

In scientific accounts as well as in public discourse "immigrants" are usually represented by the immigrant male. Statistics on post-war immigration to Sweden, however, show that a majority of those immigrants were women and that many of them were unmarried, divorced or widowed and thus dependent on their own work for their livelihoods. Moreover, a large number of the married women also worked for a living – more, in fact, than married Swedish women. As the focus on immigrants has been the men, a complete picture of immigrant women’s work is unavailable, but there are indications that they were often to be found in other sectors of the labour market than both Swedish women and immigrant men. At a time of Swedish women pushing into white-collar work in offices and shops, the immigrant women often worked in industries, especially in food, textiles and clothing, but also in housework and trade. Immigrant men were mainly in the metal industry and ore-mining. In a longer time perspective it also becomes clear that the men were concentrated to the more expansive branches of industry, whereas the women were employed in the most stagnating ones.

In this historical examination, the section on the relationship between the work situations of the Swedish and of the immigrant women was of special interest to me. De los Reyes wrote that in the late 1940s the immigrant women were more in industry than in housework. This changed during the 1950s when Swedish women were moving from housework occupations and into other professions. By the late 1950s housework was the main occupation for immigrant women. When the public sector in the 1960s took over more and more of traditional women’s work – child-care for example – the demand for house-help also decreased and again the main occupation for immigrant women was in industry.

Although more or less viable explanations have been sought for why
the immigrant women ended up in the lowest paid and least prestigious professions, the fact remains that being a woman and an immigrant was early on attached to unqualified work and tasks that the majority population did not want. There are two aspects that play an important part in this. The market mechanisms discussed above are one, but the state and its laws also affected possibilities by separating the labour force into separate categories. Housework was a pronounced women’s profession at the same time as entry into the Swedish labour market was limited for foreign citizens. In other words, two principles, one formal and supported by the legislation on foreigners and the other informal and based on a sex-segregated labour market, acted together to define the conditions for entering the labour market. It is significant to note that then, as now, it was legitimate and accepted to refer people to certain types of work mainly because of their sex and their immigrant status. In her discussion on “the discourse of competence deficiency”, Mattsson shows how a “scientific” theory has developed that “legitimates the image of ‘the Others’ as generally being better suited for easier routine work, for example cleaning jobs, simple industry production and the like” (2001:252). Though her arguments are based on the situation for non-European immigrants on the Swedish labour market today, I suggest the same arguments have been used in the past both for keeping the sexes apart and for distinguishing between “Swedes” and “non-Swedes”.

The structural changes on the labour market as well as the changes in Swedish society became even more significant for the stratification of the labour force in the 1960s. With the level of education rising and a new generation of Swedes unwilling to take menial jobs, the recruited foreigners were even more strongly designated a reserve labour force and held in the lower ranked position. According to Wuokko Knocke this primary, and exclusionary, role as reserve labour force is one reason for immigrants being seen as sexless and without history. “They are neither women nor men and appear as were they from nowhere, which has come to reduce them to nothing but their function on the labour market” (1991:8). Another reason for this view of immigrants is their position in relation to “Swedes”. In the same way that “woman” has been defined as the binary opposite of “man”, so “black”, or “Other”, has been defined as the opposite of “white”, “European”, or “us”. It is in the contrast, or difference, that meaning is produced, but one part of the binary opposition is always dominant (Eriksson et al 1999:18). Both women and “the Other” have been “negatively defined as deviation, absence and incompleteness in comparison with the masculine white and Western” (Tesfahuney 2001:208) and therefore gender becomes
subordinate in importance to the status of immigrant. The social function of the binary opposition remains the same though – one part is given precedence over the other, which is seen as weaker and dependent on the first (Eriksson et al 1999:18).

The division of labour was not gender-neutral in Sweden in the 1950s. Productive work was separated from reproductive and there were clearly defined female and male professions. The situation as supplementary, and largely “sexless” labour force thus led to immigrant men and women not only being assigned gender specific work, but also allowed them to cross those established barriers. The result was that immigrant women were over-represented in typical male work places and that more immigrant men than Swedish men worked in traditional female work places. Due to the male norm on the labour market, however, the work effort of immigrant women remained invisible irrespective of what work they did. De los Reyes ascertains that even if the immigrant status rendered the foreign workers sexless, it was the male hegemony on the Swedish labour market that made immigrant women invisible.

During the 1960s and 1970s several factors concurred to further the distinctions based on ethnicity and sex. For a continued expansion of the welfare state, an increased work force was essential. The choice therefore lay between continuing to alleviate and support women’s entry onto the labour market and recruiting more foreign workers. The trade unions feared that the immigrant labour force would become a permanent low wage group and thus an obstacle to the structural changes and the expansion taking place. In view of this, they were a driving force for the limitation of labour immigration and the increased use of native workers, mainly married women. In society, the change on a normative level was from that of the housewife ideal to one of the professional woman. In the terminology of historian Yvonne Hirdman, the gender contract was altered – from the housewife contract to an equality contract (1994:187–189). With Swedish women becoming part of the regular work force and being encompassed by the same tax and wage regulations as the Swedish men, the gap between them and the immigrant women grew. Even officially the immigrant women were considered an added extra for employers. For example they would, where Swedish women would not, work under wanting economic and social conditions. A process took place whereby a mentality, a way of thinking about immigrant women, became a social discourse manifested in now acceptable and ”normal” treatment and positioning on the labour market. The result of this is that ”women” have become Swedish women, and ”immigrants”
have become either the immigrant man or a sexless collective. The two separate pictures of women that prevail to this day emerged in the seventies: The Swedish woman as an equal and independent person, the immigrant woman as a dependent, oppressed and isolated one. It was a period of increased ethnic multiplicity – refugees were many and from a great diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Generalisations lead to "immigrant women" being seen as a homogenous group and as the negative opposite to the group "Swedish women", or even, crassly expressed, to "women" by those, the majority population, with the power to define themselves and others. Mohanty discusses this phenomenon in connection with the hegemony of Western feminism (1999:195ff). Her claim is that many feminist texts "colonise the material and historical differences in life for the women who live in the Third World and that they thereby create and present a single, uniform ‘Third World woman’" (1999:196). This average Third World woman lives a basically "constricted life based on her female sex (implying sexually oppressed) and her belonging to the Third World (implying ignorant, poor, uneducated, rooted in tradition, religious, house-proud, family oriented, victimised, etc.)" and is presented in contrast to "the (implicit) self-understanding among Western women as well educated, modern, with control over their own bodies and their sexuality, and with the 'freedom' to make their own decisions" (1999:198–199). In other words, "a mythological structure – patriarchy – is used to fortify and defend another mythical structure – racism – and vice versa (Matthis 2001:60). It would seem, therefore, that there are strong connections between the colonial stereotypes of the past and present, the social construction of categories, and the (labour market) politics of Sweden.

During the time of transition between two gender contracts and two different ways of defining womanliness, immigrant women first came to represent that which "deviates" and later were identified with the old, the outdated and traditional. The association to the outdated and traditional is not unexpected in view of the fact that the immigrant women took over those jobs the Swedish women had left behind and were thus concentrated to the low status professions. From a historical perspective it is clear that the immigrant women have been made into the counter-image and model for the "other" in the construction of a new Swedish woman’s identity, a process that has as prerequisite the stereotypisation of both groups’ characteristics. The “white woman” reproduces the image of the “black woman as an embodiment of a historical phase which the white woman has left behind” (Matthis 2001:775–76). In this process one can see the power relations between women being expressed
in the new identity becoming established through the marginalisation and belittlement of women of immigrant background.

There was no longer any question that the relationship between ethnicity and gender and the perceived differences between “immigrants” and the “native-born” were clearly discursively hegemonic enough to have far-reaching effects on matters such as policy.

Self-employment

Given the context of very high unemployment among immigrants, ethnic business has lately come to be focused on as an important field of potential self-employment (SOU 1996:151, SOU 1996:55). The slimming of the public sector, the disappearance of traditional women’s jobs, the requirement of a higher level of education for more and more jobs, and a greater demand for language and cultural skills are all factors which affect the push toward self-employment for those especially marginalised on the labour market. Native-born women are therefore also pushed in the direction of starting small businesses. One reason is that the likelihood of already existing private businesses being able to replace all the services or jobs lost in the cut-backs is deemed as unrealistic, making self-employment an alternative to those otherwise risking unemployment. In addition to this, small businesses are considered an asset to the economy, creating competition and a revitalisation of the market as well as the possibility of tens of thousands of new job opportunities (Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet 1993, Ohlsson 1997, SOU 1996:55).

Commentary

Here is this assumption again, about immigrants being more traditional, and yet less culturally skilled, less educated, more ethnic and basically only fit for either the public sector or “ethnic” businesses. Researchers with a “competence deficiency” perspective have claimed that the moving in of immigrants from non-European countries has meant that the “cultural distance” between the immigrant and the native population has increased (Mattsson 2001:245). This increased cultural distance is said to entail that people from non-European countries, to a greater degree than people from European countries, lack the formal and informal competence in demand on the Swedish labour market (2001:245). “Women” seem to be placed in more or less the same category. Entering the area of labour market and economy, the last sentence is somehow telling in its overriding concern for the economy rather than for the
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individuals and for its lack of any critique towards market or social structures. These being unquestioned, “the fault” must lie with the marginalised individuals themselves.

Self-employment, continued

The drive in Sweden to get women onto the labour market has gone on successfully for many years – 82% of women of working age were gainfully employed in 1991 – but only recently has interest in female-run small businesses come up. Statistics on these have therefore previously not been divided according to sex, so it is difficult to establish the exact number of female self-employed. By using the information available, however, it has been calculated that approximately a quarter of the entrepreneurs in Sweden are women and that they run roughly a quarter of all businesses (Ohlsson 1997:15). The number of new businesses started yearly increased steadily from 1986 up to about 20,000 started in 1990. The recession in the early nineties caused a slump for three years, but the trend picked up again after 1993. Between 1993 and 1994 the total number of new businesses increased by 61% (to approx. 28,000 in 1994), but businesses established by women increased by a record 85%. The majority of businesses were, however, still started by men. Nevertheless, the tendency over a longer period is that the number of women entrepreneurs is increasing. In 1989 women started 15% of the businesses in Sweden. By 1995 the number had reached 23% (Ohlsson 1997:36–39).

In their inquiries into new businesses, the Swedish Bureau of Statistics (SCB) only included questions pertaining to reasons for starting one’s own business, with unemployment or the risk of unemployment being a possible answer, in 1992 – a reflection of the new situation on the labour market. During 1992 and 1993 an average of 29% of new entrepreneurs indicated that unemployment or the risk of unemployment was the main reason for starting their business. Since then the percentage has sunk and in 1995 25% of the new businesses were started due to unemployment. When split into men and women, however, it becomes clear that the tendency is sex-linked. During 1992 and 1993 unemployment was hitting men the hardest, hence they started more businesses due to unemployment than in the following years. In 1994 and 1995 the industrial sector was on the rise again whereas the public sector was suffering dire cut-backs. The percentage of women starting up businesses for unemployment reasons consequently rose during those two years, exceeding the men in 1995. Otherwise the main reasons for women starting their own business are “freedom” and “independence” – for 58% of the women (and 48% of the men) in 1995 (Ohlsson 1997:47–48).
In the drive to cut unemployment, many new “Start-your-own” business courses have been arranged by employment exchanges as well as other organisations and authorities. The question whether new entrepreneurs have partaken in any such courses has been posed to them since 1989. It turns out that it has become more usual to do so, but that the majority still does not. The number has steadily risen from 9% in 1989 to 25% in 1994. In 1995 the number was 22%. It is more common for women than for men to attend these courses. In 1995 the difference between the sexes was greater than before, with 31% for women and only 20% for men. A suggestion is that the courses are a way for women to not only increase their competence but also that taking them is a strategy for increasing their credibility as entrepreneurs (Ohlsson 1997:49-50).

Commentary
So self-employment is both labour market and sex linked. Knowing a little more now, I wonder what kinds of businesses these statistics are based on. Also, who answered the questions? It is a known fact that not everyone presented with enquiries in the form of opinion polls answer them. Who are the persons that decline? How were the questions formulated anyway? Do we know what these, or any, statistics really mean or indicate? The last sentence is an additional indication that self-employment is still a male domain; there are more men doing it and they are assumed to be the ones doing it. Women are not quite seen as the type. What does that say about the general view on women? And what does it mean that women are more willing to increase their competence than men are? Do men already know so much more or are they just more self-assured and supported in their ventures?

Immigrant self-employment
Self-employment generally does not have a strong official tradition in Sweden. The country has been known for an intensely state-interventionist labour market policy. Today this situation has changed, particularly for immigrants. By the beginning of the nineties it was as usual for foreign citizens as for Swedes to be self-employed. However, men continued to be self-employed more often than women. The proportion of self-employed men in 1992 was 11.8% for foreigners, 14.6% for immigrants with Swedish citizenship and 13.8% for the whole population. Among women there was about 5% self-employment for the whole population, 4.9% for foreign citizens and 5.6% for immigrated women
with Swedish citizenship (Ekberg & Gustafsson 1995:51). As has been shown, the proportion of self-employed has continued to rise since 1992, though there are still more men than women in self-employment.

Ethnic businesses are mainly concentrated to big cities, particularly to Stockholm. Big city areas with large immigrant populations are characterised by growing efforts to combat unemployment through various measures and projects. Large numbers of foreign citizens are thus caught up in retraining and training opportunities schemes, a political strategy which also obscures real unemployment figures (Ekberg & Gustafsson 1995:36). In the light of unemployment figures of 35% for non-European citizens, 26% for European, non-Nordic, citizens and 11% for citizens from the other Nordic countries, self-employment is strongly promoted by national proposals as well as local policies (Statens Invandrarverk 1996). Most ethnic businesses are run by European immigrants – 71,4% in 1991, of which 49% from the Nordic countries. Asians run 22,3% (of which 84% from the Middle East), North and South Americans 3,3% and only 2,2% of self-employed are from Africa (of which 73% from North Africa) (SOU 1996:55). Female immigrants appear to run approximately 30% of ethnic businesses, and around 63% of them are within the service sector. In 1991, 36% of all ethnic businesses were found in Stockholm county. 37,1% of the total number of ethnic businesses in Sweden run by men were in Stockholm, 33,5% of those run by women. In 1994, 28% of the population of Stockholm county was immigrant and its share of new enterprises in the county was 23% (SOU 1996:55). From 1985 to 1991, the total number of ethnic businesses in Sweden stayed relatively steady at between 20,000 and 25,000. From 1992 until 1994, however, there was a great increase in numbers to over 50,000 (SOU 1996:55). In 1994, 17-18% of self-employment was in “ethnic businesses”, started by first and second generation immigrants (Ekberg & Gustafsson 1995:51).

Commentary
Self-employment needs to be more clearly defined. If the woman does all the work, say in a shop, but the business is in the husband’s name, who is self-employed? Records will of course say the man is. With gender structures being the way they are, this is conceivably a hidden factor. It is even more likely to be the case where a couple run a business together. The numbers show a correspondence along ethnic lines, or rather hierarchies, between self-employment and unemployment. What does that mean? The ratio of women to men within the category “self-employed immigrants” is about the same as that of self-employed
women to men in general. What does that indicate? The category “self-employed immigrants” can in percentages be compared to the category “self-employed women” (at least in Stockholm). Is this further indication that the two categories “immigrants” and “women” are comparable in more areas than one? Statistics may provide the numbers, but it does not provide all the answers.

Programmes for self-employment

During the autumn of 1994 a government plan of action against unemployment was presented, as a co-ordination of labour market policies, industry and commerce policies and the policies of education. The programme contains measures within five main areas, for an active policy of industry and commerce for small and medium-sized businesses, for stimulating employment, for increasing the competence of the labour force, for mobilising the unemployed and for decreasing unemployment among youth. All the areas have in common the aim of strengthening women’s position and of breaking the sex segregated labour market (Proposal of operative programme for “Employment” 1995–1999). Especially vulnerable groups are specifically targeted in the plan of action, including women and immigrants. The measures and their results are continuously evaluated by the National Labour Market Department in order to follow up the development of the various policies.

Among the targeted groups within the Swedish Objective 3 are women and immigrants. One of the goals of Objective 3 is to combat the alarming development for immigrants on the Swedish labour market during the last recession by using European Social Fund (ESF) contributions to promote self-employment. Where the Swedish Objective 3 programme is based on the goals and development strategies of the national labour market policies, “Employment” is a community initiative created as a complement to Objective 3. Its aims are to generate employment opportunities and to increase the competence level of the labour force through trans-national and innovative projects in several relevant areas. “Employment” consists of four part projects which are especially targeted at measures for vulnerable groups, including women and immigrants (Proposal of operative programme for “Employment” 1995–1999).

YOUTH START is aimed at youth under the age of twenty without vocational training or with an insufficient basic education. The goal is to facilitate their transition onto the labour market. One of the target groups is young women, another socially vulnerable youth, especially immigrant youth in the large cities.
NOW aims to increase the equality between men and women on the labour market, primarily through educational drives and measures which increase women’s, native-born as well as immigrant, possibilities for employment and non-traditional career choices. A strong emphasis is placed on the drive for self-employment.

HORIZON aims to make it easier for the handicapped and vulnerable groups to gain employment. The “vulnerable groups” referred to here are immigrants and refugees. The sub-programme “Horizon disadvantaged” aims to take into consideration the varying needs of the heterogeneous group of immigrants in order to speed up their entry onto the regular labour market, among other things through self-employment.

INTEGRA has the same target group, immigrants and refugees. Emphasised for Integra is that “the potential possessed by many immigrants for initiative, entrepreneurial spirit, and owning their own businesses should be developed and afforded favourable conditions” (Supplement 1997–1999:2).

Commentary
It is interesting to note that “women” and “immigrants” are “vulnerable groups”, that a major way of “breaking the sex segregated labour market” and increasing the “possibility for non-traditional career choices” among women is to promote self-employment. This gives rise to several questions. Vulnerable groups in relation to what? And why? Why this focus on self-employment? What does “generate employment opportunities” mean? How does self-employment increase equality between men and women? How is self-employment part of the regular labour market? There are so many questions! Some of them will be further explored in this text, but I realise others will remain open. Ultimately the object is not to answer as many questions as possible in as little space as possible, but rather to develop a critical approach. In starting to ask questions and by alienating oneself from the familiar and taken for granted, one is at least on the way toward a cultural criticism (cf. Winther Jorgensen & Phillips 2000:28–30).

Stockholm
Stockholm is today a multiethnic city which, in this respect, shows a lot of similarities with other EU cities. The region is inhabited by approximately 1.7 million people distributed over 23 municipalities. Stockholm has undergone profound economic restructuring during the last couple
of decades, involving a dramatic decrease in manufacturing together with an increase in service sector activities, public and private (cf. Andersson & Malmberg 1988). Being the Swedish “import harbour” for ideas, know-how, and high-tech, Stockholm is more and more taking on the character of a dynamic node in the global economic network. However, the globalisation process, matched by immigration, has been accompanied by a number of contemporary dilemmas related to the political economy and division of labour in the multiethnic city (cf. Schierup 1995).

For a long time the Stockholm region has been the main region for immigrants in Sweden, with a great influx of immigrants and refugees from abroad as well as through internal migration. A striking feature is the spatial distribution of immigrants to a great number of municipalities with already high concentrations of immigrants. The proportion of immigrants is, according to recent statistics, around 17% in the Stockholm region as a whole. About 400,000 people, distributed over nineteen major localities, are living in suburban areas considered to exhibit a high density of immigrants (i.e. >30%). Finns, Turks, Yugoslavs, and Chileans have long been among the most numerous groups, but during the 1980s and early 1990s a substantial and increasing number of immigrants (mainly refugees) from many different parts of Africa and Asia (other than Turkey) have moved into the region, and they form a growing part of the population in disfavoured suburban areas.

Commentary
Why in those areas? Who decides where the refugees go to live? How do the immigrants themselves choose, if they have that opportunity? At this point of rereading, the feeling is that my first phase report mainly generates questions, but only very few answers. To be fair, it did provide a background, an idea of the big picture, a sense of trends, at the outset of the project. It certainly got my mind going – some of the issues that arose during this time followed me onward in the continued work and were later dealt with more thoroughly.

Stockholm, continued
The effects of globalisation have, among other structural changes, given room for the development of hierarchical occupational domains, not least the emergence of an ethnic labour market. The growth of an ethnically structured economy and of social exclusion has among other things given rise to a growing sector of so-called “ethnic businesses” (i.e. minority owned shops and enterprises), largely employing immigrant and
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ethnic minority labour. However, besides an increasingly ethnically structured and stratified labour market, a highly conspicuous and worrying feature of Stockholm today is rapidly expanding processes of social exclusion and residential segregation (Ålund 1996a, 1996b). The suburbs developed in the sixties and seventies as part of the big welfare state programmes were quickly filled by marginalised Swedes and immigrants. Due to the expensive new public housing estates, these vulnerable people often became dependent on public housing benefits and social welfare.

The areas developed into stigmatised territories with the reputation of being housing estates with social problems, followed by any middle-class ethnic Swedes moving out and more, and new, immigrant groups moving in (Andersson 1997, Borgegård & Murdie 1996). Thus with the unemployment rate steadily rising and a residential and social marginality for minority groups, Stockholm is facing a vicious circle where these already stigmatised areas are becoming even poorer in relative and absolute terms and other well-off, middle-class areas dominated by Swedes are becoming more socio-economically privileged and culturally more “Swedish”.

Commentary
Oh dear. Not that there is anything wrong with the report as such. The trends and phenomena in themselves are probably correct, but there are plenty of underlying assumptions and unasked questions just below the surface. Why has globalisation led to an ethnically structured and stratified labour market? Why are effects of globalisation an ethnic labour market and social exclusion? What is globalisation anyway? There are many “facts” presented here, but I do not seem to have thought of asking “why?”. I assume I ought to have read more about globalisation and its consequences, because I do not see how globalisation in itself can be blamed for the social ills mentioned. Surely it must have something to do with how the country of immigration, in this case Sweden, receives and incorporates its new residents into society? The way the phenomena are spoken of, it is as if globalisation, residential segregation, and social and labour market exclusion were completely autonomous occurrences – an unstoppable chain of events that no human has had any way of affecting or even has anything to do with.

Järvaältet
As these processes of social and labour market exclusion and residential segregation accelerate, they have become the object for increasing
political concern. In Stockholm there are several different policies and programmes designed to deal with the problems of integration/segregation with reference to immigrant populations. These attempts are often aimed at breaking the prevailing trends concerning residential patterns, but there are also determined efforts aimed at changing trends in the labour market.

Out of the nineteen most heavily immigrant-populated areas of Stockholm, Järvaflättet has been chosen as the main focus for this study. The main arguments guiding that selection are as follows:

— earlier experience concerning organised or spontaneous action stimulating the active participation of citizens in local community efforts targeted against segregation
— the quality of current strategies to achieve goals related to this objective
— the existence of actual programmes and actual conditions making these efforts realistic.

One important reason for selecting the area of Järvaflättet, located in the municipality of Stockholm, is related to its size and social complexity. Approximately 60,000 people live in this area, many of them with an immigrant background. Extensive investments have flowed into the area during the preceding decades. Studies of the local community programmes related to Järvaflättet can illustrate the highly varied preconditions which must be taken into account in efforts to develop new inclusive strategies.

Järvaflättet refers to a conglomeration of residential areas in the northern part of Stockholm municipality. As a whole it is marked by a specific mixture of “rich” and “poor” areas, a phenomenon rare within the rest of the greater Stockholm region. Some of the suburban localities of Järvaflättet have become known for their very high rates of unemployment among individuals with an immigrant background. These localities are characterised by their constant lack of resources, particularly local community funds, and labour market opportunities. On the other hand, there are other suburban areas in Järvaflättet which exhibit quite a contrasting situation, housing a relatively (above average for Stockholm) large middle-class and educated population, many of them foreign-born, as well as comprehensive opportunities in the local labour market related to the presence of enterprises and industries in advanced micro-electronics and other high-tech branches.

The intention of the targeted programmes of sustainable urban development which are found in Järvaflättet display a marked concern with
the labour market issues, and they comprise various projects where issues of work and education are intertwined. Those measures penetrate different local institutional sectors of local communities, setting off already at the level of pre-school activities. Some of the larger projects, for example “House of Entrepreneurs” (Företagarhuset. A project under the Integra programme), are concerned with counteracting long-term unemployment, and with support targeted at the encouragement of self-employment among immigrants. Others, like the “Rinkeby Language Centre” (Rinkeby Språkcentrum), a centre engaging in education and research, aim at making use of the variform and actually existing, but unutilised, language skills in the area. Others again, e.g. “Livstycket”, a social economy project, have in focus immigrated women who receive training in handicraft skills as well as in language, mathematics and social science. Altogether different projects are focused on combating unemployment through more proficient utilisation of existing local competence.

Järvafältet has a joint administration and should be seen as a single unit despite strikingly contrasting social and economic conditions within a range of only a few kilometres. In order to illustrate this phenomenon a brief comparison between two residential areas, Rinkeby and Kista, follows.

Rinkeby is considered to be a “poor” suburb by general Stockholm standards. It is, at the same time, one of the most famous suburbs in all of Sweden due to the rich diversity of its population, originating from more than 100 countries. The population consists of roughly 14,000 inhabitants and the foreign-born part amounts currently to 62% of the total (far more if one includes “second generation immigrants”). The unemployment rate is much higher than average, the standard of income is far below average, and the level of education is also relatively low. There exists here an extensive local tradition in working with issues of community integration and social inclusion (Ålund 1996b, 1997), particularly directed at certain immigrant and low-income sections within the population.

Community efforts in the area represent to a large extent “bottom-up” initiatives. The community is influenced by very active, locally based leaders who have long championed issues against racism and eth­nically inscribed marginalisation and exclusion (Ålund 1997, Olsson 1991, 1992, 1995). In Rinkeby, with its largely mixed population, there are today relatively few reports of overt street-level racism or locally based institutional discrimination, so those issues cannot be said to be the core of the suburb’s social problem.
Commentary
I have to break in here. Are we talking about combating segregation within a suburb or in the city or even country as a whole? To really “illustrate the highly varied preconditions which must be taken into account in efforts to develop new inclusive strategies”, would it not be a good idea to include a study of suburbs such as Djursholm, in which very few immigrants live, where there are other types of “problems” and where the economic level is much higher? Or are they not included in the integration process? Who is to be integrated into what? Also, what is the definition of “racism” here? Wetherell and Potter see racism as “rooted in the social and structural rather than in the personal and psychological” (1992:217) – something which would indicate that the “lack of overt racism” need not mean there is none. Indeed, if racism is considered something the majority population subjects “immigrants” in general to, then on one level there is probably little of it in this area. In the same spirit, there would be no truly local institutions, or at least no local anchoring of them, if discrimination followed that same pattern. However, if it is not some form of – dare I say it? – national racism or discrimination that puts the suburb in the situation it is, then what is the “core of the suburb’s social problem”? The residents themselves? Unless there is an intention of isolating the suburb as a separate and disconnected entity, then any problems that exist must be related to the rest of society and its structures.

Järvafältet, continued
Kista is actually comprised of three linked local areas; Kista, Husby, and Akalla, with a total population of approx. 28,000, among which 40% are of foreign origin. The locality of Kista has an extensive infrastructure when it comes to the local labour market. The suburb is famous for its large high-tech and electronics industry. It has a population of approx. 9,000, of which less than 30% are foreign-born (26% in 1994). Kista has a considerable middle-class population and has become particularly popular as a residential choice for middle-class individuals of immigrant background. The locality has all the economic and labour-related opportunities that Rinkeby lacks, but still a substantial part of the foreign-born population remains unemployed. It is obvious that a part of the problem of social exclusion in Kista is found in the neighbouring Husby, which more or less lacks the opportunities found in Kista and which has a considerably higher rate of unemployment and social problems. Husby has a population of roughly 10,500 people and 55% of them are foreign-born. In the other local area related to Kista, Akalla, the compo-
Facts and apprehensions

sition of the population (in terms of immigrant background) is some­where between that of Kista and Husby and the same holds true for job opportunities.

Unemployment among immigrants and ethnically profiled social exclusion are, however, problems which the three Kista localities share with the rest of Sweden and which therefore hold high priority concerning city administration and local community efforts. The actions in Kista as a whole hence focus on generating enhanced job opportunities, particularly for immigrants. The intention is to increase the number of locally based employees and to increase the social mobility of the local population. These attempts include projects in which ways of co-operat­ing with the enterprises in the area and of enhancing the educational level among individuals with immigrant or ethnic minority background to match the types of education and skills required by the local economy, are sought. The Kista projects represent more or less “top-down” initiatives, mainly designed and organised by administrators and profes­sionals.

Commentary
It would have been interesting to find out what the employee profile of the local high-tech enterprises was. How many that work there are of immigrant background? How many of the unemployed immigrants in the area have degrees or skills compatible with what the local economy requires? If one imagines Kista as a miniature of Stockholm, or even Sweden, it becomes clear that integration and inclusion must be a con­cern not only for the poor, the unemployed, the immigrants, but for the rich, employed and “native” as well. Otherwise the concept means nothing.

Järvafältet, continued
These localities across Järvafältet are the main areas from which re­pondents are to be culled for both the “expert” and the biographical interviews to follow. An additional part of this first report was to con­duct five preliminary interviews in order to get an idea of the situation before going on to conducting five “expert” interviews for the second report. As one of the preliminary interviews was with an “expert” and the other four were with immigrant women who were also later inter­viewed, I have deemed it preferable in this final report to add this inter­view material to the relevant parts of later reports rather than bring them up here. The “expert” was a commissioner at the City District Administration of Kista, two of the immigrant women were involved in a
project in Kista, and the other two in a project in Rinkeby. The interviews suggested that the main difference between the two situations in Kista and Rinkeby is that there actually is an existing labour market in Kista, whereas for the women in Rinkeby the ability to go on with their newly found competence may depend on their willingness and ability to move onto the central Stockholm market, i.e. away from the Rinkeby network. All four women seem to have gained enough in experience and confidence to feel that they can go on even without the support of their particular projects, but the Kista women have the security of a labour-network in their own area. The interview with the “expert” described in some detail a few of the policies, programmes and practices in one of the city areas and also brought up some pertinent questions around definitions of terms, theory vs. reality, as well as perspectives on power and the powerlessness in the process of social rejection.

Commentary
When I carried out the preliminary interviews I initially found a degree of comfort in the empirical “reality” conveyed by flesh-and-blood humans. It was in that setting that I felt at home; speaking to people, asking questions and discussing pertinent issues. Nevertheless, the familiar methodological context did not of course provide me with instant insight, but instead expanded the area of discrepancies to more than what I had noted in the statistical material. The statistics I had gathered showed an inconsistency in the labour market situation for native-born Swedes and immigrants, especially between women of the two categories. That disparity was made more complex through the interviews. It was not just that there were different employment patterns depending somehow on ethnic background and gender, but agents on different levels of the social structure also had varying perspectives on the matter. The commissioner shared her knowledge and the immigrant women theirs, but the separate versions did not quite tally. I had a sense of some underlying reason for this, something other than just different points of view, and at our first workshop in Germany an idea of what that was started to take form.

Frankfurt, March 1998. The weather was brilliant. March in Umeå, Sweden, is still closer to winter than summer, or even to spring, with snow covering most of the landscape and temperatures below zero. Frankfurt was warm, sunny, full of birdsong and bursting with colour. It was the first time all the project participants gathered in the same place, though some of the senior participants had met each other in varying constellations at conferences and other “dos” around the world before.
For most of the doctoral students and research assistants, however, it was their first introduction to each other as well as to the senior researchers other than their own team leaders. I was nervous. What were my counterparts going to be like? How much more than I did they know about the topic(s) at hand and what was I, an ethnologist among sociologists, going to be able to contribute to the project? I had started to get to know my tutor from the sociology department a little and was relieved that she was there. She provided me with support and encouragement as well as her own expertise in the research field I had suddenly found myself in. Part of my anxiety before the workshop lay in still not really understanding what the project was all about, and part of it with a daunting respect of previously distant and imaginary figures. The reality was, (I can say this now) of course, that the project partners were as “human” as anyone else.

During our workshop discussions, categorisation was one of the issues of contention. Although we all agreed that the terms “immigrants” and “immigrant women” were much too equivocal to really be useful, some of the partners wanted to focus on specific ethnic groups. Others wanted to stick to the original idea of placing emphasis on the individual rather than on ethnic belonging. The grounds for concentrating on a few ethnic groups differed. In one case there were special support programmes for Greek returnees that warranted attention and in another an idea of comparing group-specific strategies prevailed. Both incentives were reasonable in their own way, though the latter made me feel slightly ill at ease. I felt that the risk it entailed, even with a pronounced intention of problematising and deconstructing the essentialist element, was greater than the benefits the perspective might bring. In focusing on ethnic groups rather than on individual persons there is always a danger of “culturalisation”, i.e. of culturally explaining people’s actions without attention to social or personal context (Ehn 1986:19ff, Liliequist 1996:34). As the maintaining of the specific nature of a category or group can be cited as a reason to favour or disfavour people according to their origins (Pripp 2001:18, cf. also Ålund & Schierup 1991, Ehn 1992), I felt it may be the wrong approach in our case. Would it not be better to start from the other direction? To interview individuals and perhaps in the final analysis comment upon and interpret perceived group attributes or strategies? I felt strongly about this and very uneasy about the perception of culture as a clearly delimited and static totality that appeared to exist even in academic contexts.

The hints, the indications in my material and in our discussions, were only just detectable to me at the time, and it was only when I dis-
covered I had my own preconceived ideas to contend with that the idea, or understanding perhaps, started to emerge. During a stroll along the river Main with one of my colleagues I shared one of my interview experiences. Having lived most of my life abroad, attended international schools together with peers from all over the world, and travelled extensively, I believed myself to be free of bias and preconceived ideas. However, as I confessed to my fellow reveller in the beautiful day, I had been consternated to discover in myself an expectation of a certain behaviour and attitude in the veiled Muslim women I had interviewed. An expectation that luckily was not met, thus exposing my flawed image of myself as well as of them. In the brief exchange with my colleague I was relieved to hear that others experience similar revelations about themselves. Despite knowing that “no-one is perfect” and that one should just try to “learn from one’s mistakes”, the encounter with myself nevertheless made me wonder about what such preconceived, and perhaps undiscovered, ideas and notions do with what we do.

I had a cacophony of voices surrounding me. I had learnt that statistical labour market curves for Swedish and immigrant women differed profoundly, but not why; I had been told that local self-employment programmes were a great idea for solving the immigrant unemployment problem, and had been impressed; I had also been told those same programmes were not so good and not what the immigrant women themselves necessarily desired, and had been surprised at the contradiction; I had read that immigrant women do not want to work and I had read, and heard, that they do. In addition, I had discovered confusing aspects of myself, aspects that I did not really want to accept and that I asked myself where they came from. In this mental mêlée I had to sift through all the noise and start making sense of it all.

If preconceived notions were what we all suffered from, then there could be a connection between my preconceived idea of Muslim women and the phenomena I was starting to identify “out there”, on the labour market and in society as a whole. If my understanding of immigrant women, although unconsciously and certainly only partially, was based on the historically generated distinction between “us” and “them”, then was it not possible that the same perception would, or could, be found throughout formulations and attitudes in both research and politics? This was a new, and at the time rather dizzying, thought. I was of course aware of the debates on immigration issues, aware of the spectrum of attitudes toward foreigners, or immigrants, within the populace. But this was a glimpse of something bigger, and it was a reflection that stayed with me and to a certain extent informed my subsequent work.
Questions and other worries that arose during the first phase of the project found a valuable arena for discussion at the Frankfurt workshop. We discussed many issues, from conceptual refinements to methodological questions and theoretical points of departure. It became clear that we were far from in agreement and our debates both clarified and clouded the issues brought up.

Meeting with doctoral students and research assistants from other parts of Europe also brought new insights. There were many similarities in our situations both within academe in general and within the project structure. In fact, it turned out that several of us shared many of the hesitancies I had felt stirring at this early stage of trying to get a grip on what we were supposed to do, and how. A tentative (and ironic) feeling emerged of an “us and them” — the us being the lower ranks, the ones who actually had to implement what “they” planned. Though it was not explicitly expressed, I felt this loose formation led to a feeling of easygoing understanding between us. So, during the course of three brief days, I had entered into several new constellations, though the way these groups overlapped and conjoined was a reminder of the non-fixedness of their boundaries. Nonetheless, there was my tutor and I, also declared the “Swedish team”, there was the group of doctoral students and research assistants, and, I discovered on my return to the department in Umeå, there was the entire project ensemble.

From having been lifted by the workshop experience, I fell right back into place when I got home. Though colleagues on one level could relate to my excited babbling about what I had done, seen, and learned — “yes, conferences are great, aren’t they?” — they could not share it with me, they did not know who I had been while away. Once again I was a doctoral student among many, though with a “secret” other dimension to my work. My involvement with an outside project meant two things. I was “only” doing project work, not writing my thesis, and during the course of the project, the tutoring responsibility was anyhow shifted
from my home department. This put me in a bit of a “time-out zone” with a mystifying effect as consequence. Though I am sure most doctoral students get the feeling of existing in a glass bubble from time to time, the fact that no-one was completely initiated or involved in what I was doing intensified the sensation. Still, the first report had to be delivered on time and so I carried on.

In the second phase of the project, the task was to interview “experts”, i.e. persons in positions of administrative power concerning the allocation of funds and the implementation of projects and programmes promoting self-employment. I was naturally looking forward to finding out what was concretely being done for the myriad individuals I had sensed behind the sheets and tables of statistical categories and numbers. The indignation I felt at the obvious discrepancies between the situation for Swedes and that of immigrants went with me as I set off on my assignment. I was, however, pleasantly surprised by what I was told in my first few interviews. Plenty was being done to change the situation. “They” were being offered courses, advice, mentors and economic support so they could start businesses and not have to be unemployed anymore. My initial delight soon changed into a more hesitative mood, though. Not only did further interviews with “experts” who had slightly different viewpoints dampen my enthusiasm, but my process of personal insight also continued. I started to realise that despite my self-characterisation as an unprejudiced and broad-minded person (to a degree strengthened by the knowledge that at least I knew where I failed) I nevertheless allowed the categorisations, verbally accepted the divisions between “us” and “them”, and in doing so upheld and perpetuated prevailing structures – if not actually physical then of the mind. Why was it so difficult to avoid?

It was my first contact with the municipal political establishments connected to the chosen areas and it became an eye-opener. I found that the ”experts” are often precariously positioned between the greater political establishment they serve under and the people they are meant to serve locally. Depending on the background and experience of the ”expert” in question, attitudes differed regarding the effects and successfulness of the various programmes and projects they were running, as well as regarding the whole set of problems connected to their task. The “experts”’ relative closeness to the projects as well as to the individuals involved also affected their opinion. In one way or another they had to navigate the field they were in with its rules and regulations as well as face the obstacles and prejudices they confronted both from above and below.
Position and expression

The five “experts” interviewed are of different ethnical backgrounds, both sexes, and have distinct personal experiences. As “middle men” (between the state and the disadvantaged) the “experts” have a unique opportunity of assessing any discrepancy between the intentions of policies and their actual implementation and success. The interviews were conducted according to predetermined themes, but narrative digressions by the respondents were welcome in order to catch the issues important to them and/or their organisations. The subjects that surfaced most frequently are organised into separate themes and also discussed.

Organising material into themes serves several purposes. First of all it helps one sort the mass of information into manageable categories. Secondly, it is a useful tool for analysis in that it reveals patterns as well as contradictions. I have attempted to merge the etic perspective of the predefined areas of interest for the project with the emic perspective of the respondents’ own spontaneous thematisations. First the respondents and their positions as “experts” are briefly introduced. Then the interviews are addressed through themes that were considered by more than one respondent and that are also worth discussing in more analytical terms. In the Discussion at the end of the report, aspects arising from the themes are also tentatively related to Marshall’s concept of citizenship and Bourdieu’s theory on the importance of social and cultural capital.

Under the thematic heading “Attitudes and stereotypes” there are four subdivisions; Self-employment, Financing, Gender, and Ethnicity. Attitudes naturally pervade all human interaction and action in general, but these subdivisions are of particular interest as they are crucial to the context of self-employment and social inclusion. The attitudes of those in positions of power as well as of those subjected to their plans and measures may possibly determine the outcome of the policies. The second major heading is “New insights”. Integration/inclusion, Tough insights and Success/failure are its three subdivisions. These themes are chosen as they represent the transformations occurring today. Experience has shown the five “experts” that changes are necessary for the success of the extensive plans for labour market and social inclusion for disadvantaged groups in Sweden.

Commentary

One of the possibilities for doing political research is to “consciously formulate one’s questions so that the results can contribute to illu-
minating the aspects of reality one is of the opinion should be influenced politically” (Blehr 2001:19). Another is to choose which topics to focus on, which thematic headings to use in the text. In doing so, I have steered the text in my preferred direction. Were I to listen to the tapes of the interviews again, I would probably find that the respondents had brought up other themes as well. Even though I attempted to balance the “predefined areas of interest for the project” with the “respondents’ own spontaneous thematisations”, I had the last word. If nothing else, this shows that what the researcher presents in the form of text is a subjective construction of research material and results.

**Expert respondents**

The five key respondents interviewed are in positions of expertise in the areas of programmes, projects, grass-roots movements and other measures (i.e. both top-down and bottom-up activities) within the context of social inclusion and self-employment. The project directions proposed that these key respondents may come from the political system, the market system, non-governmental organisations or trade unions. My choice of respondents was guided by several factors: the intention to have delegates from as many as possible of the above mentioned fields, the perceived importance of having representatives of both genders and of various ethnic backgrounds, and by a possibly subjective view on the definition of “expert” – I see it as someone who has experience in the workings of the social, political and/or market systems in the context of self-employment but who also has an insight into social inclusion/exclusion processes in general.

**Camilla**

The first interview was with Camilla, a commissioner at the City District Administration in Kista (KSDF) and an instigator of novel programmes and strategies for promoting social inclusion through, among other things, competence-development, traineeships, mentorships and, of course, self-employment – often in conjunction with or as a result of the first three schemes. Camilla’s area of responsibility covers the coordination of integration, labour market, business and industry, and financial assistance/social security benefits. In addition to her professional expertise, she has on a personal level the experience of having lived eighteen years in a city area with a predominantly immigrant population and is thus intensely aware of circumstances in such places.
Lars

Lars, the second respondent, is responsible for trade and industry at the City District Administration of Rinkeby (RSDF). Although his professional position may be similar to that of Camilla, although in a different city area, Lars is interesting as a key respondent for another reason as well. In 1996 he was the head of an Employment/"Horizon disadvantaged" project which led to what is now called Företagarhuset ("House of Entrepreneurs", now under Integra), a place where entrepreneurs can present their ideas for self-employment, receive counselling, support on several levels, and presumably a good start as self-employed. The success of the project and the obvious need for this sort of organisation has led to the incorporation of Företagarhuset into the regular labour market measures run by the local SDF.

Eduardo

Eduardo is the Managing Director of Internationella Företagarföreningen i Sverige (IFS, The Swedish Association of Ethnic Entrepreneurs), located in central Stockholm. The association's conviction is that it would be better for Sweden if the same prerequisites applied to everyone, specifically in the field of self-employment. Their "/.../ mission is therefore to support and to develop ethnic enterprises in Sweden. IFS is an independent organisation, building bridges between different cultures and different enterprises so that life and work together becomes easier" (IFS information folder).

Kemal

Kemal is presently the investigator for Matters of Integration at the Stockholm Streets and Property Board. As he is a man with many irons in the fire, I first encountered his name in connection with a Turkish restaurant project in Rinkeby. At the time he was employed by the Rinkeby SDF but also had a commission of trust from the Turkish Association in Rinkeby to try to change the situation of mass unemployment among the women in the Turkish community. That project has expanded and developed and is, in connection with his other "irons", an interesting example of a more holistic approach to inclusion measures. It is this project I address in the interview.

Gabriela

Gabriela is part of the Women's Research Institution in Stockholm and has as such been enlisted in a number of projects over the years. She has among other things mapped the situation and activities of networks of
Chilean women, been involved in the establishment of a residential college for adult education in a city area with a large immigrant population, as well as been commissioned by the county administrative board to start up a resource centre for women in the same area. These and other projects, mainly involving women, have given her valuable insights into the workings and non-workings of the many projects in circulation. Today Gabriela runs a project called LIKA, a project not specifically geared toward self-employment but where a comprehensive social inclusion for immigrant women is the aim and where self-employment is a potential goal.

Commentary
In the unabridged version of this second report, there was a lot more information on the five respondents. I wonder what difference that makes? For an ethnologist it is important to get a feel for the respondents, to have, in the interview situation, a personal relationship with each one. In one’s writings, one tries not to speak for the respondents, but to let their own voices be heard. I would prefer to present each individual as completely as possible, in order for that person to represent him or herself and for the reader to be able to make his/her own acquaintance with the respondents. I suppose it has to do with what information, what knowledge, one is after. The final report to the EU-commission was to concisely show results and recommendations, it was not intended as a familiarising introduction to a number of people in various settings. Descriptive ethnography would perhaps have been closer to that particular ambition. My own aspiration is to find a satisfactory combination of the two.

Attitudes and stereotypes
The attitudes to each other of those in positions of power and those in disadvantaged circumstances are often prone to include stereotypical characterisations and be formed out of prejudice. The following are some of the problems with attitudes that have been discussed in the interviews. Attitudes, as mentioned before, of course pervade all aspects of human interaction, and are therefore also present in the next section, though the focus there lies on other matters.

Self-employment
One attitude concerns the ethnic or cultural nature of self-employment. It is rather a general opinion in many of the official documents concerning labour market measures and self-employment that minority ethnic
groups, some more than others, are particularly suited to that specific niche of the market. One of my “expert” respondents explained why so many immigrants are choosing self-employment by claiming that for many of them it was a survival strategy already in their homeland. This of course does not necessarily imply that it is part of their culture, but does lend an air of legitimacy to the current practice of urging immigrants to start their own businesses. “It’s what they’re good at” has become a common phrase.

Eduardo, however, sees the danger in approaching this as a “truth”. Over the years he has become more aware of what consequences different social circumstances have for the self-employment activities of ethnic groups. For some it has become a survival strategy under conditions of continuous migration or continuous minority status. Some groups are more active than others due to larger informal network structures within the ethnic group. “Supportive networks play an enormous role”. If role models are not available in any other occupation, then self-employment becomes what determines what the majority of the group do. As Camilla puts it “/.../ immigrants often end up in a specific business because if others in the ethnic group run for example pizzerias, then those friends, that network, will know where to get advice on starting a pizzeria. So you do”. Eduardo feels that “It is much too simplified to try to claim that immigrants are entrepreneurs in their genes. There are many factors that determine an individual’s decision to become self-employed. Why immigrants are less mindful of the risks is because they’ve hit rock bottom already, they say ‘what the hell, let’s go for it’. For good and for bad”. With more experience and more involvement from the immigrants themselves, these stereotypical attitudes nevertheless appear to be slowly changing. More about this further on.

Financing

Money is a key issue in business, and a vital one in starting a new enterprise. Though financing processes may be explained in the context of each particular organisation, there are also more subtle forces involved in the views on money and its uses.

Eduardo considers parts of the debate on financing dangerous. The prevailing tendency is to praise and encourage the borrowing and lending of money within ethnic groups to finance self-employment. “Sure, it’s great to a certain limit. After that it inhibits development and any possibilities of growth”. The biggest problem is with credibility, according to Eduardo. Keeping the financing within the group leads to the entrepreneur’s professional and business ability being called into ques-
tion. “If you don’t have the right structures around you, a lot of business will be lost, you’ll have problems with developing. A lot of what is said today has to consider many more dimensions. They can’t run businesses on the premise of ‘borrow from the family’. Society and other actors must understand that it is not enough”.

The economic plan applied in Kista is partly a consequence of this problem. Camilla explains; “I can tell you that the biggest problem with unemployed people starting their own businesses is that there is no risk capital. You have to own a house or something and mortgage it in order to receive a ‘start-your-own’ loan”, something that very few of Kista’s unemployed have as an option. Some of the money that the state is now willing to invest in the support of small businesses must be available as risk capital in Camilla’s opinion. The partial use of the social security kitty in Kista as risk capital for new businesses is a radical and even questioned measure, but as far as Camilla is concerned it is worth it if it can be used to lessen welfare dependency. The spiral of welfare dependency is something that affects all of society and many are critical of the system that allows it. Gabriela mentioned two experiences that influenced her views on the passivity created by the social security system. At the adult college which she helped develop, a discussion on rights and obligations in society came up in civics class. Afterwards a young immigrant man came up to her and said “I was not a parasite when I came here, I became one”. In another context a Somali woman had questioned the system by wondering why, instead of receiving benefits every month, she could not get a whole year’s worth at once so she could be a business woman. In Somalia that is what she had done, she had run her own life. She could not understand why she should get money and then not do anything.

The strategy of trying to change attitudes in for example financial institutions is something IFS takes seriously. Eduardo has seen the unwillingness of these institutions to support immigrants, often out of a lack of knowledge and insight. He blames part of it on stress and the demand for efficiency. “As soon as something is unclear, a question arises, in an application for support for example, it is put aside and the next one is picked up”. There is therefore a need not only for good applications, but also for more meetings between the financial institutions and the actual people applying for loans. ALMI is one such large institution that previously granted only 3–4% of their credit loans to immigrant businesses. Through intensive discussions and by proving that the businesses they promote are economically sound, IFS has, according to Eduardo, been able to increase that share to 20–25% and now handles a large part of ALMI’s credit funds for immigrant ventures. As an indirect
consequence of this there is now someone responsible for immigrant issues at many of the larger banks and plans are in motion for this to continue down to the smaller neighbourhood bank offices, especially in the heavily immigrant populated areas.

An offshoot project from Företagarhuset has a similar aim. It started as an attempt to help well educated immigrants, whose last and undesired alternative seemed to be to start their own businesses, to find jobs more appropriate to their background on the regular labour market. The plan was co-ordinated with the work on convincing a bank to open offices in Rinkeby, which succeeded after eighteen months. The bank in its turn joined an EU-venture involving “bank hosts” and the co-operation is now in full progress. Eight bank hosts with immigrant background work and function as “a kind of salesmen or bridge builders or communicators with the immigrant population” (Lars), facilitating the process of getting financial support and starting your own business.

Commentary
I will touch upon two topics brought up here, topics that to a certain extent are connected. One is part of the “discourse on competence deficiency” and the other is the notion of “welfare dependency”. In the criticism against the welfare state and its benefits system, “welfare dependency” is a central concept (Eriksson Baaz 2001:176). The argument is that individuals have inherent potential and responsibility and that social interventions and benefits not only deprive the individual of these, but also create passive citizens (2001:176). With this, Eriksson Baaz has drawn a parallel to foreign aid organisations which have in fact moved away from using the concepts of “aid”, “receiver”, and “giver” in order to emphasise the responsibility of the “collaborator” in a partnership discourse (2001:160). The passivity ascribed for example “Africans” is often presented as being a result of foreign aid and “aid dependency”, and seen as something that now has to be counteracted in order for the receivers to become active and independent (Eriksson Baaz 2001:172–173, 177). One way to do this is to be reticent with economic support. “The receivers have to learn to use their own resources” (2001:177). At the risk of it being far-fetched, I see an analogy to the “tendency to praise and encourage the borrowing and lending of money within ethnic groups to finance self-employment” here, as well as to Camilla’s comment on welfare dependency. If it seems reasonable as an analogy, then the same paternalistic kind of discourse is used both in foreign as well as in domestic aid. The idea of the passivity of “the other” is also rooted in colonial notions of “the active” and “the passive”, of “us” and “them”
LIFE IN THE LABYRINTH (2001:173) and thus in the idea of “cultural identities” and the distance between us. This distance can be expressed in “the old colonial thought, that Europeans/white people and non-Europeans/coloured people are more or less suited for different types of tasks” (Mattsson 2001:252–253). In the efforts (see the above section) to “help well educated immigrants to find jobs more appropriate to their background”, it seems they ended up as “a kind of salesmen or bridge builders or communicators with the immigrant population”. I will comment no more, except to say that the statements made to Camilla by a “young immigrant man” and a “Somali woman” probably say more about a system that discursively creates “the other” than about those “others”.

**Gender**

Another aspect that keeps cropping up in the material is the attitude towards women, immigrant women in particular. I see as a potential problem that stereotypes about immigrants may inevitably push them in a certain occupational direction. The need to counteract this may however conflict with realistic possibilities for self-employment. As mentioned in the first report, there is a real danger of lumping all immigrant women into one category and assuming that as immigrants (and therefore less “modern”) and women, their best bet is to start businesses in traditional women’s work. Most of the businesses and co-operatives considered for women involve either cooking, sewing, handicrafts, cleaning or other such traditionally “female” tasks. This, however, seems to be more the case where the initiative for projects and new businesses are of a top-down character. Where women have come up with ideas themselves it appears there is a bigger variation in choice of business. Lars mentions a travel agency and an interpreter agency as examples of enterprises women have started through The House of Entrepreneurs.

There is, of course, the more positive aspect of picking up what people actually can do, what possibilities are available. Camilla applies the same methods in her city area as are generally applied to the thinly populated areas in northern Sweden. “When there’s a discussion about development in the less populated areas one talks of what people can do and know and about what nature can offer and all the rest. When it’s about these areas with big immigrant populations there’s less co-operation, we have to ‘help’ and ‘support’ and I’m very sick of that”. Camilla insists there is a wealth of resources among the immigrants and it just has to be tapped. Gabriela too talks of the need to be prepared to rethink what one can do. “Many well educated immigrant women today have no
Fiery souls and ascribed identities

hope of practising their profession. We have to find other solutions, sometimes outside of the women’s actual professions. It is a very painful process because their identity is taken from them”.

Commentary

Gabriela is herself of immigrant background and shows a keen understanding of the necessity to look beyond the unemployment situation and to take on the whole complex of difficulties “her” immigrant women live with. Nevertheless, after the interview with her, I kept thinking about the finality with which the “fact” that immigrant women have “no hope” of practising their professions was expressed. Gabriela’s job, of course, is to accept “facts”, or at least an obvious social situation, and to take it from there, to find “other solutions”. I like to think that part of my job is to ask questions – in this case “why?”. Why no hope? Why other solutions? One way to see it is to consider the need to find other solutions a need dictated by the circumstance that little is being done to change the structures that put “immigrants” in an outside position to start with. Unquestionably there are always also “Swedes” who, depending on the situation on the labour market and within their professional fields, find they have to retrain or re-educate themselves in order to be able to secure a job. Their situation is still different. Many immigrants have professions within which a lack of manpower prevails. A recent example is the shortage of medical staff in many areas, where instead of supporting trained immigrants’ entry into available jobs, it was proposed that doctors and nurses be “imported” from other European countries. According to the “competence deficiency” discourse, the more culturally coloured competence of today has caused it to become more difficult to translate formal education and informal competence between cultures. In its turn this means, according to the theory, that immigrants with a “big cultural distance” have lacking competence despite a sound academic education (Mattsson 2001:253). I would think that, despite these supposed difficulties in “translating” certain foreign educations into the Swedish context, surely in the long run it would benefit both Sweden and “its immigrants” if such a system were established. A person’s choice and practise of a profession is certainly a substantial part of his or her identity, but the loss of that part can be presumed to be worse than otherwise when there are other than pragmatic reasons for it.

Gender, continued

In Gabriela’s experience there is also a difference in how authorities view Swedish and immigrant women respectively. First of all there are
young Swedish women with a minimum of education who are, in Gabriela’s view, more vulnerable than the immigrant women in the same situation. This she explains by the fact that they and their circumstances have not been mapped to the same extent as those of immigrant women. (Having related her findings, a plan to do so is in the makings at the social security offices.) Despite the predicament of the young Swedish women, the authorities still see them as individuals though, not as representatives of a concept like “immigrant woman”, the stereotype of which is a relatively primitive, definitely traditional and not modern woman.

“They know very little about immigration problems. Many social security offices have a lot of knowledge, but in the ‘immigrant bag’ one forgets the individuals behind the masses. /They forget/ that a woman from Kulu⁴ has nothing in common with a woman from Ankara. That’s a big failing.” Gabriela herself prefers the term “woman of foreign background” to point to the heterogeneity of the immigrant population. “It’s a long process. The immigration politics have led to the continued existence of this problem.”

Equality is very high in priority in Swedish politics, and most programmes and projects are obligated to have equality on their agenda. The result of this “rule” is sometimes debatable. “Sweden is very conscious of the equality aspect and very concerned for the position of immigrant women”, says Camilla. However, as well-intentioned as all the equality plans are, she advises caution in their application. There are situations where it may be better to look at the whole picture before “pushing” the women into more work than they can manage. She illustrates with a general example of a woman with several small children, an unemployed, unhappy husband, the main responsibility for the household, possibly ailing parents or parents-in-law, all then compounded by the additional pressure to get onto the labour market. With immigrant women being offered more than their men in the way of studies, computer training, and projects, Camilla’s desire would be to at least balance it and “rehabilitate the breadwinner”. “We have to be careful”, she says, “and make sure we offer all possibilities”.

The “equality-above-all” policy is pervasive, and in Gabriela’s eyes equality has become a “pitfall for women” and in fact leads to discrimination in the other direction. “We are fixated to the regulations to the point where we structure the /social and labour market/ measures to fit the regulations. Men need role models too.” Gabriela sees it as a “very Swedish” phenomenon – “We have to do the ‘right’ thing. It’s more than than equality in itself”. In her opinion, there are two main obstacles to
equality; the severely sex-segregated labour market and the ethnically segregated society in general.

Commentary
There is that combination of gender and ethnicity again, the enigma that was touched upon in Chapter 2. It would appear that it causes problems not only in defining people, but also in policy implementation. Having “equality” as a guiding light in politics is surely commendable, but perhaps there is a need to investigate how the concept is defined and, more importantly, how it is put into practice. Equality must be considered from a variety of perspectives. There is the issue of equality between the sexes, but also between “natives” and “immigrants” as well as between “women” and “women”.

Identity and stereotypes, equality and ethnocentrism
“It is a very painful process because their identity is taken from them”, Gabriela says. Which identity? And who takes it away? As people do not necessarily see themselves as others do, and as I had discovered a tendency of rather gross generalisations about immigrants, Gabriela’s statement nagged at the back of my mind. Was it really the fact that they could not get a job within their profession or was it more complex than that? Not many people would claim their profession or job to be their whole identity. Perhaps the fact that their professional skills were not even accepted as such made the assault on their integrity all the more profound. Take Taner for example, one of the self-employed respondents. He is a well-educated and internationally experienced building engineer who is unable to get a job. His skills are admired and sought after, but when it becomes clear that he is from Turkey, he is suddenly presumed to know nothing. So now he runs a toy shop. Immigrant lawyers, economists, seamstresses and teachers – they all find their ethnic belonging to be the decisive issue. Pega (with a law degree from Iran) studied to be a library assistant and actually got a job, but only temporarily and with no prospect of either permanent employment or of advancing from the lowest ranks. The way the respondents’ potential employers saw them was as “immigrants”.

Mattsson brings up one of the paradoxes of the “discourse of competence deficiency”: On the one hand, personal qualities are said to be
more highly valued on today’s labour market than before and recruit­ment more geared toward finding that particular individual who best suits a job. On the other hand, competence is described as having be­come more culturally coloured, which for “the Others” means there is no room for an individual competency (Mattsson 2001:255). Despite his personal merits, Taner’s capability is evaluated on the basis of his na­tionality and thus assumed to be “a culture-bound and (in the Swedish context) useless competence” (2001:255). These ideas about a lack of competence among immigrants are, at least partly, an expression of stereotypical notions about “immigrants” and “their culture” (2001:245).

“Stereotypes” is a term and a concept I have brought up a few times already, and it will appear again. Most people have a notion of what it means, and it is quite often used but not as often defined. According to Stuart Hall, “Stereotypisation reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature” (1997b:257). An example would be the reduction of Taner’s identity to only his ethnic belonging (and whatever notions go with the designation “Turkish”). It is interesting to note, in the above sections of the report, that although the “expert” respondents are aware of the problem, they still use the term “immigrants” rather indiscriminately themselves. Who are the “immigrants”? The usual association to the concept is not of an immi­grant from France or even Canada, but one of someone “non-Western”. Gabriela explains that she tries to avoid the perception of the category “immigrants” as homogeneous and stereotypical by calling those as­signed to it “persons of foreign background” instead. I can agree that her version is an improvement on the extremely general term “immigrants” – at least it hints at a heterogeneity through the common knowledge that there are many countries other than our own – but it is still a denomina­tion that reproduces the dichotomy of “us and them” and thus is just as vulnerable to stereotypical interpretations. As Annick Sjögren says “To abolish the term immigrants without at the same time handling the categorisation in social organisation and people’s consciousness is like putting a plaster on an infected wound. /.../ In other words it is not enough to exchange the term immigrant for another” (Sjögren 2001:155). So how can one speak of others without generalising and at the same time reducing them in this way? As a researcher I do not want to uncritically take on a terminology without nuances, and yet I have to call “them” something. The problem is that in the naming we create. There are, however, both advantages and disadvantages in designating “immigrants” a separate category (“women” is another example). If one does so, one maintains categories one would often prefer to dissolve; if
Fiery souls and ascribed identities

one does not, the risk is that already marginalised groups become even more invisible and lose those rights and possibilities for empowerment they may have won through special attention to their situation, for example on the labour market. “Oppressed groups have been able to gather social and political demands around a common essence, for example “woman” or “black”, and in such a way have been able to make their voices heard and to bring up experiences and histories previously made invisible” (Eriksson et al 1999:41). The strategic essentialist does not view cultural essence as something real, but maintains such a standpoint for a specific political purpose. The critics of “strategic essentialism”, however, claim that “regardless of whether the movement is made up of people who believe or do not believe in the existence of a cultural essence, the consequences of this kind of politics are the same” (1999:43). The point I want to make here is that by discursively attributing the concept “immigrant” with certain qualities we in turn ascribe individuals with stereotypical identities – identities which the individuals in turn have to contend with (cf. Liliequist 1996:17–18).

We have here a situation where officials use the term “immigrants” or “immigrant women” in a stereotypical way and without bearing in mind the heterogeneity within the category. Gabriela’s contribution to solving this problem is to start by replacing the term “immigrant woman” with “woman of foreign background” – a long-term strategy for individualising the “masses”. She also says: “The immigration politics have led to the continued existence of this problem”. I wish I had asked her to elaborate on what she meant by that. Do politics generalise? Well, yes, if one in “immigration politics” includes most of the policies, educational and labour market for example, that deal with the actual category “immigrants”. The real problem though is that I cannot quite see how one can blame politics per se for an issue that quite clearly has people, individuals, behind it – as does politics itself. Swedish immigration (and refugee) politics certainly leave room for improvement (cf. for example Kadhim 2000, Slavnic 2000, Södergran 2000), but in this context I believe aspects such as ethnocentrism and power structures need to be addressed. And yes, “equality” enters into the equation.

The Swedish model for equality is very much based on the idea of equal rights for men and women, in combination with an economic viewpoint. Women’s right to go out to work is thus emphasised and in a comparison with other industrial countries, Sweden holds a unique position, with more than 80% of women working in a profession. As only about 30% of women work in some European countries, the following reasoning takes place: Countries that offer women better possibilities to
go out to work provide a greater degree of equality, while countries that limit this possibility are considered to give women lower social status and a lesser degree of equality (Bel Habib 1992:15). Several studies have shown this to be an oversimplification (cf. for example Ålund 1991, Bel Habib 1992), yet rather than ask how equality is being promoted or is even perceived in other countries or cultures, Sweden continues to pursue its own narrow path – convinced of having “universal solutions to everyone’s needs” (Sjögren 2001:156). Although the intent, in my opinion, behind the politics of equality is commendable, it does become clear that universalism “becomes reductionism; that is, there is only one way to be human and fellow being, one way to be woman and equal woman, one way to be Swedish and enlightened citizen” (2001:156). Naturally, this approach can cause difficulties in light of the immigration goals of equality, freedom of choice and partnership7.

Upon my question as to whether there are specific measures targeted exclusively to helping immigrant women start their own businesses in her area, Camilla says no, and explains her reasoning on the matter. For a start, she claims, project money for the unemployed is most easily obtainable for immigrant women, thereafter for Swedish women, then immigrant men and the hardest, “almost impossible”, for Swedish men. “Don’t get me wrong”, Camilla says, “I have nothing against the women receiving money and opportunity, and they are very good at what they do, but the distribution of it is unbalanced”. She has been confronted with the equality-above-all, or affirmative action, policy often enough in her work, explaining how the first thing she is asked when seeking financial support for projects involving immigrant men is “and what are you going to do for the women?”. The example she used to illustrate her point was a deal made with a housing and construction company. The deal was that with economic support from the district administration the company would take on a number of unemployed immigrant men and train them in the construction business and at the same time train a number of their own employees as foremen. Every time the project was discussed Camilla had to justify the fact that there were no women involved. “I mean, it’s not exactly common for Swedish women to be laying or insulating the foundations of buildings, is it?”, she asks. Although this argument seems sound enough, there is still cause to examine the way Camilla speaks of “immigrant women” as well as the “immigrant family”. In the above section Gender, she says one should not “push the women into more work than they can manage”. Her example places the woman in charge of everyone and everything in the household, naturally making it difficult to handle the “pressure to get onto the labour mar-
Fiery souls and ascribed identities

Camilla would also like to balance what the woman and the man respectively are offered (in the way of labour market measures) and to “rehabilitate the breadwinner”. There are two conflicting, or antagonistic, discourses at work here. The first is about equality – “Sweden is very conscious of the equality aspect” – and the correctness of women “receiving money and opportunity”, and the other is about “immigrant women” and their position within the “immigrant family” or even “immigrant culture”. Camilla makes use of both, and to a certain extent also challenges both.

Camilla is not the only one to be annoyed by the situation for immigrant women; she says the immigrant associations are concerned and feel that their women are looked down upon by the authorities. Here one must pause to ask who represents the immigrant associations and who are “their” women? Perhaps it is my embeddedness in the individualistic discourse on women’s equality in Sweden that suggests to me that the women themselves (assuming the men represent the associations and lay claim to the women) ought to be asked. Nevertheless, Camilla feels the immigrant women are not just offered many opportunities, but pushed into taking them. My personal interpretation is that the women are expected to jump on the Swedish equality train regardless of their own background, culture, or possible strategies for reaching equality on their own terms. Again two discourses overlap. The first is that “The assumption that women make up a pre-constituted and homogenous group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial belonging, implies a notion of gender or sex differences, or even patriarchy, that can be applied universally and cross-culturally” (Mohanty 1999:198). This overlaps with the ethnocentric discourse in which “we”, which includes the Swedish women, are the standard, or yardstick, by which “they” are measured and described as “the Others”. In this articulation the “immigrant women” are the same as the “Swedish women” in that they are women, and yet different in that they are “immigrant”. The effect of the latter is that “we” have to “push them” into becoming like “us”. The immigrant women do not always willingly participate in the process, but are badgered into a normalised system based on traditionalistic criteria and still end up subordinated to existing hierarchies. Regarding the individual autonomy “allowed to citizens vis-à-vis their families, civil society organisations (eg. ethnic associations) and state agencies (eg. labour market measures)” (Yuval-Davis 1997:15, my parentheses), these immigrant women often appear caught between structures. The women who quit the labour market projects often do so because of their family situation, a reflection perhaps of the
fact that “power relations and conflicts of interest apply within ‘groups’ as well as between them” (1997:22). The matter is certainly complicated.

In some contexts, for example that of self-employment, Swedish women do face similar problems as immigrant women – they and their business ideas are taken less seriously, banks are unwilling to extend even small loans to them, they are often charged with the greater part of the unpaid work at home, and there are lingering stereotypes to contend with. Prejudices include the belief that women do not prioritise or invest in their business. A tacit understanding is that all women have, or will have, children and that caring for them occupies most of their time and interest (Ohlsson 1997:25). At the same time, women choosing to stay at home with their children and household chores rather than investing in a career often find that “non-normative” choice challenged. Despite these difficulties, however, the “native” women are not encumbered with the double stigma of being both a woman and an immigrant.

Within corporations and on the open labour market, although women in general have increased possibilities, being of a different ethnic origin than Swedish tends to dominate the equation (Schierup & Paulson 1994).

In a recent article, Wuokko Knocke brings up some interesting results from a study on labour market chances for young people of immigrant background in Stockholm and surrounding suburbs (2001:37). Young women appeared to encounter less discriminatory barriers than did the men and had more often managed to get established on the labour market. Nevertheless, certain labelling aspects still had a significant effect on their possibilities. Where the young men were surrounded by “an armoury of negative stereotypes”, depicting them as criminal or aggressive, the women were often judged by external characteristics, their personal aptitudes and skills thereby overlooked. If they were at least “partly pretty” their chances of getting a job were better, whereas if they wore the Muslim headscarf, the hijab, they were forced into areas where they would be relatively invisible. In general, those women who “chose” to go into healthcare and nursing were most successful, which indicates that the pattern of locating (in both senses of the word) immigrant women in traditional female roles remains pervasive.

Social and labour market policy is aimed at improving the situation for, among others, immigrant women who find themselves unemployed, dependent on welfare benefits, and outside of Swedish society. The intentions are good, but perhaps the symptoms are treated rather than the actual “disease”. By “simply” making self-employment a viable alternative to unemployment, the mechanisms of exclusion on the labour mar-
Fiery souls and ascribed identities

ket as well as in society as a whole are ignored. It has been, and still is, taken for granted that other cultures have nothing to contribute as far as basic social values go, and this has led to a disregard of problems in our own culture (Bel Habib 1992:13), among them issues concerning the practice of equality. The battle to alleviate the situation of immigrants is fought on an arena where the hegemonic and ethnocentric discourse dictates that they be consistently seen and treated as lesser citizens, as “others”, and where the whole structure carries a bias. “Swedishness is maintained in institutional structures and excludes those who do not want to or cannot fit in” (Sjögren 2001:156).

The “need to find other solutions” and “the loss of identity” are not “immigrant problems”, they are part of a problem within the social fabric of Sweden. The need to counteract stereotypes and their consequences is a long-term undertaking and may, for the moment, conflict with realistic possibilities for employment while the structures of society remain locked in this rationale. Meanwhile, there is, of course, the positive aspect of finding out what other things people can do, what possibilities are available. Gabriela and the other dedicated agents are struggling within and against structures that do not allow for two people with the same potential, but where one is of foreign background, to have the same chances for social or labour market inclusion. These “fiery souls” are struggling within discursive formations that are only slowly being deconstructed, partly through their own re-articulations of meanings of “immigrant”, and they are often forced to find solutions that do not stretch the accepted too far. The effects of the differentiating and stratifying practices are not often conscious expressions of power. “Many structural effects arise and are maintained by well-meaning people habitually working through and within unquestioned norms, values and symbols, in everyday life’s normalising processes” (Pripp 2001:24–25). The effects do, however, have far-reaching consequences, as we shall continue to discover.

Ethnicity

“Immigrants” is a very broad term. It encompasses a great variety of people and ethnic groups, but is very often used in a manner implying that “they’re all the same”. In some cases the “all the same” can mean that they are “all criminal and gang members”, in others that they “all need help”. Regardless of the aim or context for the use of the concept, there is a growing awareness that the term “immigrant” is far too imprecise to actually define anyone. The same danger of stereotyping as with “immigrant” lies in the use of “Turk” or “Swede” as a homogenising
concept. Several people I have met who in one way or another are involved with “immigrants” now call them “persons of foreign background” instead. More than one of my respondents expressed the hope that people would start seeing each other more and more as individuals rather than as a stereotype based on ethnic background.

Of course they are not “all the same”, not even in the eyes of “society” who speaks of them as if they were. Some ethnic groups suffer more for their ethnicity than others in a society of unspoken but very real “ethnic hierarchies”. In Sweden it is easier to be British or Norwegian than it is to be Turkish or Somali. The security and comfort in being with those who share the same culture, religion or history is manifested in the multitude of ethnic associations all over Sweden. An issue brought up in one of the interviews was whether or not the associations had lost their purpose and instead of supporting and strengthening people, are actually limiting them.

In her work attempting to start a resource centre for women, Gabriela met resistance not only from the civil servants and the administration involved, but also found the ethnic associations to be a hindrance. She wanted to cut down on ethnic activities, “collect all the sewing machines” as she put it, but each association insisted on keeping its own. Gabriela means that the ethnic division was, is and will continue to be an obstacle to integration. “Ethnic belonging is important, but for integration it must be broken down.” One problem is that the ethnic associations still do a lot of what the state ought to be doing. “For the women this is not good as it ties them down. Many ethnic associations are still strongly male-dominated and male-governed, and they perceive it as a threat to them and the structure when women want to take up some space.”

If the prevailing attitude in immigration politics and among many Swedish authorities is that immigrants are in permanent need of help, then it would not be surprising if at least the immigrants in an outsider position saw the Swedes as predominantly patronising. Be that as it may, many immigrants naturally do have stereotypical attitudes toward the Swedes.

A common dilemma for the Swedes in positions of power is the ever present risk of being labelled or perceived as racist. It is easier for someone of the same background to criticise one, than to hear it from a member of the majority ethnic group. Gabriela had an example of an Arabic woman who after applying for a job took for granted that it was because she was Arabic that she did not get it. “I told her it was because she didn’t have enough Swedish to do the job”, Gabriela recalls and says that was
also what the agent at the employment exchange had said. The idea of
the meeting, the actual face-to-face experience of each other, is deve­
loped by four of my respondents as a step in the direction of resolving
the issue of prejudices and stereotypes. This will be discussed in more
detail under the theme New insights.

Commentary
Reading through the section *Ethnicity*, it becomes almost painfully clear
how complex the issue is. Categorising, stereotyping, homogenising;
our way of handling a complicated reality is understandable perhaps, but
also a tragic manifestation of ignorance and fear. Changing labels will
not solve the problem. If we remove the categories “immigrants” and
“Swedes” for example, then they will only be replaced by others, like
“persons of foreign background” or “blondes” or “unemployed people”.
Then there is the issue of all the overlapping, criss-crossing “intra and
inter” relationships. As Taner, one of my “immigrant” respondents,
pointed out to me, there is not only racism and preconceived ideas be­
tween “immigrants” and Swedes, but also between various immigrant
groups. He described the racist comments he would hear from his own
countrymen about for example Somalis, the newest immigrant group in
the neighbourhood. For Taner this somehow made matters worse.
Then there is the desire to maintain one’s ethnic identity, and yet also to
be part of the general populace.

The pushes and pulls of differing ethnic and gender structures are
awkward to handle for all sides. There is also the fact that in view of the
cultural processes of change taking place today, the concept “ethnicity”
really cannot conceptualise the complex processes in which individuals’
identities are constructed (Eriksson et al 1999:45). While writing this
report I was overwhelmed by the complexity I found even before speak­
ing to my main respondents. The “experts”, with their differing genders,
ethnicities, backgrounds, experiences and professional positions, sup­
plied me with bewildering information, and it took some time to sort out
my impressions.

*New insights*

Many new, and old, insights are now being put to use to invigorate and
inspire the work on social and labour market inclusion. The meaning of
and paths to “integration” (inclusion) are being analysed, the complexity
of the immigrant situation is being brought to light and the urgency of
the matter is also being confronted.
Integration/inclusion

“If you see ‘integration’ as becoming Swedish, if that’s what it’s about, then it’s not so good. But if integration is about participation or economical and formal and judicial power and such, then it’s something else / . . ./” (Camilla). It is all in the interpretation of the term. An insight that Camilla wishes that more people had is that the concept of inclusion (in Sweden the term “integration” is used) has to do with participation in society. Her frustration stems from being continuously confronted with negative responses to suggested projects because they do not fit the prevalent idea of what “integrationary” measures are. In her opinion it is only natural that Swedes employ mainly Swedes and that members of other ethnic groups employ co-members of that group. “One employs those one knows and trusts, all groups do that”. Although many of the measures in Kista are aimed at broadening the ethnic horizons of both Swedes and immigrant groups, she still feels that it is “a better integration /for young Turkish men/ to be employed in a Turkish restaurant than to be integrated into a Swedish inactivity”. The main point, she feels, must be to get them jobs, get them into a position of independence and thus get them involved in society. As far as the self-employment schemes in her area go, there is a strong emphasis on breaking the barriers between so called ethnic and Swedish businesses. A whole system of mentorship and sharing of networks is intended to lead to a more integrated market in the long run, but if the individual entrepreneur employs mainly “his own” to start with, what should that matter?

Commentary
My suspicion is that it, in the above paragraph, is not altogether clear what I am trying to say, as Camilla’s example of the Turkish young men and the restaurants has been seriously condensed to fit the format of the report. On the other hand, perhaps I am reading more, or actually less, into the text since I remember quite vividly what she told me about that particular case. My understanding of the context may give me more information, but it may not be material necessary to the point I am trying to make in the text. Then again, in this rereading I see new aspects that perhaps do need a more full story for a discussion to be possible. I will therefore present more of the context below and then we will see if it makes a difference to how one can regard Camilla’s thoughts and work, how “integration” can be understood, and also how “statistical discrimination” fits in.

Camilla’s plan was to do something for some of the more unruly unemployed youths in her city district. First she found ten Turkish res-
taurant owners in Stockholm willing to take on one young Turkish man each as a trainee. Then she expanded her idea to include repaying the restaurant owners by bringing in a Turkish gourmet chef to give cooking courses. At this point she presented her project plan, which promptly was rejected. The reasons for refusing Camilla the funding for the project were, to her, both unreasonable and detrimental to the idea of integration. In the first place, she was told, there were no women included in the plan. Secondly, what was the point of putting Turkish youngsters in Turkish restaurants where they would only be taught how to cook Turkish food and would be speaking Turkish instead of Swedish? And thirdly, there was no need in Sweden for Turkish gourmet cooking. Camilla was exasperated. Her idea had been that if only these young men were given a chance, they would become not only employed but respectable, they would be able to provide for their families and make their parents proud. Hence her comment that a job in a Turkish restaurant would be preferable to remaining unemployed, welfare dependent and “integrated into a Swedish inactivity”, the plight of all too many young immigrants.

The point I wanted to make in the report was the same as what Camilla was saying – that integration has to start somewhere. That the job, as a step toward participation in society, was more important than what language was spoken in the kitchens. I still find this a valid point to make. In the rereading, however, I hear echoes of other discourses in Camilla’s talk of who employs whom and why. The discourse of “competence deficiency” claims the “immigrant” lacks the necessary qualifications to compete on the Swedish labour market. Often placed in opposition to this theory are theories that emphasise discrimination as the alternative explanation for the labour market situation. Within economic theory “statistical discrimination” is based on profitability and productivity (whereas “preference discrimination” is based on prejudiced notions) (Mattsson 2001:256–257). When “Swedes employ mainly Swedes” because it is “who they know and trust”, it is presented by Camilla as a neutral and rational decision. “In other words, the employer employs job-seekers based on crude categorisations, such as gender or ethnic belonging, but not because of an explicit dislike of a particular group” (2001:257). The practice is still based on an idea of the categories “immigrants” and “Swedes” actually possessing an average difference in profitability and productivity, however, which in turn means that the theory on statistical discrimination does not in fact contradict the discourse on competence deficiency, but rather complements it (2001:257).
Camilla did not try to find ten Swedish restaurant owners to take on the young Turkish men, she went to their co-ethnics instead – without a doubt a well-intentioned act, one not deemed in need of explanation even, but also no doubt based on notions of cultural difference. Her statement “If you see ‘integration’ as becoming Swedish, if that’s what it’s about, then it’s not so good” suddenly takes on new meaning. In the first instance I took this as a positive sign that Camilla, like most Swedes today, finds the old idea of “assimilation”, as opposed to “inclusion” by integration, to be the wrong approach. I still believe that is how she meant it. However, in view of her other ideas and actions there is a new dimension to the statement – a dimension that shows how “anti-racist arguments /can become/ meshed together with support for racist policies”, how “an argument /can be/ mobilised in one direction only to veer back on itself” (Wetherell & Potter 1992:219) and one which reveals the ambivalence in the discourse of integration. Just like the identities of the coloniser and the colonised are defined by each other (Eriksson et al 1999:34), “we” need “the Others” to define ourselves. In other words, they either have to become us (in the sense of assimilation where “they” would have to cut all ties – language, cultural expressions – and get rid of any other perceived differences in order to become Swedish; an idea that never worked and never will, partly because of the impossibility of fixing what being “us” means and what “their” differences to that are) and thus leave others to be the “Others” through whom “we” can be constituted, or they have to remain “the Other” and not threaten the (colonial) symbolic order by questioning or challenging the binary oppositions upon which “our” identity is built (cf. Eriksson et al 1999:34). “They” cannot, it would seem, be both different and “us”. Returning to the actual fate of Camilla’s proposed project, I feel the same irritation as I remember her expressing. The reasons for turning the proposal down were absurd and her exasperation justified. Despite the above discussion, I agree with Camilla on the whole. The idea is not to refute one argument with another, but to demonstrate how we continuously struggle with conflicting as well as complementary ideas. If the extended story and follow-up discussion does not actually change the point about integration made in my report, it at least gives a more full picture both of myself and of Camilla. It also gives the context, the circumstances under which these actions take place, more room in the analysis. Deciding how much of the basic material for analysis and theoretical interpretation should be presented to the reader is a precarious balancing act. In report form, less is favoured. In ethnological texts with a reflexive ambition, more is perhaps preferable.
Integration/inclusion, continued

The integration of the immigrant and the integration of the ethnic business are both different and intimately linked. If an immigrant starts his own business and that business ends up in a separate ethnic sector of the labour market, is he then integrated? Lars is very enthusiastic about the support and co-operation that the businesses connected to The House of Entrepreneurs give each other. He takes import/export businesses as an example. "They create a network that is like, though they have their own separate firms, they co-operate almost like a group because they deal with the same countries. They may be dealing with Arabic countries, say, but with different products, with different competencies. But they form a sort of network, because well one travels to Egypt to set up contacts and build up some kind of organisation for the buying and selling of goods and brings the others in on it, those in other branches."

Lars says that kind of co-operation has grown with time and that "they" have realised the advantages of it. It was even a hope at the outset of the project, that this type of dynamics would develop in the environment of a House of Entrepreneurs. "It benefits everyone." However, when I asked if it really does benefit everyone, if it does not actually lead to a separate ethnic sector with little or no contact with the Swedish business market, he falls silent for quite a while. In the end he says no, he sees no such obstacles as the entrepreneurs do not actually "deal with each other, they only co-ordinate their contracts". Nevertheless, he admits to not being sure of the end result of the arrangement.

A paradoxical aspect of the above enthusiasm toward inter-ethnic co-operation is that The House of Entrepreneurs has in fact changed its original plan for target groups. It no longer caters only to immigrants, but has decided to include Swedes in its scheme. "There are many advantages to having Swedes included in the everyday life here", says Lars, "I mean how do we convey that/. . ./ there is a Swedish business culture?/. . /. It's a code that is very difficult to transfer, so to speak, from us to them. If they live together in this kind of collective, then it becomes much easier to understand how Swedish consumers function, how Swedish businessmen function among themselves and such things, the Swedish language". Lars can only see advantages in letting the Swedes in. The change was made when the organisation had grown, rapidly, to nearly thirty businesses and Lars and his team realised that the one-sidedness of having only immigrant enterprises did not further development. The mutual socialisation into a world of many different cultures is considered a step in the right direction.
An important aspect of the work on integration is the creation of meetings. For Eduardo this is a main task for IFS. The work with potential financiers, consultants etc. rests on the premise of always having a Swede, or a recognised representative of IFS, accompanying the entrepreneur in his or her meetings with officials of any kind. This strategy is partly to avoid any misunderstandings and partly to ensure a relationship on more equal and open terms. The problems of the official-client relationship have been addressed in various texts (e.g. Arnstberg 1991) and play a prominent role in the dealings discussed here. “Our advisors can be very tough”, says Eduardo, “but our clients take the critique, because we are one of them, there is an identification with us. It’s not like with a Swedish official where he, in all well-meaning, says ‘this is not very good’ and the client thinks to himself ‘typical, it’s the Swedish system, it’s not me there’s something wrong with, it’s that I’m not welcome’. We avoid all that.” A similar strategy is applied by Gabriela in her LIKA project. She tries to set up pairs, such as man-woman or more often Swedish woman-immigrant woman to handle dealings with authorities such as the insurance office or the employment exchange. “It shows in a visual and practical way what integration is” as well as being sensible “so that it’s not the active official and the passive immigrant client”. She concludes “We have to get away from the role of the victim”.

Commentary

“Amirga? She’s no immigrant, she’s my friend”. This comment was made by a fifteen-year old pupil at one of the schools a colleague and I visited in 1995. We were on a mission to spread information about the research in ethnicity carried out at our department of ethnology as well as to discuss with the youngsters their views on and experiences of a “multicultural Sweden”. Just prior to the above response, the boy had expressed rather racist and anti-immigration sentiments. Aware of his sitting next to a girl from Ghana, we asked whether he thought about the fact that he had immigrant classmates – he turned around, put his arm around Amirga and answered without hesitation. The event was quite a typical example of how we manage to separate the individual from the collective. Billy Ehn explains that the important thing is that one “has interests in common, enjoys one another’s company and can communicate – the immediate awareness of underlying differences is then erased. If one becomes friends with someone, then the background of that person matters very little” (1993:26, cf. also Ehn 1986). In connection with the above section of the report, there is certainly hope in the strategy of
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creating meetings, but there is also a need for the ability to apply the knowledge and understanding of one person to that person’s entire ethnic group and, in extension, to the whole “immigrant collective”. In other words, we need to realise that all collectives, all categories, are in fact made up of separate and unique individuals.

Tough insights

In the interviews with Gabriela, Kemal and Eduardo, they brought up aspects of inclusion that were not addressed in the interviews with the two Swedish respondents. Naturally, this does not necessarily mean that the latter are unaware of those particular aspects, but rather that the three respondents with immigrant backgrounds probably have a closer and more personal connection to the immigrant situation and perhaps also easier access to the realities of immigrant individuals. Some subjects are most likely not taken up with Swedish representatives of this authority or that. There is a certain amount of scepticism about the goodwill of those in power – as always in situations of perceived powerlessness.

Eduardo started the IFS after finishing a commission for the city of Stockholm. The commission entailed investigating what the situation on the labour market was like for immigrants. Eduardo carried out 100 deep interviews and found something that he had previously not realised, despite having worked for years with business and industry questions. “I spoke to immigrants who had been in Sweden for different lengths of time, had run their businesses for different lengths of time and so on and found that they had problems in common that could be directly related to their immigrant status. They had similar problems with their self-employment. Even those who had been here a long time claimed they saw no changes.” In view of this, IFS was started to try to remedy the situation. One unique aspect of the methods applied by IFS is the use of the entrepreneur’s own language at the outset. In a climate of increasing pressure on immigrants to speak “perfect” Swedish in order to have any chance at all of a job, it may seem a step backwards rather than forwards. However, in view of the picture Eduardo painted, it appears more realistic than not. “An unemployed person sitting in a high-rise development area – languages are perishable goods – when you live like that you do as everyone else, you strive for security. There are /TV/ dishes everywhere, the Turks watch Turkish programmes and read Turkish papers. The distance /from the Swedish/ and the use of your own language causes the Swedish language to disappear. Then you can’t verbalise what is unique with your business idea, much less sell it. You have no chance. To be able to do that you need the nuances of a
language.” Hence the practice of only switching to Swedish when every little detail of the self-employment plan is clear.

Another aspect is the fact that many of those who seek to start their own businesses are unemployed and have usually been so for quite a while. There is a need not for making decisions for the person, but “for guiding the individual through the process and doing such solid preliminary work that he or she personally identifies the fact that this is no good”. To have secure support but be allowed to make one’s own decisions is “tremendously important for the immigrant or rather for the longer-term unemployed. A light is lit within you when you come up with the idea of starting your own business. It’s an incredible force, you can run forever. Running is good, but if someone trips you up after ten metres, you fall lower than you were before. But if you make it through and reach the point of making some decisions of your own, you grow, even if you don’t start the business. You learn loads on the way”.

Self-confidence and self-esteem are crucial for the well-being of any individual. Lars and Camilla, the Swedish respondents, are of course just as aware of this as the other three. However, I sensed a difference in the approach to the issue. Lars says, speaking of being an entrepreneur, that “there are lots of factors in this, one does have to believe very much in one’s, I mean, self-confidence. Many have been without jobs for a long time and that affects their self-confidence, that person, that they don’t quite trust themselves. They might have a great idea but have a hard time convincing others. Because I mean, you have to be a bit of a salesman here, and if you have a low image in general because you’re in poor condition from being without a job, it can be a process that takes time”. Despite a certain understanding of the situation, the process of retrieving one’s self-confidence and proving one’s worth as an entrepreneur appears to be a personal problem and completely in one’s own hands, as if it had nothing to do with any surrounding structures or conditions. (This is an odd paradox in view of the prevailing attitude to immigrants being that they are passive and in the need of help and guidance.) Camilla, however, is a strong critic of the way the system actually works to make the immigrants passive. As mentioned before, she is not only tired of the way the authorities see them as helpless, but also of the way the usual “Start-your-own” courses do nothing to actually help them become self-employed. The courses are “so routine. Those who hold those courses, they’ve never started their own. It’s never for that, it’s just for keeping busy”.

When Kemal set out to reconnaissance the situation of Turkish women he found certain factors complicating the issue. To begin with
there was the fact that if one is unemployed, then one is also denied access to child-care\textsuperscript{10}. The women were therefore in a catch-22 situation where they could not independently go out and attempt to better their job situation without someone to look after the children, and would not get child-care without some kind of official occupation. In co-operation with the employment exchange, the SDF and the social insurance office a plan was therefore made to break the women’s and their children’s social and linguistic isolation – the latter being a consequential factor to the former one. A day-care centre was started and paid for by the authorities. The project “The bridge” was then initiated and it took over the responsibility for the crèche which today cares for fifty children and has twelve employees working for a stipulated salary. Half of the employees are Turkish and half are Swedish – the latter are trained to give the children extra help with their Swedish language skills. This approach to the immigrant situation illustrates a need to look beyond the surface factors. It cannot just be a matter of taking the unemployed individual out of his or her context and pushing her into a new context, and then all will be well. The importance of the family situation and the actual state of mind of the individual are extremely weighty considerations in any measures to change their circumstances.

Someone who stresses this strongly is Gabriela. The reasons, mentioned earlier, for why the LIKA project did not progress the way it was planned, are manifold. Nine highly educated but long-term unemployed immigrant women were “assigned” to the project from the employment exchange, the social security office and the social insurance office. Gabriela was asked to try new and different methods in co-operation with various authorities in order to do something for the women. She says this is because “a great waste of money, human resources and human suffering were discovered” in the labour market measures generally applied. Gabriela calls them “storage lockers”.

Two of the original nine women had the strength and capability expected of them. With a nudge for self-confidence and the right contacts, they were able to continue with their professions in Sweden. The remaining women, however, were what Gabriela calls “multi-problem people”. LIKA’s team has had to start from basics in order to build these women back up again. “It’s become more of a training in social pedagogy as many of the women couldn’t even manage to get to the premises, let alone on time”. Isolated and even abandoned as they were, many of these women did not even get out of bed in the mornings. The first step was to start using the “diary method”, or to “dig where you stand” as Gabriela puts it. A special team has been assembled to provide
for a comprehensive “treatment” of the women. I write treatment, even though it is a gradual building up of inner strength, self-confidence and self-esteem that the project works on. Treatment nevertheless, as many of the women have physical, psychosomatic problems. The team consists of a project leader (a school of social studies graduate), employed by the SDF in order to make it more legitimate to incorporate the work into the regular operation at a later date, Gabriela who is a sociologist and responsible for contents and method, another woman who is a social scientist, a physical therapist who is also an anthropologist, as well as two journalists, one Swedish, one of immigrant background.

The “digging where you stand” starts out by asking “how do I feel?”. The next step is to begin doing something about it. Inactivity increases the perception of physical ailments, so a lot of work is done with and to the body, for example dance and massage. According to Gabriela, the women need first to build a relationship to their own bodies, and then work outwards. If the woman does not feel well, it often affects her relationship to the whole family negatively, including to the children. Gabriela claims the woman often has the role of social minister, minister of economy, and foreign secretary all rolled into one. In other words, the whole family has to be mobilised and brought into the process of integration. Without actually using the term, Gabriela, like Eduardo, strives for the empowerment of her “clients”. “We must give the women the responsibility for themselves, but be there for them, support them in it.” To increase self-confidence they literally stand in front of a mirror and say “I can, I want”.

Where do all these problems originate? One reason for them is, according to Gabriela, the juggling back and forth of the women between various measures – courses, projects, courses and more projects. This juggling can go on for years, but the women are never seen. “These women don’t make themselves felt or heard.” However, there are often other, underlying, reasons too. Gabriela feels that people working with immigrants and refugees in Sweden have not learnt to ask the tough questions. When these people arrive there are masses of documents to fill in and questions to answer, but no-one actually looks at you and asks “have you been maltreated, assaulted or tortured?”. These issues have to be worked through before anything else can be started. Not only may these things have happened before migrating, but the traumatic situation of migration itself may trigger this kind of behaviour in the home. It must be followed up. “It’s a professional stance”, she says, “not to ask if you have nothing to offer, but we have to learn because it costs society a lot of money as well as enormous suffering”. There must be “treat-
mments” available, because the longer one waits to remedy the situation, the worse it gets. Many of the highly educated women that come to LIKA have not managed to pass their “Swedish for immigrants” courses, something all immigrants have to take, but no-one has looked into why.

These tough insights appear to be relatively new in the work to mobilise and activate immigrants out of welfare dependency and onto the labour market. My immigrant respondents seem to be more aware of these issues than my Swedish ones, perhaps because the latter are not in a position to ask the “right” questions. In fact, these matters should be taken care of well before the individual is “thrown” out into various measures.

Commentary

With the decentralisation of political and administrative power to the level of city district administrations, the “how” and “for whom” of labour market measures and support is delegated to local politicians. This kind of responsibility can lead to problems in policy implementation – free agents with subjective interpretations on one level, the commissioners and administrators are also tied to both rules and procedural regulations as well as to dominant social discourses – but can also bring forth activists with a dynamic interest in making changes. In the context of the development of city areas, especially dedicated persons, “eldsjälar” in Swedish, are often inherently thought of as someone from the grass-roots level, i.e. one of the “people” on the inside, not one of the officials from outside. In the case of the five dedicated “expert” respondents in my report, however, they are all both the grass-roots (in the sense of “ordinary people”) and, in one capacity or another, representatives of officialdom. For example, in a district that has been defined as one where initiatives are of a top-down character, the commissioner Camilla plays a very important role. “Eldsjälar” “have in the past few years almost come to be institutionalised as an important force in the mediation between the political administrative apparatus and local life. One of their most important tasks is not just to initiate local activities, but to enter these operations in a greater societal context” (Hansen 1999:39–40). Camilla considers herself to be close to the local people and their situation as she has herself lived for many years in one of the heavily immigrant populated areas beset with high unemployment. She regards the residents as a huge resource largely missed on the labour market and feels that the methods and results of her efforts ought to be an example to other districts in the same situation. Camilla is one of the “eldsjälar” who is “of great importance in understanding failures, or the
development of successful institutional practices" (Dahlstedt 1998:87). In fact, “without their amazing efforts nothing would have been accomplished” (1998:87). Camilla’s, and the others’, work has led both to failure and success in individual cases, but the resounding effect regardless of outcome is that issues and problems relating to labour market and integration have been brought to the fore, and in their exposure can start to be dealt with. Despite their own embeddedness in discursive formations, these respondents’ actions may lead to shifts in meaning, to new articulations and a deconstruction of the current understanding of “immigrants”.

**Success/failure**

Upon my question as to what he thinks about the various national and EU programmes implemented during the nineties, Eduardo responds that we (in Sweden) have reached a point where we have to admit to ourselves that we have not succeeded very well. “If we had /succeeded/, ninety-five percent of the Somalis wouldn’t be dependent on welfare benefits.” He continues that we must try new paths using the accumulated information and knowledge to start identifying what needs to be done. The activities that have been put into motion over the last years have mostly had “aims that were tremendously good”, but somewhere along the way they have got stuck in a bureaucracy that tends to suffocate the will to try something new. In the interview with Eduardo several aspects belonging to the “old” thinking emerge, aspects which in his opinion have to be changed. One is the way the focus around immigration is to “look down”, i.e. the tendency to regard the immigrants as needy, as people who have to be helped. Another is that in most of the applied programmes for self-employment the aspect of actual self-sufficiency is forgotten. For self-employment to work there must be enough resources, human as well as financial, on a long term basis. Insights into these, as well as other, aspects have led to the refinement of procedures and methods implemented by the IFS.

In Gabriela’s eyes the most important thing, other than learning to ask the tough questions and deal with the answers to them, is that the city (area) administration must learn something from the project and incorporate its methods in the regular operation, “so that it doesn’t become yet another parenthesis. The experience must remain, be documented and the methods implemented maybe even in other municipalities.” Success, she feels, will only come if the immigrants are given back the responsibility for their lives and their livelihood.

Lars has learned through experience that many of the immigrants
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who come to the House of Entrepreneurs and claim they want to start their own, would actually rather do something else. “Yes, many are desper­ate and see every alternative to idleness as a possibility. . . . / and this is difficult for us too, when we make selections, to discover which ones are the entrepreneurs and which ones are in desperate need to take a chance or do something else.” This insight has led to the off-shoot project which attempts to find alternative work solutions for those who would rather be gainfully employed than self-employed. According to Lars an entrepreneur is someone who “has the tenacity, the patience, and doesn’t think this is going to happen at the speed of a rocket, that suddenly you’ll have loads of money. No, they have to really build, toil away and build some kind of base where you can at least support yourself and then hope that it can grow.” Though there are many factors in play in becoming self-employed, he believes “entrepreneurhood”, or the quality of being enterprising, is the most important for the venture to be a success.

Both Kemal and Camilla are concerned with the context of the im­migrant and the possibilities for self-employment, though in slightly dif­ferent ways. In Kemal’s case, as in several of the others, he feels that the surrounding situation must be taken care of first, before any other pre­requisites for self-employment are looked into. The local co-operation of authorities is of importance for that to work. Camilla, in applying alternative strategies to the “problem”, is also looking at the immediate surroundings. “Start with what people know and can do, and what nature and the environment can provide. See the market. What niches, economic niches, exist for this area?” Success is when things work. For that to happen as many as possible of all influencing factors must be taken into consideration, starting with the individual and his or her fam­ily and continuing on to viable employment or business ventures.

Commentary
A brief comment only, on the words of Lars. I cannot help but hark back to the discussion on welfare dependency. Within the argumentation for more responsibility and less passivity was the strategy of being reticent with economic support and thus aiming for the receivers of support to “learn to use their own resources”. In today’s deliberations of who can be regarded a “worthy” recipient of benefits there are several aspects considered: not only the ability of the person in question, but also the will and motivation for helping himself and for changing his situation are evaluated (Eriksson Baaz 2001:176). Lars becomes the judge of whether or not the person seeking self-employment support is just des-
perate or indeed an entrepreneur with the will to work hard. “They” cannot expect to suddenly have “loads of money”, they have to work hard for their emancipation. During the colonial era it was common to compare the “African” to an approximately ten-year old white child (2001:178). They were on about the same level of immaturity and irresponsibility and needed to be educated by the white adult male. Although that likeness is seldom applied today, the attribute of irresponsibility still is. “In addition one can ascertain that the view the “givers” (within foreign aid organisations) have of their role and task in relation to the “recipients” exhibits many paternalistic and ‘educating’ characteristics. /—/ A good upbringing today is about counteracting that “spoilt attitude” and getting the objects of education to become responsible, independent individuals through their own responsibility and their own initiatives” (2001:178, my parenthesis). I have no desire to reduce Lars to one of these “educators”, but rather to demonstrate how colonial discourses of the “Other” still influence us today.

**Discussion**

The above themes bring out especially important aspects of social inclusion and self-employment. They are important in so far as they were addressed by the respondents in often narrative form where they expanded on the subject at length. In addition to this, the collection of information from all five respondents, and the comparison and analysis of it, have brought to light new aspects that need further probing.

Attitudes and stereotypes pertaining to gender and ethnicity are something that all the respondents in one way or another perceive as hindrances to the immediate progress of the schemes in their original forms. Changes in attitude, however, are not directly brought about by rules or regulations, but rather by an increase in knowledge and personal experience of the “other”. The lack of that knowledge on the administrative and state level as well as among institutions and individuals of the majority population is something to look into. The “tough insights” are one step towards learning more and perhaps adapting policies to fit a more beneficial approach to the process of integrating disadvantaged groups into society and onto the labour market.

The starting hypothesis of the project was elaborated to “predict that those subjects with similar matched background and deficits, but differing in the dimension of achieving the benefit of a good practice policy programme will be more successful in their entrepreneurial activities by either having promising start-off businesses or viable and rea-
listic business plans. Through this typology based on case studies, specific good practices within programmes will be identified as well as failures of policies to achieve their aims” (TSER-proposal 1997:16–17). It seems clear that the programmes have to be extended from the present forms to include specific aspects of social inclusion as well as labour market inclusion to actually become “good practices”.

With a point of departure of the project being T. H. Marshall’s definition of citizenship, it would seem worthwhile to discuss the relation of the new data to thoughts about what citizenship actually entails. Marshall divides citizenship into three parts; civil, political and social. “The civil element is composed of the rights necessary for individual freedom – liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice. By the political element I mean the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body. By the social element I mean the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society. The institutions most closely connected with it are the educational system and the social services” (Marshall & Bottomore 1996:8). According to this perspective, all individuals ought as “citizens” to have the equal right to participate in the running of society’s collective affairs (Dahlstedt 1998:5). The point is that these different rights should not be regarded as phenomena isolated from each other, but rather as intimately joined and dependent on each other. There are those who claim that inequalities have a cumulative effect, i.e. they tend to spread from one area to another (1998:6). The problem arises when certain parts of the population, such as immigrants, are completely excluded from certain of these rights or in reality lack the possibility to make use of these rights. In other words, the risk is that such flaws may infect other areas and that the position of being an outsider and subordinate in this way becomes reinforced (1998:6).

In view of the above brief there are several aspects to take into consideration. First of all it seems apparent that the participants in the various measures under scrutiny in the project are not in a position to make full use of their citizenship, despite there being no “real” or at least no legal obstacles to their participation. The understanding of one’s own space is mirrored in how one relates to one’s citizenship. Lars explains the need for the House of Entrepreneurs by relating how they had found fear and hesitate among the self-employed, “the obstacles they
raise for themselves, I mean before they take this leap into self-employment. It's that they don't know where to go, they're very frightened of this jungle, bureaucratic, Swedish jungle to start your own business. They're also a little afraid of loneliness, you know, sitting at home and all the rest, it gives no dynamics". This may possibly also apply to a long-term unemployed Swede, but certainly not to the same extent to someone who has a strong foothold in society and feels secure enough to find a way through that jungle. The obstacles in the way of the immigrants and other disadvantaged groups are laid down by the structures in society, formal (and thus by those in power) as well as informal. There exists a series of limitations and possibilities in Sweden that are clearly unequally distributed.

For someone to "share to the full in the social heritage" of a society, he or she needs access to that heritage and the social and cultural capital (cf. Bourdieu 1984) to relate to it. That "capital, understood as the set of actually usable resources and powers" (1984:114) is not equally available to all citizens. There is perhaps a need to expand the meaning of citizenship and bring the cultural element in as well. I do not believe it possible to simply give an individual all the civic, political and social rights available and then expect that person to "fit right in". There is a period of socialisation to be considered for anyone in any new setting, and without the ability, for one reason or another, to actually participate in the communal everyday life and culture of that setting, the necessary "capital" will never be accumulated. If segregated parts of the population do not participate in a number of contexts, there is risk of the development of a sort of "culture of silence" in this part of the population. This "culture" is characterised by, among other things, a lack of trust in citizens and politicians, a lack of identification with any organisations, with a tendency to result in apathy and fatalism. This "culture" risks being propelled by its inherent logic, in a sort of destructive downward spiral, which may contribute to the perpetuation of the existence of subordinate outsiders in for example the immigrant part of the population (Dahlstedt 1998:14. See also SOU 1990:44).

Commentary

To summarise, I had started to realise that there was a bigger picture to be seen than may have been visible from the start. There were, for example, attitudes in society that needed to change in order for the self-employment programmes to work. These attitudes could perhaps be influenced by "knowledge and personal experience of the 'other'" – meetings between "natives" and "immigrants". The programmes them-
selves would have to be “extended from the present forms to include specific aspects of social inclusion as well as labour market inclusion” in order, among other things, for social capital to be accumulated and thus participation made possible. I had started to explore the “structures in society”, but still wrote of the policies as unquestionably having to be directed at “the immigrants” – they needed to be integrated, not we. In the meantime, I was learning that I was not the only one finding it difficult to avoid the use of categories and cultural stereotypes.

Crete, Nov. 1998. The weather was at least as good as it had been in Frankfurt. At home autumn was relentlessly turning into winter, whereas in Rethymnon we carried the chairs outside and held our meeting in brilliant sunshine surrounded by Cretan blooms. Our meals were a delicious experience in themselves and the wine was near-obligatory. The atmosphere was festive and we were enjoying each other’s company. The project comprised six countries and almost twenty individuals in various ways involved with the research. In a wonderful manifestation of “international” there was no obvious way of pinpointing who belonged to which country’s team as ethnicities, nationalities, languages and cultural belongings criss-crossed and overlapped extensively. Yes, there were “Germans” in the German team, but also “Greeks”. There were “Greeks” in the Greek team, but some were stationed in Scotland and some considered themselves “Cretan”. The “British” team had Indian and Greek-Cypriot ties and the “Swede” on the Danish team was also part Danish and part German (or was it the other way around?). All of us spoke English and several also commanded third or fourth languages. Using expressions such as “we Swedes” or “in Britain we . . .” became intriguingly nonsensical and yet were still valid formulations. Somehow we seemed to know what was meant or implied in each different situation.

Once in a rare while our personal cultural or ethnic identities became topics of conversation. As I recall these moments, pre-existing labels were of less interest than how we actually defined ourselves. One is a little of this and a little of that, one sometimes chooses to be this and sometimes that, one is difficult to define exactly, but not at all uncomfortable in that position. Despite this fluidity of identification and our acceptance of each other as complex individuals, there are certain historically fixed “national attributes” that never cease to pop up in the form of questions during conversations like these. One such question is “What about this Swedish sexual emancipation thing?” Since I was thirteen I have been confronted, by “others” (and usually abroad), with this query in every possible guise and under every possible pretext. Espe-
cially during my teenage years the matter was often enough brought up inquisitively and with an underlying expectation and just as often the insinuations were hotly refuted by me. In those days there was a perceived need to protect and defend my own moral integrity and reputation. Now the issue is more to explain and defuse this persistently tenacious, and clearly fascinating, truism about Swedes and their culture.

The topic was broached during a lovely lunchtime walk in the hills around the University of Rethymnon. I cannot remember who brought it up or how the conversation started, but I do recall that even the stragglers caught up and entered into the discussion. My first reaction was the familiar hot flush of indignation at the associated intimations which in turn automatically triggered the beginnings of a defence speech. However, realising whom I was talking to brought me back to my senses. After a brief and explanatory historical synopsis of the rise of this particular myth, our discussion humorously turned to more comparative and general aspects of what is considered “natural”, of the place of nakedness in our societies and its connection to sex. It is nevertheless interesting to note that despite our multi-hyphenated ethnic and national identities, despite our academic and practical knowledge of the non-essentialist character of categories, we still apparently have this strong “urge” to tie people to specific, and imagined, ethnic or cultural traits and attributes.
IN CRETE I was someone specific again – that other me. I felt a tentative competence mixed with self-doubt, a near-euphoria of being in my element, both in using knowledge gained and shared and in my interactions with the other project partners, combined with continued misgivings about the rationality of the method and intention of the project. It became clear during the workshop that we were still discussing, and disagreeing on, the same questions as during our Frankfurt meeting. Definitions of concepts such as “citizenship”, “exclusion”, “ethnicity”, and “success” were still unclear, or rather, there were very many ways of defining and delineating them. The project methodology was once again debated and the difficulty of comparison brought up. Though one can argue for the creativity of such disparity, there is also an element of chaos to it. In my case it led to the realisation that although I must follow the project guidelines as far as possible, there is also a need for independent thought and action. This somehow describes the paradoxical work process within the project: A very regulated situation with strict guidelines, deadlines and requirements, but also an occasion to grow and develop as an autonomous researcher both on a personal and on a scientific level. Having carried out the second phase of interviewing “experts”, I found myself more and more caught up in analysing the set method of the project as well as the underlying assumptions and discursively determined starting points. Back home again, with the geographical and mental distance to that special atmosphere re-established, I experienced what can be described as a turning point in my project process.

It started with a problem. The third phase of the project was to be spent starting out on the forty-two biographical interviews set for each team. Unfortunately, or not so unfortunately depending on how one sees it, I was troubled with technical mishaps from the beginning. The tape recorder I had bought specifically for doing interviews suddenly developed a loose connection and rendered five or six of my early inter-
views useless for transcription and analysis. This need not necessarily have been much of a disaster, but my nagging doubts in combination with the frustration this incident caused, led me to have a good long think about the project in general and my involvement in it. The process of contemplating the implications of the information drawn from the “expert” interviews as well as listening to the stories of the true experts in the field, the self-employed themselves (I did carry on with the interviews once the tape recorder was fixed), led to a further reflexive train of thought and eventually to a critique forming. I then chose to concentrate on formulating and presenting that critique of the project methodology in the third report.

A reflexive methodology

Coming from the discipline of ethnology with its own epistemology and methodological traditions, my development during the project time has brought me from a generally averse attitude to the method proposed for the project, to a better awareness of the similarities as well as the differences between the sociological and the ethnological understanding of and use of qualitative methods. Though my conclusion is that there is no point and perhaps no real need to change anything at this stage in the project, I nevertheless consider a discussion to be relevant as the issues raised are ones that both ought to be considered in future projects and are ones pertinent to any qualitative researcher.

Established method

The method applied in the project is one “widely used for qualitative analysis in the social sciences” (TSER Proposal 1997:11). It is based on the Grounded Theory methodology as developed by Anselm Strauss, mainly. I have no intention of giving an exhaustive description or definition of this method, but rather to present it as it has been introduced to the project partners and as it has been adapted to the specific framework of the project.

Two key terms of the Grounded Theory approach are “causal conditions” and “paradigm models”. Causal conditions are defined as “the events, incidents, happenings that lead to the occurrence or development of a phenomenon” (Strauss & Corbin 1990, quoted in TSER Proposal 1997:11). These are in turn “the starting point of the building of ‘paradigm models’ that link subcategories to a category in a set of rela-
A critical phase

tionships” (TSER Proposal 1997:11). Causal conditions (A) lead to specific phenomena (B), which exist in a specific context (C). This context is modified by intervening conditions (D), which lead to action and interaction strategies (E). The final outcome is the consequences (F) to be explained by the model. In the context of the subject matter of the project, there are specific sets of relationships which can provide a paradigm model of the project hypothesis’ (TSER Proposal 1997:11):

(A) skills, cultural capital, legal status $\rightarrow$ (B) deficits, unemployment $\rightarrow$ (C) context of chances for employment $\rightarrow$ (D) participation in programmes of social policies $\rightarrow$ (E) self-employment $\rightarrow$ (F) business success/failure.

The processes shown in the model are conceptualised and reconstructed on an individual level through the biographical interview. In narrating their life stories, the respondents share their personal histories as well as their experiences within the field of employment (unemployment, self-employment) specifically. Each interview is taped, transcribed and analysed. The life story will render knowledge of the individual, the effects of his or her biography on employment, and vice versa, but also be one of many interviews in a comparison within and between national cases. In order to be able to do a comparative analysis, all biographical interviews are based on a standardised narrative interview schedule and later compiled in a specific manner in a computer programme called QSR NUD*IST.

The QSR NUD*IST (Non-numerical, Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorising) software package “is designed to support researchers in handling qualitative text data through routine processes of indexing, searching and theorising” (TSER Proposal 1997:13). The interviews are brought into the NUD*IST programme after being transcribed and are then processed by being coded. The coding procedures used “involve open coding, axial and selective coding. Open coding will be used in breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising text units of the interviews. / / Axial coding is the process of relating subcategories to a category, geared to discovering categories in the paradigm model. Selective coding will involve the process of selecting core categories from life stories (the central phenomenon around which all other categories are integrated) and systematically relating these to other categories” (TSER Proposal 1997:13).

Before coding the interview in the computer programme, however, it is recommended to analyse it first. This is done based on the “principle of sequentiality which characterises not only the biographical experi-
ence but also the narration process” (Guidelines 1999:1). Sequentiality takes into account both content and form of the narrative. “The core of biographical analysis is the segmentation of the text into its segments (suprasegments, segments and subsegments) and the subsequent structural description of these segments” (1999:1). We are advised to “take some precautions in order to save the sequentiality of the interview text in the NUD*IST coding, namely, to carry out the structural description before proceeding to the NUD*IST coding” (1999:2).

The structural description is carried out as follows: First, the thematical segments of the text are outlined; secondly, the segments are described – what is said, how it is said, in what order it is said. According to Riemann and Schütze it is a “first abstraction that stays firmly and visibly grounded in data” (1987:10). Using the principles of Grounded Theory, hypotheses are “built on the content of every segment / . . . / and subsequently verified, falsified, revised or differentiated through the structural description of the following segments” (Guidelines 1999:3). After this procedure, we are meant to import the structural description into NUD*IST and copy the segments and their “headers” (descriptive names) into the nodes and node-memos of the programme. Following the structural description, an analytical abstraction is carried out. This is a summary explication of important aspects of the narrative and is intended to reveal “the total view (gestalt) of the interview” (1999:5). From this categories should be developed and later inserted into the NUD*IST programme along similar lines as the structural description. The final step of analysis, to be worked on in the later phases of the project, will be to conduct a contrastive comparison of the different cases and examine how the emerging typology matches the hypothesis of the proposal.

In the above section I have only briefly outlined the methodological procedure of the project as it has been presented to us. From the points brought up, however, I in the following intend to discuss aspects that have surfaced during the course of my work.

**Critique**

There are countless aspects to consider in any research process, many of which appear only after a considerable amount of work has already been done. In order to avoid the risk of getting bogged down and never getting done, one must continuously limit oneself and one’s subject area and focus on some aspects at the expense of others. However, it has become increasingly important, especially within qualitative science, to
not only state what has been emphasised, but also to discuss what has been left out, why, and the possible consequences thereof. Within ethnology and anthropology the concept and practice of reflexivity has become very significant in this context as well as in other areas of the research process. I will attempt to discuss the methodology of this project reflexively, on a personal as well as on a more general level.

The search for respondents
To start at the very beginning of the process, I have to look into the method and outcome of searching for interview partners. So far I have done this in two ways. The first was to get in touch with various authorities running self-employment programmes or projects and through them finding potential respondents. As I started out concentrating on the “minorities” part of the study, the authorities I contacted tended themselves to be focused on the promoting of self-employment among immigrants. Naturally it was and is in their interest to present especially interesting and successful cases and thus through them I have only reached respondents who have reaped the benefits from the support offered and done well. The second way of searching for respondents was, in the terminology of Robert Prus (1998), through “cold calls”. In other words I approached “relative strangers on /my/ own” (1998:28). This is perhaps the more interesting approach to analyse, as one’s own methods of selection should become more clear.

One memorable day I sat alone at a table of an open-air café and considered my options. On the small but main square of the immigrant dominated neighbourhood there appeared to be quite a number of potential interview partners around. There were a few market stalls selling mainly fruit and vegetables, grocery shops advertising “oriental food” and “spices”, and there were several more cafés to choose from as well. It was thus not any lack of alternatives, but rather my own insecurity that kept me sitting there. I had conducted several interviews earlier, but this was the first time I was going to approach someone without prior introductions of any kind. After gulping down the last of the cold coffee, I finally started strolling around. In my thoughts I was going over different ways of introducing myself and my “business” and the longer I spent at it, the more unsure of the whole thing I felt. How would I appear to them? What was I wearing? How did that compare with what the women around me were wearing and doing? Would I give a naive or “expert” impression? Which was preferable? To me, to them? Was it better to approach a woman or a man? Going into a shopping centre I noticed there seemed to be smaller shops as well as less people milling
around in the downstairs area. I took the escalator and on the way down spotted a book-shop with a bespectacled man sitting reading behind a high counter. No one else was in there. After a moment’s hesitation I went in, introduced myself, and succeeded, after a brief and pleasant exchange of words, in booking a time for an interview the next day.

The difference between the two ways of finding respondents is of course that in the latter one I can choose whom to approach more freely. However, this does not mean that there are no assumptions, prejudices, or expectations involved in that choice. The path that led to my ultimately addressing the book-shop man was full of conscious as well as unconscious decisions of what was possible and not, desirable and not. In the end, the book-shop looked peaceful, harmless and familiar, as did the proprietor. He appeared comfortably middle-aged and scholarly, a kind of man I am familiar with and can find in my own academic world. My reflections on this particular aspect of the research process are an example of the kind of awareness necessary throughout an investigation. Reflexivity entails thinking about one’s own thinking and doing. Naturally some incidents, like the above, are easier to analyse than other, more subtle ones – special situations and first time experiences tend to stick out in one’s memory – but a habit of questioning one’s own motives as a researcher as well as the intentions and consequences of the various steps in the methodological process is vital to a fair presentation of results.

Commentary
Going even further back in the research process entails taking a look at the choice of “field”. Where were the respondents to be searched for? I touched briefly on this in Chapter 2, but find the selection consequential enough to dedicate a lengthier discussion to it.

The field
It was the beginning of the third phase – the start of the “true” biographical interviews, the first “real” venture into the field. Despite having already travelled to and within the selected areas, in order to interview the “experts”, I had not had to reflect on the field as such. I had hardly seen the areas, really. My excursions had been direct routes, with a map and directions to the relevant offices or premises in hand, from A to B and then back to A, central Stockholm, again. Now I had to find my bearings myself.
"It's like going to another country" was something I was told by those who had been there. "There" being the geographical, physical place for my fieldwork. My reaction was one of curiosity – how could this be, in the middle of the capital city? At the same time I was intrigued. Having moved to a different country every three years during my entire childhood and young adulthood, coming "home" to Sweden had been an immigration experience. I was used to other places and I was used to being different, so going into my field was going to be interesting. What country would it be like?

In the discussion on reflexivity within anthropology and ethnology, I find myself somewhere in between the two poles of doing anthropology in a very unfamiliar environment or culture and doing ethnology "at home". Marilyn Strathern is of the opinion that "those anthropologists who study their own society tend to become reflexive. They become more conscious about themselves and their culture, but also about their research, since they cannot as easily as in very unfamiliar countries hide behind the 'smoke screen of exotification'. It becomes more apparent what they are doing when they are dealing with relatively well-known circumstances" (1985. See also Ehn & Klein 1994:74–75). This very likely applies to my situation, though with a double twist, as I am a kind of immigrant in my own country and as most of the people I interview are of foreign background. My respondents can to a certain extent be considered "Other" in a more anthropological, non-familiar sense and in a meeting with them the possibility of both cultural and linguistic obstacles exists. In addition to this, the city areas actually turned out to be exotic enough for someone who had lived and worked in a comparatively homogeneous northern town for the last eight years.

I had intended to insert a description of my first encounter with those areas here, but decided against it. "The image of arriving in 'another world' whose difference is enacted in the descriptions that follow, tends to minimise, if not make invisible, the multiple ways in which colonialism, imperialism, missionisation, multinational capital, global cultural flows, and travel bind these spaces together" (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:12-13). Although this quote more obviously pertains to non-European "worlds", the parallel to my field is still quite pertinent. Had I presented my first field-notes here, the impression would indeed have been an exotic one – it was for me. The risk of it being "a presentation that will be defined, or eventually will crystallise as political practice and text" (Nilsson, F. 1999:96) was reason enough to abstain. Were it thus politicised, the presentation would become a representation and that would be counter to my desire to attempt to "represent and understand
the world around us more adequately, to see beyond the epistemologies of received categories of collective identity and the assumptions about anthropology and fieldwork that continue to reinscribe various "Others" of internal and external colonialism" (Passaro 1997:161). The immigrants in my study are already marginalised and vulnerable to stereotypical definitions. By showing the "them" side of them more than the "us" side, I may well contribute to "the stigmatisation of the stigmatised groups" (O'Dell 1999:69), something I wish to avoid as far as possible.

In his call for a reflexive sociology, Pierre Bourdieu discusses how sociologists often in an unreflecting manner accept a pre-constructed problem for research without studying how it became a problem in the first place (1992:229). The suburbs that figure in the project are typical cases of "problem areas" – they are distinguished from the rest of Stockholm in bureaucratic and political speech and action and are seen by outsiders as different (cf. Bourdieu 1992:239). As the ethnologist Per-Markku Ristilammi points out, they have, together with similar suburbs in other big cities, "since the beginning of the seventies . . . been made symbols of social failure" (1994:39). Within the project it is stipulated that the respondents should have a connection to the chosen areas by either living or working there. If a "majority of those around us /evaluate/ our living environment in a negative way, then there are negative consequences for our self-image. The living environment is then transformed into a stigma – a specific sign that marks the individual as a person" (1994:20). In its extension, this leads to the respondents and the suburb being problematised, their situation is irrevocably tied to a geographic place and can in this way be isolated.

These communities, along with others like them, have become set apart from the rest of Sweden as clearly as "culture areas" in anthropology. They are household concepts with naturalised negative connotations as well as politically singled out as objects for special funding and policy measures. Considering the fact that they are very clearly separate from other Stockholm areas in their population make-up and employment situation the above reasoning seems only to cement their existence as islands surrounded by a hostile and disowning sea. In that sense, the government has found a territory to focus attention on, perhaps distracting general attention from other issues in society. Specifically at the time of the project, at that moment in political history, that territory was of importance to the state in various ways. The general public had with growing immigration and decreasing job opportunities shown an increase in hostility toward people of foreign background. Immigrants were unjustifiably blamed for the lack of work available to Swedes and
also for receiving unfair benefits from the state at a time when Swedes were exorted to tighten their belts. In addition to this, those problems that do exist in these neighbourhoods were, and continue to be, extensively covered by the media and the imagery of the ghetto becomes more widespread. There was a need to control the areas and discourses dealing with them, as well as to stop the negative development on the labour market where in fact immigrants were at a gross disadvantage, a situation that is only slightly improved today.

So, despite the fact that the local policies are based on an intention of practical politics, there are certainly other factors involved as well. In effect there is a struggle going on between the various discourses on what it is to be an immigrant and an attempt to re-articulate them through various measures. Instead of depicting “our immigrants” as needy and helpless, they are more and more portrayed as a resource to be counted on. The battle, however, may have the unforeseen side effect of reiterating the distinction between “us” and “them”. The switch from “burden” to “resource” does not necessarily put “immigrants” on a more equal footing with native Swedes. For a start it still conjures up a picture of immigrants being evaluated according to economic worth and Sweden’s need (or not) of them, and not as fellow citizens. The attempt to substitute positive images (“resource” for example) of immigrants for negative ones (“burden”), though it expands the range of representations and the complexity of what it is to be “immigrant”, does not necessarily lead to a displacement of the negative. “The strategy challenges the binaries – but it does not undermine them” (Hall 1997b:272, 274). A binary can for example be Swedish/immigrant, and irrespective of how “immigrant” is depicted, the binary still remains and “meaning continues to be framed by /it/” (1997b:274.). Thus the positively described “immigrant”, perhaps a successful entrepreneur whose story is told in the newspaper, can in the next day’s newspaper appear as a barbaric and uncivilised stereotype of the Muslim (cf. 1997b:274). The ideological consequences of this is a continued separation between “us” and “them”, manifested for example in more efforts being put into promoting self-employment among disadvantaged groups than clearing the path for them to make use of their actual professions on the regular labour market.

Hansen’s discussion of the influence of welfare politics on the sparsely populated areas of Sweden illustrates a similar phenomenon to what has occurred in the heavily immigrant populated districts of the big cities. ”The political measures introduced a comparison between the villages and the rest of the country, a common model for assessments
and they introduced new resources that were distributed according to this model. Comparisons and changes in regulations made the near environs, their own everyday surroundings, visible as a separate category for the residents: the village was objectified and became the object for reflections on typical characteristics which gave rise to notions of local identity. It was thus not the unity and unanimity between the residents and their environs that were the hotbed for a local identity tied to a particular place, but rather the distance that was established between them" (Hansen 1999:38). If one replaces "village" with "city district", the comparison is not too far-fetched at all. The local identity is created both from outside and from within and risks cementing preconceived ideas about "us" and "them" and making attempts at inclusion and desegregation more difficult. That we are all affected by this objectification was confirmed on a personal level when I set out on that first trip to "the field".

At the outset of the project I did not even vaguely question the selection of city areas to cull respondents from. It seemed not only logical, but natural to pick out those areas where many immigrants lived, where unemployment was high and where there were special policies in place. The "main arguments guiding that selection are as follows: earlier experience concerning organised or spontaneous action stimulating the active participation of citizens in local community efforts targeted against segregation; the quality of current strategies to achieve goals related to this objective; and the existence of actual programmes and actual conditions making these efforts realistic" (Project description PfMI “Co-operation for Multi-Ethnic Inclusion” 1997:7. See also Chapter 2). Also "studies of the local community programmes related to /the districts in question/ can illustrate the highly varied preconditions which must be taken into account in efforts to develop new inclusive strategies" (1997:7-8). Was this a project looking into individual strategies or one where singled out city areas were once again under scrutiny? Was it about inclusion and segregation within those areas or of them? The arguments for the selection were all very reasonable, but there may be a point in looking closer at what discourses actually create these areas and notions associated to them. "Politics and -isms and ideologies belonging to them can / . . . / be considered as a striving to control territory but the territory must first be discovered" (Nilsson, F. 1999:80). By labelling the city areas in specific ways the state exerts a certain control over them, the areas become created and also defined as areas of certain interest for research and various measures. In effect, the territory has been discovered. Nevertheless, in time it may lose its interest to those busy
objectifying it today – “as the state’s interests shift, so do funding priorities and the definition of areas themselves” (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 8–9). It was clear that at the moment my geographical field of study was of particular significance to both politicians and scientists. The question was what that meant for the actual fieldwork and the consequent results.

The interview

These are steps of the process largely ignored in the material the project partners have worked with. Focus lies on the thematical segmentation and sequential analysis of the interview transcription, but little is said on how to get to that point. In the project Proposal a “standardised narrative interview instrument” (TSER Proposal 1997:14) is submitted, with themes to be addressed in the interviews. The themes are shown to be analytically fitted to the paradigm model:

Socio-economic background (A)
Family history (A)
Educational history (A)
Migration history (A)
Work history (B)
Networks (C)
Having used benefits of a policy supporting self-employment (D)
Having participated in a NOW or Horizon project for business creation (D)
Plans (E)
Self-employment strategies (E)

Several other themes are added for supplementary information. The question is how to get information on these themes in a narrative interview without actually asking direct questions about them. In the Guidelines provided on the biographical method, it is claimed that “The analysis of the sequentiality of the narration is facilitated if we take care through the interview conducting technique that the interview can become a narrative one ./.../ through our invitation that he/she tells his/her life story and through our active listening to the story line as it develops throughout the interview. After the main narration, the interviewer may ask questions on themes that have not been talked about or have not been clear enough” (Guidelines 1999:1). There is risk of contradiction here. Either one would have to be rather explicit about what kind of life story it is one wants to hear, or else one would have to allow the respondent to tell his or her life story freely and then be obliged to ask
the “important” questions afterwards. Certainly it is recommended that those follow-up questions be “narration generating, that means, avoiding closed questions” (Guidelines 1999:1), but the fact remains that they may not actually be part of the respondent’s favoured life story.

“Life” as it appears in a biographical interview is a construction, i.e. the interviewee constructs a story about his/her life and in doing so chooses to give an account of what feels relevant for this purpose (cf. Arvidsson 1998:23ff, Ehn 1992:206ff). There are many factors that bear on the presentation of that story. To begin with there is the fact that what the respondent talks about is a selection of the total amount of experiences in the course of his or her life. “/T/his selection /is/ also something that occurs in interplay; in the interview it occurs through interplay with the interviewer who with his/her questions attempts to guide the respondent’s selection. Simultaneously the interview also contains more subtle interplays: the respondent’s interplay with him/herself and with his/her imagined reference group/s” (Arvidsson 1998:20). By reference groups Arvidsson means those culturally bound structures that more or less unconsciously backdrop the respondent’s way of imagining his/her life. These ideas on what a life story should look like can be called “life-scripts” (Frykman 1992:261). In our project a difficulty may lie in the “translation” of the life-scripts of various cultures – they may not follow the same pattern as the West European one that we are informed by. An example, that would also affect the sequential analysis of the interview, would be our understanding of time as linear. Other (perhaps especially non-European) cultures may not see life as a flow from birth through childhood and adulthood to old age. Instead the different parts of life may be seen as distinct and separate, without any bearing on each other (cf. Arvidsson 1998:21). In their article “Det osynliga arvet” (“The invisible inheritance”), Billy Ehn and Karl-Olov Arnstberg bring up another dimension of this idea. They show how immigrants’ sense of time is often segmented into two blocks. When they arrived in Sweden they were “reborn” as immigrants, the consequence being that they split life into the categories before and after (1991:102).²

Whether the interviewer chooses to ask for a specific type of life story (which would entail explaining more about the purpose of the project) or opts for follow-up questions, the respondent will always adapt the narrative to the situation as perceived by him/her. “When the interview starts the respondent is in a position where the question is ‘what does the interviewer want to know’, and must base the answer both on how the interviewer has presented his/her purpose and on how the respondent him/herself wants to control wealth of detail and direc-
A critical phase

Catherine Kohler Riessman follows Goffman when she writes “My narrative is inevitably a self representation” (1993:11). The story the respondent is telling is “being told to particular people; it might have taken a different form if someone else were the listener” (1993:11). Depending on how the respondent sees the interviewer and the purpose of the interview, the life story will be modified one way or another, certain parts will be included and others excluded. This has to do both with how the respondent wants to present him/herself to the interviewer and with what he/she believes the researcher wants to hear.

As much as we would perhaps like to embody the neutral, objective scientist, this is impossible. There are many subjective factors, such as age, sex, political orientation, occupational status, etc, that influence the interpersonal relation we enter into with the respondent. An essential aspect of that interpersonal relation is the fact that there is always a power (im-)balance in the interview situation. This needs to be taken into account not only in questioning how the respondent was “picked”, but also in analysing the resulting narrative. All the above, and many more, factors play a role in the various levels of representation that a research process entails (see Riessman 1993). For the respondent, representation starts immediately after the actual life experience – how is it remembered, what stood out in the experience? The next stage is the telling of that experience. Here the researcher comes into the picture – how does one tell the experience to this particular person? For the researcher, representation becomes most important from the point of listening to the life story. What does one hear, and later, how is the interview transcribed and analysed?

Commentary

While doing my interviews I felt the first true twinges of scepticism. How was this going to work? So many issues and questions had already arisen. For the moment, the main question was “who am I?” In one interview situation I am taken for a figure of authority, someone to perhaps not tell everything as the information may end up in the ”wrong” hands. In another I am treated as more of an equal, with a ”you know what I mean” attitude – perhaps because we were closer to each other as far as educational level goes, perhaps because I expressed an initiated understanding of and outrage at their predicament. In a third situation I am an obvious novice and being told what is what. Unfortunately ”/a/ll the pious calls for dialogue and mutual respect between the ethnographer and her subjects cannot change the fact that socially structured in-
equalities do not dissolve under the influence of acknowledgement and understanding. Reflexivity is not, in itself, an equalising act” (Weston 1997:172). The researcher cum interviewer is in a position of power which she can manipulate depending on the circumstances of the meeting. But although I could not change things by being aware of them, at least I could keep the awareness alive and consider the implications of those inequalities present in the meeting. Corollaries to the first question of "who am I" are therefore "who am I and the interviewee to each other" and "what does this do to the information gleaned”? Probably the only way to handle the discrepancies in information that the differences in interview constellations and situations will produce is to realise that “all knowledge is social, partial, local, and critical. /One should display/ an attentiveness to the way in which meanings are produced through interaction (social); the changing and incomplete view of those meanings (partial); how they are located in a specific space, time and a cultural and ideological context (local); and the manner in which values are produced, maintained, or constrained in the production of that knowledge (critical)” (Daly & Dienhart 1998:100).

It is also worth remembering that the inequality in the interview situation is not always to the “researcher cum interviewer’s” advantage. There is an assumption, perhaps born of the tradition of “studying down”, that the interviewer is always the one holding the long end of the stick, whereas in fact in certain settings the balance tips the other way. Something I learned about myself during the time of doing interviews was that no matter how I tried to modify my appearance to look more sophisticated, competent or professional, my personal self always managed to shine through – for good and for bad. Good in the sense that there is no point in trying to be someone I am not, and good in the realisation that who I am is actually good enough, no matter what the occasion. Bad in the sense that I had a few extremely embarrassing moments. The following will illustrate how various factors can combine to put the interviewer at a distinct disadvantage.

My first embarrassing moment was when I went to interview the chairman of IFS, one of my “expert” respondents. I had dressed with care, carried a briefcase rather than a bag, was well-organised and felt confident. Trotting along the road to the address I had been given, I realised that my ability to read maps did not extend to estimating the distance between points and thus the time it would take to get where I was going. I trotted faster. I did get to the appointment on time, but was out of breath and felt slightly discomposed and dishevelled as the waiting employee ushered me into the chairman’s office. The chairman,
Eduardo, asked me to sit for a moment and he would be right with me. Gratefully, I sat down in one of the deep and soft armchairs he had indicated, but instead of getting myself set up for the interview, I took the moment he was out of the room to lean back and try to get my breath back and steady my nerves – a slight but significant mistake.

As Eduardo a few minutes later entered the room and took a seat next to me at the low, round coffee table, I should have realised I was in trouble. His chair was of the wooden, straight-backed kind, one that does nothing to alter one’s composure or look of efficiency, whereas my deep armchair appeared to have enveloped me and was unwilling to let go. As I struggled to sit upright, Eduardo asked his assistant to bring us some coffee. He then launched straight into explaining and describing his work. I fell into the patter, asked questions and then remembered to ask whether it was all right to record our conversation. Eduardo consented to the use of a tape recorder, so I hurriedly started to unpack it from my briefcase in order not to miss too much of the already started interview. As I pulled the tiny clip-on microphone out, the small and very light foamy cover for the actual mouthpiece flew off. Stressed and flustered, I excused myself and proceeded to crawl around the floor on all fours looking for it. Eduardo, with a slightly bemused or perhaps just bewildered look on his face, also peeked under the table. It was nowhere to be found. In an attempt to get me back in my seat, Eduardo promised to send it to me, should it appear. Realising the little cover was of absolutely no consequence and that I had made a fool of myself for no good reason, I sank into the armchair again and started the tape recorder. Two minutes into the taped interview I remembered that I had forgotten to check the setting of the tape recorder. By now, however, I was much too embarrassed to start fiddling with it, so instead I dug around the briefcase for a pen and paper to take notes, just in case. With the pad in my left hand and pen in my right I settled down to try to salvage what I could of our slightly strained conversation. The armchair had it in for me, however, and, needless to say, it was not going to give me a break now. Every time I put my elbow on the armrest to jot something down, it would slip off the very narrow wooden structure inside the generously padded cover and I would jerk it back, like a drunk at the bar. I think I managed to regain some composure before the end of the interview, but when Eduardo received a phone call from one of his children who needed a lift right now, I was quite happy to call it a day. Later I found that the recorded interview was rather good – thank goodness it was not a video – and that the foamy microphone cover had flown straight back into my briefcase.
It is incidents like this that make each step on the research road unique to the individual researcher. Naturally, not every interview is “fun” and neither do “story material” incidents occur every time, but there is a point in realising that chance plays a large role in how interviews turn out and that it is in the interaction between interviewee and respondent that material is produced and sentiments established. Sometimes, however, there are more parties involved in that interaction.

In the self-representation that the respondent’s narrative is, he or she must relate not only to whom the interviewer is perceived to be, however, but also to those discourses that inform both parties of who and what the “immigrant” is perceived to be. Oscar Pripp found in his study on minority entrepreneurs (2001) that the consequences of “heavy discourses” include the appearance of a “third presence” in interview situations. Heavy discourses he defines as those discourses that are repeated often, that are comprehensive, and that imply forms for comprehension and distinction of population categories – the dominant discourses on immigrants being prime examples (2001:18). During interviews Pripp found that the respondents were delivering answers to questions he had not asked and that these comments addressed pervasive images and ascribed characteristics and identities of “immigrants” (2001:19, 73–74). It was as if an invisible, and telepathic, third presence posed questions impossible to ignore. The process of confronting negative opinions and interpretations of themselves by the world around them by emphasising counter-images in their self-presentations he called “strategic syncretism” (2001:74). By stressing a dedication to values and norms perceived to be embraced by the majority, minorities combat stereotypisation, and in the process also revise their own self-images and self-presentations (cf. Liliequist 1996).

It is not only the interview situation as such or the inequalities between interviewer and respondent that produce a certain result, however. It is also the particular situation of the respondent at the time of the interview. This has become especially clear in those rare cases where I have been able to do follow-up interviews. Zita, a woman involved in a co-operative catering business (described in Chapter 6), is someone I have met on a number of occasions. Her situation changed drastically between our meetings and with that her attitude towards the project, her work, the venture itself, her colleagues, Swedes, the social system and so on. The point is that a person is never the same from one occasion to another. Naturally, we also got to know each other more and more which also influenced the outcomes of the interviews. Realising that the material I based my analyses on is only a product of instants in time and
space, glimpses from within a tangle of complexity, my doubts about the greater aim of our project only increased.

The transcription

"/W/hen we speak of transcription, /w/e/ do not speak of a mechanical striving toward accuracy for the sake of accuracy in itself. Rather we move within the problems of representation with its many ideological dimensions. Transcription is an analytical act and a question of epistemology /.../" (Klein 1990:44). Being accurate in transcription entails much more than just getting the words right. As mentioned above, the same story can be told in a number of different ways, depending on situation and audience. The teller will embellish the story and its meanings by using pauses, intonation, emphasis, variations in volume, gestures, facial expressions, etc. Certainly, not every single detail can be brought into the transcription of an interview, but by using “ethnopoetic” transcription methods, one can drastically improve accuracy as well as intelligibility, as “forms of transcription that neglect features of speech miss important information” (Riessman 1993:20). The ethnopoetic method entails using typescript notations to identify features such as pauses, emphasis, different volumes, rushed speech, interruptions, etc. Other, non-linguistic, features such as laughter or gestures can, when deemed important, be included within parentheses, for example. This kind of transcription ensures not only that one is as true as possible to what was said and how the story was told, but also that the reader can make his/her own interpretations. “Not simply technical questions, these seemingly mundane choices of what to include and how to arrange and display the text have serious implications for how a reader will understand the narrative” (Riessman 1993:12).

The role of the researcher, or interviewer, in the interview situation is also important. Even in situations where the interviewer says very little, as recommended in the biographical interview, there are certain themes to bring up if the respondent does not, and there is a need for some sort of response to the narrative, so the respondent feels encouraged to continue. In other words, the interview can be considered “a conversation where two or more persons construct meanings together” (Klein 1990:44). An important consequence of this definition is that the interviewer’s questions and reactions ought not be “edited out”, but seen as part of the material to be analysed in the context of the interview. As interviewers we also “present” ourselves, or a representation of ourselves, to the respondent. In our reactions and expressions, with our “mms” and “ahs”, we expose ourselves, our values, sympathies and atti-
tudes. To do so, which is inevitable, is also to affect the interviewee and to prompt a certain type of narrative or a particular version of the life story. Being aware of these various levels of representation (the respondent, the life story, the interviewer, the transcription) is a step to reflexively being able to see the interpretation and analysis of an interview, and in the end of a whole study, as only one possible result.

The analysis
The analysis of the biographical interviews is the part of the research process given most attention in the texts distributed to the project partners. It is also the part of the process that I have had the biggest struggle with. Not only am I not schooled in the methodology of Grounded Theory, I am also an ethnologically, rather than sociologically, trained qualitative researcher. And although the qualitative methodologies of several neighbouring disciplines (e.g. ethnology, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies) are drawing nearer to each other, there are still differences in the choice and application of methods as well as in the epistemological objectives of the disciplines.

It appears that in Grounded Theory, the idea is to reach one’s Theory from a succession of building blocks of hypotheses that with time, more data, and further hypotheses are either proved, disproved or modified. The practice in ethnological methodology is similar, though on a “thought process” level rather than on a documented step-by-step one with an additional burden of “proof”. In ethnology one leans toward giving an account of processes of learning and of discovery in the manner of writing about them reflexively. Another difference is perhaps that there are no claims of finality, no notion of producing something that can be re-produced. “/B/y no means should qualitative social research only be seen as an auxiliary research step into the direction of ‘mature’ quantitative research. There is no epistemological legitimisation for such an assessment, for the research steps can be repeated by others and are open to questions of reliability of the use of research procedures and to the questions of theoretical and empirical validity of categories” (Riemann & Schütze 1987:7-8). To me, this statement claims that qualitative social research and “mature” quantitative research are equally positivistic, in the sense of “provable”. The presumption that someone else can repeat my research process is inherent in the statement. From a reflexive point of view, I doubt it. The ultimate recommendations to the EU-commission may, possibly, be the same, but the path trodden to reach that end would be a very different one.

Without going too deeply into the complexity of the process, there
A critical phase

are some clear points to be made. The researcher is situated within many contexts. The researcher is of a specific sex, class, age, and ethnicity. He/she has a specific and personal experience (or not) of everything from childhood, school, marriage and children, to studies, work, politics . . . The list is endless. All these subjective aspects of the researcher will influence and inform his/her research process. They influence the choice of interview partners, the interaction in the interview situation, the interpretation of what is said, and the analysis of the material. Even with a rigid application of Grounded Theory methodology, “our readings of data are themselves located in discourses” (Riessman 1993:64). Equally, the impression the respondent has of the researcher will direct the life story version told and thus the outcome of the interview. In other words, the ethnologist in me can only claim that “this is what I found out through these particular interviews with these particular individuals at this particular time in this particular place and within this particular context”. This does not, of course, mean that connections cannot be made to macro-structures or that analyses cannot be done or conclusions drawn within a broader scope than the immediate context, but one must be careful in claiming representativity or any universalistic truths based on such material.

On a more specific note, the methodology of Grounded Theory used in this project risks becoming a quantitative way of doing qualitative work and missing important aspects in the process. Although the method accounts for the “whole” of the narrative with the “analytical abstraction”, the preceding process of breaking up the transcript into thematic segments in a “structural description” has its dangers. Often the tellers “/knit/ together several themes into long accounts that /have/ coherence and sequence, defying easy categorisation. / . . ./ There /seems/ to be a common structure beneath talk about a variety of topics” (Riessman 1993:vi). There are guidelines for how to deal with this; for example identifying the different parts as “suprasegments, segments and subsegments” (Guidelines 1999:1), but the breaking up of the text remains. In some cases there are “bracketing devices” (Riessman 1993:18) to inform the analyst of the beginning and end of a separate narrative, but “stories told in research interviews are rarely so clearly bounded, and locating them is often a complex interpretative process. Where one chooses to begin and end a narrative can profoundly alter its shape and meaning” (Riessman 1993:18). The key word here is “chooses”, implying that depending on various factors, one can actually demarcate different sets of thematic segments in the same transcription, further complicating the subjective nature of the process. In view of this, my main concern
is to not lose the “whole” of the narrative, the actual life story the respondent has told me.

Commentary
At our third workshop in Aalborg, Denmark, strong criticism against the structure and use of the NUD*IST data programme was uncovered. There was a sense of being forced to work with, or even to manipulate, the interviews in a particular way in order for the analysis to fit into the programme rather than of the programme being a helpful tool in the highly individualistic, though disciplinarily conditioned, process of analysis. In my case I found the whole idea of a sequential analysis repulsive at first. I recoiled from the task of breaking the interviews into segments and even subsegments and of coding them down to the shortest of sentences. To an ethnologist, as well as to many social scientists, several of them colleagues within the project, this seemed unnecessarily laborious. As time went on I became less and less meticulous and conscientious in my use of the programme and really only did what I had to in order to fulfil the requirements of the contract the project had with the EU commission. The “real” analysis and the “scientific” theorising of my material I did the way I was schooled to within ethnology and the way I found worked best based on the empiricism and epistemology of the research task. Our NUD*IST tutor and guide who was present at Aalborg agreed with much of our critique, despite his own early enthusiasm, and acquiesced to our suggestions of a more pragmatic approach to our promise to use the programme and provide the EU with a database.

Our critique of the data programme and its uses was severe enough for the Frankfurt team to address the issues in the final Coordinating Report (2001:31–32). There had of course been advantages to the programme – one of them being that it provided “a unified document structure where all our material was in one place and accessible for quick orientation”. The disadvantages included the need for “a steep learning curve” and the fact that “in the scientific community of qualitative researchers / . . . / there is a strong tendency toward individuality; ‘I personally organise it differently!’” Many partners, myself included, were not prepared to “code only for the sake of coding”, and instead held a “strong methodological position in the direction of holistic hermeneutic approaches to textual analysis”. Because the “introduction of machine technology in the ‘natural’ interpretative process involved a subtle shift in attention away from the real analytical work to keys and software functions / . . . / the potential advantages of coding in NUD*IST did not receive the attention / that had been/ foreseen in the beginning of the
project”. I agree that the learning process took too long and that the “technology” interfered with my work. However, despite having come to the point of seeing some mainly organisational advantages with the programme, I still consider the inherent method to be more disadvantageous than beneficial to the research process. In fact, the training we received only “increased the sensitivity to the limitations of NUD*IST”. The project leadership, however, finds that paradoxically this increased awareness of its limitations “increased the readiness of the researchers who were not previously familiar with the programme to try to find a compromise and adapt their previous theoretical assumptions and style of research work to the requirements of our methodological data base”. If by this they mean what I have described above of only just fulfilling requirements, they are right. They are wrong if they believe that this compromise led to a change in style of research – it really only meant I did more work than would have been otherwise necessary.

Nevertheless, in the spirit of reflexivity, I must consider my own biases. My initial feelings and reactions to the proposition that we use a software programme for analytical and theorising work was no doubt grounded in personal as well as disciplinary factors. Learning a new programme is, as mentioned earlier, a time-consuming process and I preferred to lean on the “usual” way to do my work. On the other hand, faith in the individual researcher to manage these processes and to be able to cope with large amounts of material without technological aid is, to me, a sign of confidence in the methodology of the discipline and in the integrity of the ethnologist’s craft. Naturally, ethnology is not the answer to everything. Each discipline has its own purpose of knowledge, and its own paradigms and discursive truths to challenge. This small step into a “more-than-one-discipline” research project has certainly been an eye-opener for me. Despite the contentment of tarrying within the familiar, a venture into the less known can be like shaking a kaleidoscope and seeing the same picture differently, or perhaps a different picture of the same thing. And perhaps it is also true that the more pictures one has, the more complete the album becomes.

The comparison
There is another thing, methodologically – the comparative method of the project. In order to find the most “appropriate social integration policies” (TSER Proposal 1997:1–2) for the EU, several levels of comparison are employed. These can be expressed as: the individual level, where biographical interviews are used to compare life and work histories and their effect on self-employment; the local level, on which diffe-
rent city areas and their actual application of local and EU measures are compared; and the national level, on which the analytical results from the partner countries are brought together for a final comparison. In the above section, the complexities on the level of biographical interviews were addressed. In view of them, I wonder how feasible it is to find a common EU strategy when not only the selected nations are very different in their set-ups (immigration, gender, legal, financial and labour market, for example), but also the local areas within those nations, not to mention the countless differences between the many individuals (more or less) adapted to and acting within those varying contexts. The idea is that as the project proceeds further, more and more common themes for analysis will surface and the comparison will become increasingly extensive and sophisticated. Though some themes have certainly already arisen, I remain sceptical to the possibility of finding any best practices for self-employment policies that will come even close to taking the multitude of individual contexts of the marginalised citizens of Europe into consideration. Perhaps that is not the aim, though. Perhaps we just have to uncover those practices that take the individual background, experience and situation most seriously and that do more than expect self-employment to be the solution to exclusion on all levels.

Conclusion

My intention with this critique has not been to denounce the methodology of the project, but rather to bring the risks and consequences of it, as well as its possibilities, into a reflexive light. An important point of this critique is that “transcription is an analytical act” (Klein 1990). At the time of writing the third report I suggested using the method of ethnopoetic transcription for all the interviews in order to improve the analyses as well as to make the material more transparent to the reader. However, the time pressure as well as the use of the NUD*IST data programme unfortunately limited the usefulness of this method and the idea was abandoned.

The main point of my discussion, however, is the emphasis on the practice of reflexivity throughout the research process. One way of attempting to keep the importance of that in mind may be to “frame/ discussion of the research process in the language of “representation” rather than as ‘stages’ or ‘perspectives’”. This would “emphasise/ that we actively make choices that can be accomplished in different ways. Obviously, the agency of the teller is central to composing narratives from personal experience, but so are the actions of others – listener,
transcriber, analyst, and reader” (Riessman 1993:15), several of whom are we. As the foundation of the project is the biographical interview, it has to be seen for what it is – a version of a person’s life created in the interplay between interviewer and respondent. Again, the issues of power may not be bypassed. We have to ask ourselves how we are situated in the personal narratives we collect and analyse as well as whose voice is represented in the final product. “Any finding – a depiction of a culture, psychological process, or social structure – exists in historical time, between subjects in relations of power. Whereas traditional social science has claimed to represent the experiences of populations and cultures, the new criticism states that we cannot speak, finally and with ultimate authority, for others” (Riessman 1993:15), which is why we have to be very conscious, reflective, and cautious about the claims we make.

How valid can our research results then be? “Validation in narrative studies cannot be reduced to a set of formal rules or standardised technical procedures. ‘The sciences have been enchanted by the myth that the assiduous application of rigorous method will yield sound fact – as if empirical methodology were some form of meat grinder from which truth could be turned out like so many sausages’” (Gergen 1985. Quoted by Riessman 1993:68–69). In the end, we have to accept that our results will certainly be the product of hard and meticulous work, of well thought through and applied methods and theories, of reflexive cooperation with our respondents and each other, but also that they will only be one of several possible versions of the story. That, however, is not to say that they will not be valid from the point of view of the epistemological objective of the project.

Commentary

The method paper was written in lieu of the expected report during phase three of the project. Although the technical problems were the catalyst, I had long felt a need to address disquieting issues – I find putting matters into print often clarify them for me. During the same period I also wrote a work-in-progress paper for the ethnological seminar on some of the political aspects the project brought with it. Again, it was a way to clarify for myself more than anyone else how I felt about new aspects I had discovered about the project, about myself and about my scientific identity. It had suddenly become clear to me that the project was of a political nature in several ways. It was not only that a political body, the EU commission, stood behind the project or that the “experts” interviewed were players in the political arena. In the interviews with the main respondents for the project, namely the self-
employed themselves, I discovered yet another dimension to the picture. The respondents were simultaneously agents and pawns in the game and so was I. Regarding the purely methodological questions I believed they could be of interest to the other project members. Indeed, despite my tutor’s worries that there would be repercussions following this “misstep”, I received encouraging signs of interest from more than one of the other project partners. The problem with carrying out this sort of extra-curricular work within a project structure, however, is that as interesting as things may be there is no time to develop any further thoughts and no leeway to go back and start again. There are set tasks, set deadlines and the project must chug along toward its destination. Small detours within the framework, short journeys on a branch line, are acceptable as long as one rejoins the main line in time to get to the end station on schedule together with the others. This was not only the case with my paper, the same can be said for most of our discussions during workshop meetings and otherwise via e-mail. Of course we narrowed down and fine-tuned concepts, ideas, methodological issues. We questioned many of the parameters of the project and critiqued aspects from varying points of view. But we were in no position to actually “take over” and make it our project – which, considering our often different standpoints would certainly have been quite a task! Nevertheless, on occasion I found myself envious of my fellow Ph.D. students in Umeå who had the freedom, as well as the responsibility, to plan, carry out, modify and tailor their own doctoral projects. If it became clear that more fieldwork, more reading, or a different approach altogether would be of help, then they could pursue that idea. They could chop and change strategies to suit their needs and further their research and learning process more or less at will. I had forty-two interviews to get done.
CHAPTER 5

Victims and agents?

It was the beginning of October 1999 when the project partners met in Aalborg, Denmark for the third workshop meeting. Though the weather was a little more grey than on the first two occasions, the get-together was not. This time the interview method, questions of analysis and of difficulties in the comparison were taken up. Discussions on how to define “inclusion”, “success”, “self-employment” and other key concepts brought back memories of previous workshops and once again laid bare the complexity of our venture. As the research assistants conducted more and more interviews it had become ever more clear that there was no easy or obvious way to define any of the terms. Complicating the whole matter was the need to be able to make comparisons, both national and cross-national. Some partners wished for predefined and set categories and typologies whereas others preferred to discover them as they emerged, even if this made cross-national comparisons more difficult. Though I believe we came closer to understanding both each other’s divergent points of view on the matter and the very fundamental differences existing in national structures, there remained, to the very end of the project, unresolved issues. To their credit, the project leadership was open to and even a proponent of independent work, analysis and theorising, which meant the work could proceed anyway.

In much of my critique, as a backdrop to my apprehension, my scepticism and doubts, lay my identification with ethnology and the schooling I had received in reflexivity. My reactions to what some of the other project participants said about method, material and empiricism often had to do with what I found to be a lack of consistent reflexivity. The need for it, though not necessarily called by that name, was brought up on occasion, but really only concerning isolated pockets of the research work. During an early discussion on whether or not the interviewer ought to be of the same sex as the respondent in order to get the best possible result, for example, the arguments of both sides were aired as well as conceivable strategies for handling whichever situation one
found oneself in. From my standpoint a reflexive stance was the obvious and favoured modus operandi for handling this specific problem (if indeed it was one), but also for applying throughout the research process and to every level of it. Reflexivity is a potent method for analysing the influence of the personal as well as the disciplinary background of the researcher, but also of the discipline itself and the many other structures and systems involved in forming and informing the research. Bourdieu speaks of “radical doubt” (1992:235ff), the radical questioning of the preconstructed – from the research “problem” (1992:229), the discipline’s “own operations and ... its own instruments of thinking” (1992:236), “the concepts, the words, and the methods that the /discipline/ employs to speak about, and to think, the social world” (1992:241), “the particular role of the political field and especially of the bureaucratic field” (1992:239), to the common sense and the practical reason of the social world (1992:247) which risks, as it “presents itself under the cloak of the self-evident, /to go/ unnoticed because it is by definition taken for granted” (1992:251). In other words, the researcher is embedded in discursive formations, or “enmeshed within a culture of multiple languages” (Gergen & Gergen 1991:79), which if not questioned, can lead both research and its results to simply verify the already accepted, the common sense of the preconstructed, whether it actually confirms or disconfirms research hypotheses (1991:81). Take the discussion mentioned above, for example. If the language, or discourse, about the sexes and their differences is not deconstructed by “formalising the understandings already contained in the common conventions” (1991:81) for talking about for example “women”, then we are stuck endlessly repeating the same hidden assumptions of difference whether we decide that it matters if the interviewer is of the same sex as the respondent or not. Somewhere along the way, I felt that perhaps my schooling in reflexivity and my firm belief in its exigency was what determined my disciplinary identity and was also what led to my questioning the method used, the project itself, and ultimately the politics that shaped it.

These questions of what it was that politics, research and researcher were taking for granted, nagged at me all through carrying out the interviews with the self-employed respondents. The report for the fourth phase, however, was aimed only at presenting short, one-paragraph descriptions of each interview with the main points referring to the impact of biography – in order to develop a self-employment theory – and the implications for policy evaluation. In addition, structural descriptions of the interviews were to be delivered in an Annex. The fifth phase report included the rest of the structural descriptions as well as analytical
abstractions of all interviews. Its focus was to be a discussion of typical developments concerning the process of becoming self-employed and typical ways of policy impact on self-employment projects. This entailed making a systematic comparison of the national interviews. For the Final Report, I drew the two phase-reports together and basically presented a summary of results.

Biographical projects and policy measures – national cases

The fourth phase was dedicated to conducting further biographical interviews and starting to analyse them. Based on the first stage of analysis a preliminary conclusion was that biographical factors are indeed very important for the success or failure of a small self-employment venture. Experience of self-employment or even in a business, a burning interest in or decisive skill within the chosen niche, strength and self-confidence, knowledge of the market and the society it works within, and whether or not one has self-employment as a first choice, are all aspects that play important roles in the running of small businesses. There are, however, structural conditions that also heavily influence the outcome for such businesses. The unwillingness of banks to lend money to immigrants, the double disadvantage of being immigrant and female on the labour market, and the lack of expertise amongst those running the labour market policies are a few. In addition, high taxation can be devastating to a new business.

Two of the interviewed self-employed Swedish women, Alice and Elin, are also mentors for the catering co-operative that one of the migrant women partakes in. They both agree that despite promises from politicians it is not getting easier to start small businesses, neither for the native-born nor for immigrants. However, it is tougher for the immigrants as they often lack the contacts and the orientation in the Swedish market crucial for making the step into self-employment as smooth as possible. The two consultants’ recommendation is to adjust taxes for the first year of self-employment so that the step from unemployment to self-employment is not so big. Due to the heavy taxation of businesses, it is also impossible for a small business to support more than the salary of one person, indicating that the investment in co-operatives may not be as successful an idea as originally thought.

These first conclusions were confirmed in the continued analysis and comparison of national cases. The final comparison had its focus on
Commentary
This concise synopsis of the results of the fourth phase is probably adequate for the report required, but does not really say much. What were the respondents like? Did all the interviews go well or were there disasters? Who are the persons behind the “burning interest” and the “decisive skills”? What happened to the co-operatives? Unfortunately, the unabridged Fourth Scientific Report is not much better. You remember Hossein, the man in the book shop? This is the brief description of the interview with him:

Hossein
My impression of Hossein is that he is a very idealistic man, a man who wants to do good, be of use, fend for himself and not have to beg to be able to do it. He finds it difficult to speak of his family, probably because of the trauma attached – one brother is dead, another wounded. In view of all the accomplishments in his past – his education, his political engagement, his work during the migration process, and his wish to create something important in Sweden – he appears to be rather dejected by the conditions, obstacles, in Sweden, that make his effort such a struggle. Despite this, should he be forced to give up his bookshop, he is determined to pursue his dream and continue somewhere else in Stockholm, or as a last resort, in another country.

Impact of biography
Hossein’s pride and idealistic drive will prevent him from seeking support just to keep the business going. The only way he would apply is if it were for a cultural cause, i.e. a project to for example create a multicultural meeting place centred on his bookshop. Hossein’s earlier accomplishments do not allow him to become just a bookshop owner. He wants it to be more than that in order to maintain a level of social benefit in his contribution to society.

Implications for policy evaluation
The rigidity and bureaucracy inherent in the various labour market policies make it difficult for several of the interviewed immigrants to try to create their own niches and to find satisfaction in doing so. A little more flexibility and creativity would probably open for more types of businesses and thus for more applications to enter policies.

Picking out one or two details from this already lacking description
to point to a “type” would certainly not do. Obviously, I had the whole picture and stories of Hossein and the other respondents with me when I wrote the above summary for the Fourth Scientific Report. Any other reader of that report would not, however. How these brief descriptions could be of any use to an outsider in determining whether my analyses and conclusions were “correct” or not, I do not know. It is not enough to even start to understand Hossein, or any of the other respondents either. In other words, the reports may answer some questions, but they miss very much as well.

**The process of becoming self-employed**

I have chosen to break this analysis into the most often occurring themes in the respondents’ narratives about becoming self-employed. The individual trajectories naturally involve many more biographical factors than those presented here, and in many cases the themes also overlap. In order to isolate typical developments, however, it becomes necessary to focus on certain conditions; conditions that are individually experienced and personally expressed, but often grounded on structural factors.

**Discrimination – gender and ethnicity**

In the process of becoming self-employed, discrimination on the labour market seems to be the main factor for the immigrant respondents. Although all the men have experienced discrimination in various forms, they call it by different names. Arash, the most successful of them, tends to dismiss the incidents as flukes and also puts them in a business context of healthy suspicion. When asked if he had encountered any negative reactions to a foreigner selling goods at low prices, he answered: “it depends on how you interpret them. This scepticism exists in the whole world . . . when you have very low prices. We have had that too, but if you compare that you have two thousand customers and only five persons have said that kind of thing, then . . . it’s natural.” The others have faced more obvious ethnic discrimination in looking for jobs, even with a very good university education, as well as in the process of setting up their own businesses. Babak has surrendered to the perceived fact that if there are a number of applicants to a job, even a menial one that does not require specific skills, there is no way he will be offered the vacancy – it will be given to a Swede instead. He recalls being sent to a job interview by the employment exchange: “I was the thirteenth person. The man in front of me had three years’ experience. . . ./M/any have various experiences but now I felt handicapped. . . ./ They have experience or they
speak good Swedish or they have education or they were first”. His ex-
planation for this is that he lacks the language and the work experience
in Sweden. Taner relates an incident involving a potential employer
who was very impressed by his qualifications until it became clear that
Taner was Turkish. The man then claimed Turks “know nothing” – a
clear illustration of discrimination based on preconceived ideas of what,
in this case, Turks are and know.

Ping pong thinking
When I read the above I realise I have reserved the definition of dis-
crimination for my own determining. Arash may “call it by a different
name”, but I have decided that it is discrimination anyway. The “more
obvious” cases of discrimination are those where the respondents them-
selves, in one way or another, acknowledge or clearly describe such inci-
dents. And yet, often enough, it is still I who attaches the label to the
occurrence. Why do I do this, when my intention is to let the respon-
dents speak for themselves? Yes, it is the researcher’s privilege (and
duty) to carry out the interpretations and analyses, but in so doing he/
she risks distorting the empirical material. With the statements and
quotes from the above respondents one could just as well have presented
results claiming that it is not discrimination, that in fact the incidents
only describe “healthy suspicion” in business, a preference for expe-
rienced workers, and judgements based on previous experience. Per-
haps. However, the researcher has more information than what the re-
pondents provide. For me, a key term becomes “structural factors”, or
“structural conditions” as I called them earlier. Even though it can never
be complete, the picture I have been able to assemble includes results
from other research projects, what the “experts” have said, as well as the
background information from Chapter 2. Following the various leads,
my conclusion is that discrimination does indeed exist and take place on
the labour market. The combining of micro and macro, the drawing of
lines from individuals to structures and back again, are methodological
skills a researcher should have and be able to use. Wolf says “my control
over possibly competing interpretations is determined by my ability to
comprehend and process the data available” (Wolf 1992:10). This is of
course true, though I still believe that experiences during the research
process, among other things, have an influence on how that ability is
applied and on how the results are formulated.

There were really only two occasions on which I felt emotionally
unsettled during interviews. One of them was when Zita, (who will be more thoroughly presented in Chapter 6), was distressed about how the catering project was proceeding. As she started to cry I turned the tape recorder off and spent a few minutes just sitting with her and comforting her as best I could. The other occasion was interviewing Babak, a young man whose life seemed to be literally falling apart. He had had a traumatic childhood, fleeing Iran as a young teenager, spending years in exile while working politically and in collaboration with the UN’s refugee efforts. When he eventually ended up in Sweden he had the odds stacked against him. He did not have much education, had been forced to grow up very quickly and abruptly, and when no longer kept continuously busy his traumas troubled him. During his SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) lessons he found it hard to concentrate and when a helicopter flew by he dived for the floor. In order to keep his memories and fears at bay, Babak quit classes and instead tried to find work. It did not go very well, and neither the employment exchange nor his own efforts got him anywhere. Eventually, upon hearing that the mentioned catering business was needing help with its deliveries, and with the reluctant help from the employment exchange, he started a delivery service as a last resort.

The business started out all right, but very soon ran into difficulty. Not only was it impossible to get other clients than the catering service, despite low prices and quick availability, but the car he started out with also broke down. Being self-employed meant that Babak could not receive welfare allowances, having too few clients meant he made too little money, having a useless delivery van meant he could not work anyway, and there being no more support available from the employment exchange meant the spiral spun faster and faster downwards. Babak could for the life of him not understand why the authorities seemed to prefer the scenario of him going bankrupt and becoming dependent on welfare benefits to one where they helped him get a working van and paid for his rent until he was on his feet business-wise. As it were, they turned his every offer and suggestion down, and his only alternative now was to claim bankruptcy. In the middle of this mess, Babak was about to lose his flat (he had three days to get out) and his wife had taken their small child and left him to live with friends. He was in despair and I felt completely hollowed out listening to him. Where had things started going so wrong? Why were not the policies more comprehensive and why did not the various authorities work together so that they would be equipped to handle this kind of situation? What was the point of launching something that could not be carried to the end?
Babak had done what most of the immigrant respondents had done. He had utilised his embeddedness in an ethnic network – borrowing money from friends and finding work through fellow Iranians – and had also taken advantage of the government policies set up to promote the start of small businesses. Despite the aim of integration inherent in those specifically targeted policies, however, they had let him down at a critical time. It has been said that the most negative aspect of labour market policies is the risk of generating passivity in the partakers of projects and programmes. During many interviews with "experts" as well as self-employed individuals, the often short-term projects have been heavily criticised. In the past they have often not resulted in any employment, let alone self-employment, and have instead been only one in a row of similar projects keeping the immigrants busy, and out of the open unemployment figures, but not actually leading to anything fruitful. In those cases where businesses were started, the early years of the new policies brought a high rate of failure, perhaps as a consequence of "policy/taking/ the supply (group characteristics) of potential entrepreneurs for granted and /attempting/ to alter only the demand (opportunity structures) side" (Waldinger et al 1990:193). It cannot be stressed enough that "immigrants' predispositions toward entrepreneurship are not imported but situational" (1990:194), and that therefore the policies must be of a societal character, not just social policy based on preconceived ideas.

In the case of Babak, though his decision to become self-employed was certainly due to his situation rather than any innate disposition, the initiative was still entirely his. It was an active and motivated decision, and yet the response from the authorities can only be seen as negative when he sought support beyond the initial social policy. The responsibility of the authorities apparently carries no further than to show a little initial goodwill, to entice with a promise of a better future, only to drop the entrepreneur like a hot potato at the first sign of trouble. As the authorities also encourage the borrowing of money from co-ethnics (knowing the banks are reluctant), which most of my respondents had done, they also wash their hands of any trouble that might obtain in that area. Should a business based at least partially on support from the ethnic network fail, the ensuing problems may entail much more than just paying back loans. As the "enforcement capabilities within the ethnic community are very strong because the opprobrium meted out on offenders has not only moral but material implications" (Portes & Zhou 1992:514), one outcome may be losing one’s standing within the community. Oscar Pripp found in his study hints of the importance of honour,
trust and the effects of rumours, good as well as bad ones (2001:127–129 and 134ff). Needless to say, under certain conditions, when one feels that the ethnic community is all one has left, for example, losing the confidence of one’s co-ethnics may be the worst thing that can happen.

Feeling empathy with one’s respondents and anger at those who, or that which, affects their lives negatively will influence how one shapes one’s arguments. A fear I have is that in emphasising the structural aspects, I forfeit the possibility of presenting the respondents as the agents they are. On the other hand, I am convinced of the importance of exposing the structural factors, as otherwise the ball is back in the court of the “immigrants” and it becomes up to them to “make it”, as if societal structures have nothing to do with possibilities, opportunities or even the “realities” of everyday life. Ethnologists have long rallied around on the one hand the perspective of agency and on the other hand cultural relativism. According to Bäckman and Ekström this “contributes to the ethnological interest tending, to an alarmingly great degree, to move away from structures and the consequences of people’s choices” (2001:166), to instead emphasise the subjective experience of reality. My ambition to maintain the perspective of agency, but also to express an explicit standpoint in the matter of prejudices and misconceptions connected to notions of ethnic difference for example, will have consequences for “how /I regard/ central ethnological problems, like for example the relationship between agent and structure and questions connected to people’s possible subordination and degree of influence on their own lives” (2001:166). Perhaps this is why I expounded on the “expert” interviews so much in Chapter 2, even though in the course of the project that part was relatively minor. I cannot shake off the feeling that this is the level on which influence can be exerted, that where structural power resides is where the battle can take place. Still, bringing the testimonies of the self-employed, the women and the immigrants to the fore can only consolidate other material, and add faces to the stories.

Discrimination, continued

The immigrant women experienced discrimination both when looking for jobs and when trying to start their own. Two of them express the conviction that not only their ethnicity, but also their gender put them in a marginalised position on the labour market. While working temporarily in various jobs, Pega found that her chances for permanent employment or advancement were non-existent. At the last job interview of many that Meygol went to, she was told that her accent precluded her employment. “It was so terrible for me and I thought that I can’t get a
job in Sweden.” In both her and Pega’s cases, these experiences eventually led to the women starting their own businesses. Meygol encountered an additional level of discrimination by entering into a male dominated business area – not only did the banks not believe in her capabilities, but her customers assume it is her boyfriend who is the owner of the mobile phone shop as well as the one with the technical know-how.

Dilber is another immigrant woman who has faced discrimination. She looked for work as a seamstress both in the beginning and at the end of the eighties, when jobs were quite abundant, but was offered none of the positions she applied for. One woman, who later changed her mind, actually told Dilber she would not have a Turk working for her. Even after she opened her own clothes shop, Dilber would hear people outside deciding not to go in as they could tell she was a foreigner. “I heard it myself. ‘Don’t go in, she’s a foreigner.’” This kind of incident eventually led her to move her shop to premises in an immigrant-dominated area. Despite these experiences, however, Dilber refuses to call discrimination by name. “No, there is /this/ in the whole world. One can’t complain about everyone . . . I found it fun here, that’s why I came here. I thought it could be fun – we’re all foreigners. Speak one’s own language sometimes.” She laughs at the incidents and denies that she would feel like a foreigner or an outsider.

Commentary
In the interview with Dilber, I brought the issue of discrimination up after hearing her stories. Even after I explicitly used the term, she just dismissed it with the above comments. Dilber’s account, in my opinion, expresses agency in the sense of making choices – she has decided there is no point in complaining about “everyone”, since “this” exists everywhere, and she chose to move her shop because of the way it could benefit her. On the other hand (ping pong again) I also see it as a way of empowering an action that could otherwise be seen as a defeat. Her “twisting” of perspective can nevertheless be considered a sign of agency. During our interview, Dilber at length told me about her initial run-in and later close relationship to the lady who at first, and very rudely, refused to employ her. The elderly woman had no qualms about letting Dilber know how she felt about “Turks”. Dilber stood her ground and explained that for a start she was not really Turkish, but of Azerbaijani origin, and that she was good at what she did. After some altercation, the woman asked her the name of the Prime Minister of Azerbaijan and said Dilber could come back the next day. When she did so, it turned out the lady had phoned the authorities to find out if the
name Dilber had given her actually was the Prime Minister. As it was, she gave Dilber a chance. Dilber laughed heartily when she told me the story that I, at first, reacted strongly to because of the ill-mannered way in which the woman had behaved. It turned out that the two became close friends and still meet regularly to talk and argue. Pervading most everything that Dilber talked about, was her dry and, to a degree, cynical sense of humour. It took me a while to discover that she used it as a strategy for handling potentially tough situations, and that by doing so she maintained control over her own life. Dilber determined what her experiences were and expressed her empowerment and agency through choosing her own definitions.

Discrimination, continued
The Swedish women express no awareness of discrimination. They all started their businesses after or during regular employment and did not need to take any loans, thus minimising their contact with institutions such as the employment exchange or banks. Nevertheless, it appears that to a certain extent they were encouraged precisely because of their sex, and that their “female qualities” were assumed to be to their advantage.

An interesting case on this theme is Dinah, a Syrian woman who came to Sweden as a young teenager and thus attended a few years of regular Swedish school before entering the labour market. Her story indicates experiences of discrimination, but she does not label them as such. When finishing school her marks were not good enough for her to enter the hairdressing programme, so she was advised to do secretarial studies instead. Dinah chose to pursue her dream anyway and found work as a trainee. After two years she had the credits she needed and did the one-year hairdresser’s course. Later, after working for several years, she decided to start her own. “I worked the whole time at big salons and I thought the atmosphere wasn’t at all the way I would have had it. It was just customer in, customer out. There was no contact with the customers.” However, when she presented her business plan to the employment exchange, they denied her support on the grounds that she had already signed a contract for premises. The advisor presented this to her as a rule she had broken and rejected her application. Dinah thinks it is a stupid rule, but blames herself for breaking it. She also believes the advisor used it as an excuse to deny her support, but sees it as a strategy for sorting out those who will make it anyway from those who really need the help. In her view the reason was that she spoke good Swedish and already had a foot in on the labour market and thus was in no acute need.
of support. Dinah’s way of interpreting her experiences can be analysed from the perspective of her having taken on a “Swedish” attitude, which in general includes believing that everyone, regardless of sex or origin, has the same opportunities. Though she considers herself Syrian, in this situation she sees herself as Swedish and treated as such. The comparison between the Swedish and the immigrant women’s differing experiences also tallies with the distinction made between them as two different “types” of women.

Commentary

The question then is what “type” of woman Dinah is? She is an immigrant in the sense that she came to Sweden from Syria. She is a “second generation immigrant” in the sense that she arrived as a child and thus had a chance to “become Swedish” before adulthood. She can be considered Swedish in that she has the experience, school and work, and the skills, language and orientation in society, to navigate with expertise both socially and on the labour market. So what is she? Placing her in the category of “second generation immigrant” would appear to allow for “us” to make a choice – depending on what suits “us” best at the time, she is treated either as an immigrant or as a Swede. It also allows for Dinah herself to make that choice. In some situations she chooses to “be” Syrian, in others she sees herself as (treated as) a Swede.

Perhaps it is significant that Dinah is one of the respondents who does not “call discrimination by name”. She is successful and relied mainly on herself to get to where she is today. In the same way, Arash, hugely successful, is a self-made man. Though they both utilised family support, they did not need to become dependent on social policies. Maybe that makes it easier to avoid the issue of discrimination, although they are both aware of it affecting others. Pega – does call discrimination by name and has faced it both among potential clients and previously on the labour market. Is still dependent on labour market policies. Dilber – does not want to call her experiences discriminatory, and did not utilise policies to start her business. This is really very speculative, I am certainly not sure this would “stand up in court”, though it seems worth thinking about. Self-reliance as an antidote for self-victimisation? What does that then do to the actual phenomenon of discrimination (which we know exists)? “Are there no other conditions than those which the agents themselves admit and name? Can one not be subordinate if one does not experience one’s own subordination?” (Bäckman & Ekström 2001:172). If everyone were given control over his/her life, would discrimination disappear? Is it gone if no one acknowledges it? Risky busi-
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ness. As Inger Lövkrona once wrote about the internalisation of a traditional and gendered division of labour: “The fact that women /do/ not consider themselves oppressed or subordinate is still not the same as structures of oppression not existing” (1990:13).

\textit{Discrimination, last bit}

Immigrant women are often seen as less modern, even primitive, less educated and much more tradition-bound than Swedish women. This results in them being recommended to start businesses within traditionally female areas, such as cooking, sewing, caring for children or the elderly, cleaning, and handicrafts. Though the suggestion is often well-intentioned, being based on the premise that the women will not get work on the Swedish labour market within their professions anyway and that they may as well use what other skills they have, it is nevertheless a form of discrimination.

Discrimination can also be found in the projects started by employment exchanges and district administrations. Unemployed women of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as well as women spanning the whole range of educational levels, are often brought together to start co-operatives in areas traditionally associated with women’s work, for example cooking.

\textit{Education and skills}

Education as such seems to have little to do with the decision to start one’s own business. Unwillingness to start studying all over again because one’s degree or training is not accepted is certainly a motivation, but discrimination strikes persons of all educational levels and even those with very little formal education start their own when facing long-term unemployment and welfare dependency. However, the insight that one’s skills and knowledge are of less interest to the authorities or potential employers than one’s ethnicity or gender, is disconcerting to say the least. Taner recalls one of the few interviews he was called to: “I went to the interview and it became nothing. Unfortunately, despite having eight years’ experience, it was a newly graduated Swedish guy got the job”. In the case of the immigrant women working in co-operative businesses, their levels of education are clearly deemed irrelevant. The projects are top-down initiated and are designed with an underlying assumption of inherent skills of immigrant women – they are assumed to have enough skills in cooking, for example, to be suited for the job. There are, of course, women who want to cook and enjoy it, but there
are also those who would rather have jobs more in line with their education, but cannot get any. This of course ties in with a general discriminatory attitude toward immigrants.

It is true for both immigrant men and women that many of their university degrees are not accepted in Sweden. They are told they have to start more or less from the beginning again, regardless of whether they already have Ph.D.s or other significant degrees from their home countries, or even from Germany or the U.S. in some cases. A few have started studying within their fields again, or taken up other subjects, but more often than not they have quit in order to start a business instead. Hossein came to Sweden with a Masters and a Ph.D. from Iran. Despite this, he had to start over again: "Here I studied at the university almost four terms and developed immunology and genetics and such things to go on and study a Ph.D. . . . again . . . another one . . . It didn't work. For me it was a little hard to one more time sit and study all the time and live on student loans and so". The sense of insult is strong and the idea that a business would allow them to be independent and in control is one motivating factor for becoming self-employed. Some of them say that if they had known this about Sweden, they would have fled or moved to the U.S. or Britain instead, where their degrees are accepted. The fact that even those immigrants with degrees from universities in Sweden find it very difficult, if not impossible, to get jobs indicates that the problem is even more complex.

The Swedish women also have varying degrees of education. What distinguishes them from the immigrant men and women is their knowledge of and familiarity with the Swedish system. Another facilitating factor in starting a business is a long work history in the country. Again Dinah fits into this category as she has indeed worked within her profession before starting her own business. Taking one's professional skills with one into a self-employment situation is easier when one is already familiar with that niche on the labour market. Even more helpful are the networks established through employment and even just living in a country for the greater part of one's life. Clients are then easier to come by and can even be brought along from one's previous place of employment, as in the case of Alice, one of the Swedish women. When she found herself ready to start her own consulting business, she took one of her clients to lunch. "I asked him 'if I leave this company will you still engage me, if I start my own company?' And then he said 'yes, we go with people, not companies.'" However, having a good education still appears to help even when the business is not connected to one's profession or training.
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Commentary

In view of the above section, I would like here to recap some of the arguments used within the discourse on competence deficiency, and also to introduce a new concept – that of "economic racism" (Mattsson 2001:246). The discourse on competence deficiency is used to polemise against research which claims that ethnic discrimination and depreciation of immigrants' professional competencies are a usual cause for immigrants' difficulties in getting work (2001:244). One of the discourse's two main arguments is the one about the increased cultural distance between immigrants (especially the non-European or even non-Western immigrants) and "natives". The other argument is about changes on the labour market which have led to a new need for flexibility, independence, individual work, and communication with others – needs which in turn have led to the increased importance of individual qualities such as social competence and language skills (2001:244). When the two arguments are combined it becomes clear that the root of the problem is considered to be that the "immigrants" do not possess either the formal or informal qualifications, such as "culturally specific skills" and "Sweden-specific competence" (2001:244), required today. Mattsson studies this economic research from a "postcolonial concept of racism" (2001:245), and finds a circular reasoning that legitimises the exclusion of "immigrants" from the labour market. Within economic (human capital) theory the market is described as neutrally distributing wages and career possibilities to the most competent. It is therefore reasonable to view differences in levels of occupation and wages between different groups as an effect of differences in competence and productivity. Logically, there follows the stereotypical descriptions of the "Others" and grossly generalised notions of cultural differences (2001:245–246). These then preclude employment, for rational reasons. Economic racism, then, is a racist discourse which fetches some of its assumptions and arguments from economic theories and terminology – a "discourse which offers a certain way to understand and speak about immigrants and Swedes, a kind of unequivocal fixation of the meaning within the area of immigration and labour market" (2001:246). The term could easily, I feel, have been an alternative heading for the above section.

The decision

There are of course many reasons for the decision to become self-employed. The respondents who have been unemployed have most often made that decision based on the insight that they will not find regular employment on the Swedish labour market. They have faced open as
well as hidden discrimination, courses and trainee-ships that do not lead to satisfactory jobs, if any at all, and boredom and loneliness combined with welfare dependency.

For the Swedish women, the motivations for becoming self-employed are different. They would either like to go further than their employment can take them, or they have a dream they would like to fulfil. This also applies to Dinah, the immigrant woman who has been in Sweden since she was a young teenager and thus has a school and work history in the country. Significant for this kind of self-employment process is that the respondent has a profound knowledge of the Swedish labour market, an extensive network both privately and through work, as well as social and cultural capital. Those who have been employed or have been studying have chosen to start their own in order to get further and in order to develop their own ideas within their professions. With the exception of two of the Swedish women and Dinah, these individuals have either faced an uncertain future after studies they did not want to repeat in the first place, or found that they have only been offered unsatisfactory jobs. The Swedish women and Dinah have instead reached a point in their professional careers where it is more rewarding to be self-employed and independent. Alice puts it like this: “and then I felt ready to fly. I thought ‘I can do this myself’”.

In a few cases, the more flexible work hours of self-employment were desired in order to combine work with caring for the family and household. This was only mentioned by women, however, and turned out to be more difficult to realise than they had originally believed. Fary (from Pakistan) is one of the women who chose self-employment in order to have the time she needed for her family. “It’s still a little... well one can’t say hard, but still it’s a bit tough and on Saturdays and Sundays he [the husband] sits in the shop. I take care of the home, children, care and everything. The wash and that.” In a couple of cases, self-employment was prevalent in the respondents’ backgrounds, either their own or their families’, making the decision to start a business more of an obvious one.

Summary
These are the main factors that contributed to the decision to become self-employed:

Discrimination – on a structural and individual level as well as based on either ethnicity or gender or both. The respondents faced discrimination in applying for jobs, in contacts with authorities, and regarding their degrees, professions and skills.
The non-acceptance of university degrees and the fact that previous work experience does not seem to count.

As a corollary to the above, the seeming impossibility of getting a job on the Swedish labour market, or at least a job that is not of a low-status, low-income nature.

Not wanting to succumb to welfare dependency and passivity. The respondents have also spoken of boredom, isolation, the desire to do good, and to pay one’s way.

A desire to get ahead, to move on and develop. This applies both to those who were either studying (again) or were only offered unsatisfactory jobs and to the Swedish women who saw it as a natural next step in their careers.

Independence and flexible work hours. This was mentioned by a couple of the women, but is rather contradictory to the reality they actually face.

Policy impact on the self-employment project

This section is simply split into the two categories of those who started their businesses with the utilisation of policy support and those who did it without. The analysis of what the policy impact has been on the self-employment project also renders implications for policy evaluation.

Non-policy

Those who started their businesses without policy support were either those who chose to do it that way – the Swedish women and two immigrant women whose husbands had a good economic situation – or else those who were denied support and borrowed from friends and relatives instead. The dependence on the family or the ethnic network is not exclusive to this group; even those who did receive policy support have most often had to borrow additional capital from other sources.

The Swedish women used strategies adapted to how the labour market works as well as their social capital to start their businesses, rather than any policy support systems. The amount of money invested was small, if indeed any initial capital was needed at all. Elin concedes that when she started her business she already had contacts, she had an economic situation that allowed for it, and she did not need help or advice at all. “I had a great situation. I was on leave of absence from the school [where she was employed as a teacher], I lived at home, I was married /and/ provided for in that way, so I could invest. There were many that said ‘God you’re brave’. I wasn’t brave at all! I just stuck my neck out a
little to see, test if this . . . But I took no risks economically, not like these immigrant women who have nothing.” In general, starting out modestly and then expanding in step with the profits and the increased clientele appears to be a good recipe for a successful business. The same recipe was used by some of the immigrants who started without policy support as well. Starting out at home on a small scale, or while studying or employed, means one can afford to reinvest any profits into the business and thus gradually grow to a point where the risk of failure is less than it would have been the first year.

In most of the non-policy cases, there was also a solid economic situation in the family. This means both that the individual, or the spouse, can cover any losses incurred, but also that bank loans are much easier to get. If one can show that the financial situation is such that there are no problems in paying back the loan, the bank has no reason to deny the loan, whatever one needs it for. If, however, one has a business plan with no guarantees, a rejection is more likely.

Summary
For those who have started businesses without policy support, there are several aspects that seem to combine to make it work. Stubbornness is one factor, a strong determination another. The importance of the ethnic or family network cannot be underestimated as it is often a source of support, financial and otherwise; especially if the respondents are refused by the institutions of Swedish society. A positive aspect of this is mentioned by Dinah. She says that when one borrows from friends or family, one really puts one’s heart into the business in order to make it work. One does, however, also need to be strategic. Nevertheless, all of the above factors also apply to the respondents who started with policy support.

Policy
All except one of the respondents who utilised the start-your-own or other policies to start their businesses were unemployed at the time of making their decision to become self-employed. The exception, Pega, was working as a home-language teacher, but was dissatisfied with the prospect of being stuck in that job. Respondents who have started with the support of self-employment policies and programmes present a very mixed picture. The overriding impression is, however, that the policies are not nearly enough to insure a successful start to a new business.

For those who used available policies of support to start their businesses there were advantages as well as disadvantages. Courses provided in “how to start your own business” were only expressly attended in one
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case, Pega's. These courses have nonetheless been mentioned in discussions on courses in general and were viewed disparagingly as yet another measure that led nowhere. "Start-your-own" benefits are considered of help in the first months to a year of self-employment, but are definitely not enough. In all cases, other financial sources have been sought to finance the business. Lisa (who calls herself Yugoslavian) was one of the lucky ones in that she not only got a loan from a neighbour, but also got a supplement from the social welfare office. "Since the "start-your-own" allowance was 3,700 (Swedish Kronor) and one can't pay rent and live on that and start a business, so the social supplemented it for six months."

The benefits are of course only meant as a support, not complete financing, but are still considered a source of irritation. They are calculated according to the applicant's previous income, or are, in case of unemployment, at a basic minimum. This often puts immigrants at a disadvantage as they seldom have had any income prior to starting their business. In the case of an immigrant woman starting a business in partnership with a Swedish woman, the former received three thousand Kronor a month in "start-your-own" benefits and the latter received eight thousand. The benefits also appear to be arbitrarily distributed, often without any clear policy rules or knowledge of the actual market situation. In some cases they appear to be handed out indiscriminately, resulting in an over-saturation of the local market as well as ill advised and doomed-to-fail businesses. Taner talks about the multitude of shops in the shopping centre where he is located. "I mean there are three . . . in this small place . . . toy shops. How are we supposed to compete with each other? Should we kill each other business-wise?" In the area in general there are nineteen food shops. "Can you imagine? Nineteen. It's insane." In other cases applicants are denied the benefits on flimsy grounds such as having already signed a contract for premises. One respondent is facing bankruptcy and loss of his apartment as he cannot be allocated welfare benefits when self-employed, whereas another was given both benefits as she otherwise could not pay the rent.

Another example of inconsistency in the implementation of rules, as well as of a disregard for the market situation, is the case of the above mentioned shopping centre. It is run by the landlord, a housing company, in conjunction with the city district administration, and the immigrant shopkeepers seem to have differing rules and regulations imposed on them. Some are forced, by contract, to stay open seven days a week, whereas others have been exempted from the rule. Dinah is one of the few who could influence what days she was going to keep the salon open, perhaps due to a better knowledge of her possibilities and rights. "We
have an exemption for Sundays. I refused . . . I was allowed to have the
place closed. I wouldn’t sign the contract if it had to be open on Sun-
days.” In some cases contracts have been changed, allowing specific
shopkeepers to expand their range of wares, whereas in others the au-
thorities are inflexible and limiting. Due to the saturation of several of
the markets in the area, e.g. gift shops, grocery shops and hairdressers,
many of the shopkeepers are struggling, and yet the landlords are raising
the rent. Instead of listening to the experienced shopkeepers who know
what the demands among the residents are, they allow new shops in,
shops that have very little chance of surviving.

In seeking additional financing for their businesses, many respon-
dents have turned to banks, only to be refused loans. Meygol relates “the
bank said that ‘we can’t give you a loan’ because my income was too
low”. Even the bank that agreed her business plan was very good refused
to help. “This line of business is for guys and men. I am a woman, and
that influenced them that I can’t work in this business. On the other
hand, I think that if I were a Swedish woman it would be easier for me to
get a loan from the bank.” Two organisations have nevertheless proven
to be helpful in starting new businesses as well as in helping to secure
loans. Early on IFS, the Swedish Association of Ethnic Entrepreneurs,
started collaboration with ALMI, a state-run credit company. IFS has
become an important player in supporting immigrants in starting their
own businesses. It employs advisors of many ethnic backgrounds who
help the applicants formulate their business plans in their mother
tongue before guiding them into the Swedish system. A problem seems
to be that not many of the first authorities immigrants come into contact
with, namely the employment exchanges, know about or recommend
turning to IFS for support. The same goes for ALMI. In some cases
respondents were advised to try to get loans there, in others the state-
owned credit company was not mentioned at all. When IFS started up,
the credit ALMI extended to immigrant ventures made up only a very
small percentage of its total business, but now, some years later, around
20–25% is via IFS funnelled in that direction.

The other organisation is Företagarhuset, a subsection of the district
administration in one of the suburbs studied, which works directly with
new enterprises and provides support in many forms. The combination
of providing offices and stock rooms at low rents as well as necessary
telephones, fax machines, etc. with the exchange the entrepreneurs have
with each other and the organisation consultants appears to be very
positive. In addition of course, the collaboration with a savings bank has
been a boost. The bank in question has not only made a policy of em-
ploying clerks and advisors with foreign backgrounds, but has also opened a branch office in Företagarhuset itself, thus being able to support, follow, and invest in the businesses. Pega describes her relationship to the branch office: “They see that we continue and we grow and grow and they are very optimistic. /.../ And we have become friends with each other and they trust us. And that’s why I could get a big loan from them because they see we are growing. Yes, it works”. Many respondents, however, have had to rely solely on their family, friends and ethnic network to cover costs.

**Co-operative ventures**

In the last phase of the project I wrote a paper on “Collective self-employment of migrant women in Sweden” (Mason 2000). As it addresses several of the issues and themes brought up previously I find it relevant to include a summary of the paper here.

**Commentary**

The meetings and interviews that led to the paper on collective self-employment were somewhat peripheral to the task we had been set, but they gave me some of my most significant insights as well as cherished memories from the whole three project years. Zita and Erica were involved in a catering project in one of the city districts and Sabina had joined a restaurant project in the other. I met them all early on in the project and went to visit either one or the other establishment almost every time I was in Stockholm. We would eat together and talk, sometimes “officially”, but more often than not in a relaxed and familiar manner without a tape recorder present. As the project task was to carry out forty-two separate interviews and not to do any follow-ups, it was really chance that brought me on to this path.
Zita and Erica were two of my respondents for the preliminary interviews during the first phase of the project. The catering service was moving at the time, so the meeting with them took place on run-down and almost empty premises, and I did not get any feel for what they were actually working with. As the tape of my conversation with Zita was of terrible quality anyway, I decided to repeat that interview and take the opportunity to find out where they had ended up and how it was going.

The second meeting with Zita did not turn out the way I had expected. I had not made it clear that I wanted a “repeat performance” of our first meeting, so when I arrived I was hustled into the coffee-room and soon found myself in animated conversation with all five women that worked in the catering project at the time. Their stories, both personal and work-related, and their questions to me about what I could do to alleviate their situation gave me plenty to think about. They also taught me that partaking in a self-employment project that was instigated and run by someone else – the district administration – was something other than making the decision and implementing it by and for oneself. Intrigued by the complexity of the matter, I not only kept in touch, especially with Zita, but also chose their two mentors, Alice and Elin, as respondents for the category “self-employed Swedish women”. I also went to see Sabina (who had also provided me with a preliminary interview) again, as she was in a similar situation in the other city district.

Having the role of “researcher” makes being a friend difficult. There is always the tension between the genuine care one feels along with the good times one has and the knowledge, on both sides, that whatever happens and whatever is said could be material for scientific texts. Nevertheless, I was always greeted with warmth, treated to wonderful food, and very quickly developed a personal interest in the women’s well-being.
Collective self-employment of migrant women in Sweden – Biographical projects and policy measures

Introduction

The paper presents a picture of collective self-employment of migrant women in Sweden. The focus is on two co-operatives started as part of the self-employment drive launched in 1995. As unemployment among immigrants had risen steadily during the first years of the 1990’s, various steps were taken to alleviate the situation. In addition to general labour market measures to support and facilitate the starting of new small businesses, some programmes and projects were also initiated to specifically provide occupations for unemployed immigrant women. The paper starts out by presenting a brief overview of the relevant programmes and then introduces members of the two mentioned co-operatives. The individual biographical projects are outlined by following the changes and developments of the co-operatives and of the women, as described by themselves in consecutive interviews as well as in more casual meetings. In the final section, the biographical impact and implications for policy measures are brought together in a discussion on lessons that can be learned from the presented material.

In order to understand the policy implications, it is important to have an idea of what the point of departure for setting up co-operative projects (or indeed any projects aimed at promoting self-employment) is. As mentioned in the first report, the Employment programme Integra was the one most specifically aimed at immigrants. In its Supplement (1997–1999) it says:

Two principal lines are emphasised in the new national priorities for Integra and for a future strategy for the integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities into the labour market and society.

Firstly, the potential possessed by many immigrants for initiative, entrepreneurial spirit, and owning their own businesses should be developed and afforded favourable conditions. ... For these groups, the aim should be the free-market sector where immigrants can contribute by creating growth and new employment. The desire to be self-employed and confidence in one’s own social and economic networks should be stimulated and given institutional frameworks that provide possibilities for economic expansion. The creation of innovative and creative milieus for the target group is, therefore, one of the principal tasks of the projects.

Secondly, those immigrants who are far removed from the regular
labour market, due to a very poor educational background, weak or non-existent knowledge of Swedish, and a cultural and social dissociation from the society of the majority, should be given the possibility to develop activities, within the social economy, for new forms of employment, and new products and services. For these low-productivity groups, the aim is an initially sheltered sector, wherein work is performed under reasonable conditions, and which in the long-term leads to the highest possible level of self-sufficiency. (Supplement 1997–1999:2).

These two lines are worth keeping in mind, as their underlying assumptions as well as explicit aims have consequences that will become clearer later on (in this particular section of this report; but they ought also to bring additional light to the political discourses behind the whole self-employment drive). Integra was aimed at generally promoting self-employment among immigrants, but did not clearly specify collective self-employment. Nevertheless, its second line does hint at its possibility, though mainly as a transitional stage.

Reading between the lines

It was in connection with writing this paper that I seriously, and much more critically, started to reread the official documents related to the project and the various relevant policies. I studied them more closely, trying to read between the lines, and discovered ethnocentric discourses coursing throughout the material. The Integra text above caught my attention quite early on, but in my later perusals I also found other texts indicating that pre-determined categorisations, definitions and stereotypes continue to be the basis of policy documents. To start with, however, I reacted to the stereotypical notions of immigrants in the Integra text. As mentioned earlier, stereotyping reduces, essentialises, naturalises and fixes “difference” (Hall 1997b:258). Some of the levels this occurs on are when speaking of for example “women”, “immigrants” and “immigrant women”. These concepts evoke immediate associations that all too often accompany official documents and recommendations from authorities. In the example above some of a profusion of stereotypical ideas about immigrants and their propensity for running their own businesses are presented.

Despite the fact that the Integra document as a whole displays an awareness of discrimination, hostility to strangers, labour market changes and other aspects that affect the immigrants’ situation, a stra-
strategy of making good use of “their entrepreneurial spirit” and their own networks is emphasised instead of further problematising the situation and perhaps taking measures to support the immigrants’ entry into the regular labour market. It is assumed that “they” have a “desire to be self-employed” and this desire is to be aimed at the free-market sector where they “can contribute”. For this to happen, “we” have to create “innovative and creative milieus” for them. In my opinion, the whole passage is patronising and condescending in its tone. The ethnocentric aspect involves reducing the “Other” to something less than ourselves, which puts, or keeps, “us” in a position of power, perhaps with the idea of an accompanying responsibility of taking care of “them” – a colonial relic of “the white man’s burden” of civilising and developing the underdeveloped (Eriksson Baaz 2001:168). According to Hall, stereotyping is a set of representational practices (1997b:257). These practices include “splitting” (1997b:258), a strategy one can find in the Integra Proposal. By distinguishing between “us that are in possession of the regular labour market” and “those who are good at being self-employed”, boundaries are set up that both include and exclude. Power is a clear factor in this practice. “Stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power” and ethnocentrism is an aspect of that power (1997b:258). By seeing our own culture as normal and applying our own values and norms on other cultures, we can quite easily discern “the others” and label them with qualities that promote our own hegemony.

Introduction, continued

There are various forms of co-operatives. One is the work co-operative, an independent form of self-employment. It has its basis in the need to support oneself and is started in order to provide the members with work by developing and running a business. Work co-operatives exist in most business areas and produce both wares and services. A special form of work co-operative is the social work co-operative. These are formed to satisfy the need for an occupation and social togetherness based on the members’ interests, abilities, and needs, for groups of people who due to various disorders or handicaps have difficulties in securing work on the open market. The social work co-operatives often have a rehabilitating ambition and are financed mainly through public funds (KIC+ website). This is the kind of activity implied in Integra’s line two, and one that is manifested in co-operative work centres.

Co-operative work centres are not restricted to the target groups specified above, however. Well-educated and skilled immigrants with
Struggles and aspirations

perfectly good Swedish and without any disorders or handicaps whatsoever also have great difficulties in entering the labour market, despite more new jobs being created in Stockholm today than in a long time. It appears traditional schooling and measures are not enough. The idea is that at co-operatively run work centres there is the possibility of developing business and venture ideas together, based on personal and joint knowledge and experiences as well as on local conditions. With the support of societal resources, education and training can be alternated with work in order to increase the individual’s prospects for employment or continued work in co-operative form. The model requires a long-term perspective and flexibility, and must be developed locally in collaboration with the municipality, employment exchange and others.

On a local level, the usual place to go, if one wants to start one’s own business, is the employment exchange. There one can receive advice and consultation, but also information about other organisations that may be of help in the process. A method used in the drive to promote self-employment is that the employment exchange has itself, on occasion very strongly, recommended unemployed persons to join a project or course that is intended to lead to self-employment. These projects or courses are sometimes run by the employment exchange itself, but also quite often in collaboration with other authorities such as the city district administration, the social insurance office, or the social welfare office. As the labour market measures for the promotion of self-employment are locally adapted and implemented, their form and focus vary from suburb to suburb. In general, the co-operative alternative for self-employment seems not to have been suggested, or followed through, to any great extent. However, there are specific exceptions. In two of the areas that have been focused in my study, co-operatives have been one attempt to alleviate the unemployment situation for immigrant women.

The Catering Service

The instigator in one area was Camilla, one of my “expert” respondents. In the drive to support self-employment, co-operatives were a main form for new businesses – some of the initially successful, or at least presented as successful, operations included a catering business, a gardening and seed business, and a co-op service especially set up to create new service co-operatives aimed at the economically well-off, but bare and meagre industrial area. I write “were” as only one of the co-operatives still exists, The Catering Service.

The Catering Service group held eleven members at the start, but by
the time I did my first interviews with two of them (in the autumn of 1997), there were only five women left. Those five, four from Iran and one from Gambia, were determined to stay and to make a success of the catering firm. Today, there are three women left and the business is doing relatively well. The impression is that things have settled and the future looks clear, but there have been many twists and turns along the way. I will let my repeated interviews and meetings with one of the women delineate one biographical project, the biographical impact the venture has had on her, as well as the turbulent course the venture itself has taken since its start-up in 1996.

Reading between the lines – again

Before introducing you, the reader, more properly to Zita, I intend to briefly analyse another bit of text. This time it is part of the project Proposal, and it addresses the advantage of doing biographical interviews. It claims that by using the biographical method “we will not only gain access to the experience and views of the concerned social groups, but also to the ways in which macro factors impact on biographies. Through the biographical method it can be analysed how individuals acting within the complexity of structural-objective factors and social policies are socialised in specific directions which, in turn, directly affect their occupational development, their strategies adopted against exclusion and towards integration” (TSER Proposal 1997:12. My italics). This paragraph in the project Proposal appears a little contradictory. First of all the individuals involved are "acting within" the complexity of social policies on their own accord, but then become "socialised in specific directions" which affects "their strategies". It seems to indicate, though no doubt unintentionally, that whatever agency the individuals possess is hampered by the socialisation imposed on them by – what? Perhaps by the very social policies and structures that inform and delineate their possibilities and, it would appear, determine their occupational development.

Another part of the Proposal text states that the collection of life- and work-histories will be taken from "samples of women and migrants who /.../ have shown a strong motivation to self-employment through participation in programmes geared to active social integration” (TSER Proposal 1997:9). This sentence exposes another recurring assumption, that there is a connection between self-employment and social integration. That participation in “programmes geared to active social inte-
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"Acculturation" means one is motivated to being self-employed. Perhaps the intention and assumption of the policies is that one leads to the other, but the situation at least in Sweden is not always one of voluntary participation. Often enough self-employment is portrayed as possibly the only way out of long-term unemployment and the individual is exhorted to partake in the courses and programmes toward that end. In certain cases it is too risky not to participate as this may lead to the loss of unemployment benefits. I may be overly critical of the wording of the text, but I find it important to note the power imbalance implicit in the structures of these operations. "The cultural construction of politics can be said to originate in how flows of people, merchandise, capital and information are organised and reorganised in different time and place contexts. Here one can of course point out that the organisation of the flow is based on a form of exercise of power" (Nilsson F. 1999:85). What one is led to believe is the best plan, or what is even normalised as the best plan, may in fact be a political discourse relevant only at a specific time and in a specific place, or even based on political motivations beyond the matter at hand. Orientating (groups of) people and their possibilities in only certain directions, limiting their choices, is a way of exercising power over them and their lives.

The Catering Service, continued

Zita was born and raised in Iran by parents in the teaching profession. She also studied to become a teacher and worked at a primary school for eighteen years before having to flee to Sweden due to her political involvement. Zita arrived in Sweden in 1991 together with the youngest of her three children. After two years in a refugee installation she was denied asylum and in desperation went into hiding with her child. They spent a year living with various friends and moving around between them. The experience was very traumatic for both Zita and her child, both of whom needed psychiatric care on several occasions. In order to keep busy and stay sane, Zita secretly studied Swedish and worked on the radio and newspapers of some ethnic Iranian associations during this ordeal. Eventually, in 1994, she was granted asylum and received her residence permit.

At this point she could bring the rest of her family to her and also start to officially study Swedish in a "Swedish for immigrants" course. However, life did not necessarily get any easier with her new status. Zita and her husband divorced, leaving her to manage on her own with three children, two of whom were already teenagers when they arrived in Sweden. Adjusting to the new life proved difficult and has taken time. An
added dilemma was that she and her children had no way of becoming part of the Swedish community, as there were no Swedes where they lived. For nearly two years Zita persevered in her studies, complementing her “Swedish for immigrants” with extra courses within adult education, all in order to improve her chances of getting a job. She knew there was no point in trying to get a job as a teacher, so she hoped her studies and her continued volunteer work for the ethnic associations would pay off.

In 1996 she was finished and spent six months unemployed before she received notice of The Catering Service project through the employment exchange. At first she did not even know what “catering” was—the word was new to her, though not the concept. The requirements for taking part in the project were adequate Swedish, an interest in cooking, and the ability to spend long hours and weekends on the job. “I didn’t have much interest in cooking, actually, but I had three children to support and knew that jobs were not easy to come by, so I joined up.” The catering project was not necessarily what she had dreamed of, but it would keep her busy, she would learn things through the studying, and she hoped it would lead somewhere. Zita was put in charge of administration and customer relations. This was probably due to her previous education and skills as well as her good Swedish. As Zita’s children were relatively big, they could look after themselves when the need arose. For quite a few of the other women, however, the situation became too demanding time-wise, and they eventually dropped out.

At the end of the first interview, the impression is that Zita not only enjoys her work, but also takes great pride in what the team has accomplished and sees a successful future ahead of them. The project had got off to a great start. Two mentors were involved, Swedish women who themselves were self-employed in the consulting and catering businesses and they had done a great job with the marketing. There was a lot of PR and the newspapers and television reported about the venture. When asked about integration, however, whether the move onto the labour market had also led to a greater social integration, Zita said no. She had even taken the chance of moving to a “better” area, with terraced houses and villas and an almost exclusively Swedish population, in order for her children, especially, to become part of the Swedish community. The move was not a success, though. She said “now my children are angry with me and want to move back to the old place, because at least there they had friends, even if they weren’t Swedish”.

During a brief social visit to The Catering Service, some time later, all five women and I ended up in the coffee-room for a chat. The women
took the opportunity to turn the tables and ask me questions instead. Who was I, how well versed was I in rules and regulations applicable to their situation, and what could I do to help them, if anything. In the time between the two visits, the co-operative had become independent – the project had come to an end and the women were now self-employed. Information and knowledge required to run the business without support had not been provided to the necessary extent, and the women really had to struggle; to understand how it all worked and to maintain the spirit to keep going. The impression I got was that though they were now “on their own”, the women still did not have the situation fully under control. Customer relations, administrative tasks relating to the actual catering, and of course the cooking itself were all firmly in their hands, but surrounding issues such as tax laws and regulations regarding benefits and allowances were still beyond their sphere of information. These aspects were still handled by the project leaders, though officially they were only members of the board without any practical involvement.

By the time of the second “real” interview, Zita was in the middle of a crisis. The catering business had been independent for some time now, but was still, on a level of contacts, administration, consulting, and general advice, supported by the project leaders. Due to the accountant failing in his duty, however, the economy had founder, the business was up to its neck in debt, and all those involved were trying to save it. Unfortunately this had meant that four of the five women in the economic association had to go, leaving only Zita as self-employed. The other women had been offered work on an hourly basis, but only two had stayed on. Due to the disappointment and the insecurity of the new situation, the other two had chosen to quit completely and go back to unemployment. The economic association was kept intact by some of the project leaders taking the empty positions, but it was a temporary solution and they were only “shadow members”. Zita was downhearted, cried, and wondered how one could trust anybody. Though the business was in fact in a better position to survive, Zita still worried about the future. She feared that the board would decide to sell the whole operation and its now well-known name to “someone bigger with money”. She also had very mixed feelings about being the only one left as owner of the business.

During a later conversation Zita related that she had in fact been sick-listed for quite some time due to the strain she was under, but that she was now back at work on a half-time basis. The financial situation was improving and the business was expanding. They now served lunches on the premises and would also have tables outside during the
summer months. A new contract was being finalised with an airline and they were making a bid for a job at a new indoor swimming baths in the area. Her self-confidence had returned and the business was expanding, despite there only being three women left. Zita was indeed hoping to employ her two colleagues full-time in the near future, something that has in fact happened within the last few months.

While the business was run as a project, despite occasional problems, the only concern for Zita was that it continue and not let the women down. Everything was handled from “above” and the women themselves knew relatively little about the actual running of a business. After becoming independent it became apparent that even the project leadership was not very knowledgeable about self-employment and all that it entailed. Financial problems ensued and the result was basically that the co-operative dissolved. The down-side of the venture was that the project leaders were not too well versed in self-employment themselves, but the up-side is that they continue to support the business and help out where they can. With the contacts and know-how they do possess, this is, according to Zita, still invaluable to the continuation of the business.

Zita has shown strength and perseverance from the beginning of the project. She has had a rough time since fleeing Iran and the catering business was a way to get on her feet again. Her education and good command of Swedish has stood her in good stead as she was put in charge of most of the administration and customer contacts from the beginning. This has also been her saving grace in the present crisis as this is no doubt why she was elected to be the only one to stay on as self-employed when the rest of the co-operative was laid off. She has, however, paid a heavy price for it. Her health and emotional well-being have been compromised and it is not easy to feel that her work-mates and friends have been let down.

The project co-ordinators had little if any experience of starting small businesses or co-operatives. Though two self-employed mentors were brought in, they were also unfamiliar with the obstacles facing those starting out without any initial capital, without any previous business experience (even if only as employees), with few if any contacts outside the ethnic group, with less than perfect Swedish, with little or no idea how the Swedish tax system works, and with a past on the outside of the labour market. Other problems arose. For example, the person hired to look after the economy and book-keeping did not take the business seriously enough and thus did not stay alert to the signs warning that the business could not support five individuals working full time at a full wage. These and other indicators point to the need for project leaders to
be well versed in the business they are supporting as well as in the ways of the market in general. In addition, the project participants need to be taught, or guided, by professionals, and continuously informed so that they themselves are an actual part of the process and not just at the receiving end of a top-down venture.

In September 2000 I met Erica, one of the two women who stayed on against all odds, at a seminar that discussed self-employment from a female perspective. We had time to speak briefly and she told me that she and the third woman were indeed back in the co-operative again. This was of course a positive development, but there are still problems. Two big commissions that had been on the tapis at an earlier date had fallen through. One had been to take on the cafeteria/restaurant at a new swimming baths in the area – according to Erica it would have entailed too much work for the three women and employing more staff is still impossible. The other commission was with an airline. A district administration employee still indirectly attached to The Catering Service and also at the seminar, explained that the hygiene demanded by the airline was impossible to provide in The Catering Service’s small kitchen. The requirement was to sterilise the kitchen before preparing the food and not to have any other dishes being prepared at the same time. For a catering business with many orders and one small kitchen, this was of course not a viable alternative. A bigger kitchen is still being sought, but until the economic situation is resolved no expansion or development either in premises or number of staff can be realised. Taxes are at this point still the main problem, but the hope is that the issue will be resolved by next spring. The mistake had been not to pay off taxes on a monthly basis from the beginning, so the demand from 1999 came as a complete shock to the business. The tax arrears from then are still being paid back in instalments, but the taxes during 2000 have been paid monthly, keeping the financial situation under control. Once the last of the arrears are paid off, new efforts can be made at developing the business.

The Turkish Restaurant

In the second area the co-operative project was more grass-roots oriented, though with a top-down involvement as well. Kemal, another of the “expert” respondents, was asked, by the Turkish association, to try to do something about the unemployment among the Turkish women in the area. When scouting the community, he discovered the women were often trapped in a catch-22 situation. With no one to look after
their children, they could not spend the time necessary to look for jobs, and with no official occupation, they were not provided with child-care for their small children. Both the women and their children were also culturally and linguistically isolated. In order to change the entire situation, Kemal and a few others founded the economic association “The Bridge”. The project was initiated in co-operation with the Turkish Association, the employment exchange, the city district administration and the social insurance office with its aim formulated as “education in areas where new operations will be able to support themselves”. One of the ventures the association started as a project was The Turkish Restaurant, intended eventually to become an independent co-operative in its own right.

The restaurant is on the ground floor of the Community Hall. It is an example of the more grass-roots initiated projects common to this particular suburb. The Turkish association, supported by the district administration, the employment exchange, and the social insurance office, found twelve unemployed Turkish women to start a restaurant. The aim of the project was officially for the restaurant to become a profitable women’s co-operative. The women were split into two teams, where one team would study Swedish, civics, and business economics for a week at a time while the others ran the restaurant, and then they changed over and so on.

Most of the women involved in the restaurant co-operative were called by the employment exchange and strongly advised to join the operation. The money to start off (ESF funds), the “start-your-own” allowance, as well as consultation, courses, and training were provided to set things up and thereafter the proceeds from the business were intended to keep it running. The courses the women attended were paid for by the state, and the “salary” was their unemployment benefit. This would of course change when they actually became independent and self-sufficient. Within about a year, four of the women left for other jobs, four stayed in the first restaurant and four started, together with Kemal, the project instigator, their own restaurant in central Stockholm. This restaurant, however, soon faced various difficulties and eventually closed down.

Sabina is one of the women who has partaken in the project from the beginning. Again I will let her story present a picture of the policy impact as well as of her actual biographical project. Sabina arrived in Sweden in 1979 as a sixteen-year old girl. She and her family had left a small home town in Turkey to be with Sabina’s father who had already emigrated and had found a job. In Turkey he had been a dish-washer and
the mother had worked as a cleaner. Sabina has completed five years of school in Turkey and has in Sweden studied “Swedish for immigrants”. As the labour market situation was good at the time of her arrival, she had no difficulty in finding a job. Sabina has worked eight years as a fitter, for some time as a cleaner, and had maternity leave for three children. She has also been unemployed at times. Sabina heard about the restaurant project from a friend and joined up via the employment exchange. Her reason for joining the project was partly that her children now do not need her as much as before and partly that she was bored at home. Sabina emphasises the desire to do something for others and not to be unemployed.

The project started in 1996 and the first few months were spent alternating between studies and the kitchen work. For five months they had a Swedish cook to teach them in the kitchen and since then they have done all the cooking themselves. The venture has remained in project form for a very long time. Sabina was never overly concerned with it becoming independent at all – she would have been happy to see it continue the way it was. Her concern was more about having work, good relations to her work-mates, learning, and gaining self-confidence, than actually being self-employed. In fact, she even suggested “they” extend the project, indicating that it would be preferable to actually becoming independent. Should the project be terminated, however, Sabina is quite confident that she would be able to find work elsewhere thanks to her newly gained experience and feeling of now being able to cope in Swedish society. She would also consider studying in order to be able to get a job of her choice. Sabina claims the project has broadened her horizons in understanding and communication with other people as well as geographically. She now dares to travel in the city for example. Her attitude to learning and education is positive and she compares herself and her achievements to her parents and their minimal schooling.

Sabina talks of a great increase in self-confidence since she has been in the project and repeatedly mentions that she and her co-workers are respected – by customers, the project leadership and so on. The fact is, she says, “in the beginning I refused to even stand at the cash register. I was much too scared and shy to even face the customers. Now I make a point of going out among the tables, greeting everyone, even sitting down and having a chat when I have the time”. Sabina is a strong woman despite portraying herself (and the other women in the project) as needing the men and/or the project leaders in order for the restaurant to work. She expresses her competence in handling all the business of ordering raw materials, customer relations, and so on, but still says "we
couldn’t do it without them”. She appears to be very strong within her domain and seems to dominate the women’s group in a positive way – by being resourceful and determined.

The second interview took place approximately six months after the first one and the objective was to find out what had actually happened during the summer, which Sabina had described as a crucial time. It turns out that the summer had indeed brought a bit of a crisis, with loss of customers being one problem, but that through various strategies the restaurant was now not only doing well and catering to many regular customers, but also expanding its business to include a buffet. It was, however, still run as a project. The intention was to apply for self-employment support, but the final decision had yet to be made. As in the first interview, Sabina did not seem too concerned about the self-employment angle and in fact it was the project leadership that was looking into self-employment, not Sabina and her co-workers. She was happy, and still very grateful, to be doing what she was doing, regardless of who was in actual charge. As in the first interview, she did not have the necessary information to be able to judge the realistic possibilities for self-employment, and she gave the impression that she was happy to leave it up to others to evaluate the situation. Her only concern was that it would be a shame to close down after two years, and that it would be letting not only the women, but also their many customers down. Some distinct changes from the previous time were, however, discernible.

Sabina appeared to have become more involved in having a say in matters, as well as having opened up to new ideas for making the restaurant even more successful. For example, the question of providing alcohol had come up. In the first interview Sabina was completely negative to this, but now she discussed the pros and cons of it, taking into account the customers’ wishes as well as the need for the staff to have control over the situation. She was also open to the idea of employing more people, regardless of their ethnic belonging, if and when the restaurant became independent and the financial situation allowed for it. Her awareness had also increased concerning finances. She said that if they go independent, the situation will be such that for the first year or two they will possibly not be able to receive any proper salaries. Her attitude was that they will just have to tighten their belts, take home leftovers at the end of the day and try to get through the rough patch as well as possible. Sabina would also look into the possibility of receiving social security to make up for the deficit.

Despite her basic enthusiasm, Sabina was nevertheless tired and conceded that without the other women and the joy she finds in relating to
Struggles and aspirations

the customers, she could easily become sick of the actual work. It also became clear that she works “double shifts” in the sense that she carries the main responsibility at home, and that going home only to start cooking again can sometimes be quite a cheerless experience. Perhaps this is one of the reasons she would prefer not to shoulder the additional responsibility of actual self-employment.

The most recent meeting with Sabina was in September 2000. She told me things were going well, though she was, as usual, a little tired. They are still four women, but two men have been added to the restaurant. One runs some sort of cooking school in a basement kitchen of the Community Hall and helps out in the restaurant when orders overwhelm, and the other regularly cooks so-called “Swedish lunches” for the regular customers. Sabina and the other women only have time to cook two Turkish dishes for the restaurant, the rest of their time is usually taken up by filling catering orders. I asked her if the restaurant was still run as a project or if they were now independent. She said the economic association “The Bridge” had taken over and she and the others are now employed by it. The arrangement seemed to please Sabina, though she grumbled a bit about the men in “her” kitchen. As mentioned before, Sabina is a great organiser and enjoys talking about the plans for future development she has for the restaurant. When discussing the removal of a salad bar and the installation of a less bulky bar counter instead, I expressed surprise at Sabina’s change of mind. A few years earlier, she was not going to have any alcohol in that place, no matter what. Now she was hoping for an application for a liquor license to come through soon. At this point, Sabina moved in closer and appeared to completely change the topic – to that of relations within the family. Later on, however, it became clear that changes in Sabina are intimately connected to shifts in family relations and, though it was never expressed directly, she now appears very much more in command and is making decisions that affect the whole family. Sabina described more or less “ordering” her husband to change jobs as his work-place had a bad influence on him, a suggestion he complied with, and also relates how she had to engage and pay a lot of money to a lawyer in order to secure her son’s permit to come back to Sweden after several years in Turkey. This latter process turned out to be quite a nerve-racking battle, but Sabina fought it with determination and won in the end. Another of her recent decisions has been to move away from her city district. She is tired of the “village style” social control and of how as soon as something happens somewhere in the Turkish community, everyone knows. She wants to move into “Sweden” and give her chil-
dren the chance of real integration. Sabina has repeatedly and publicly spoken of the lack of Swedes in the residential area and the consequence of poor Swedish among the immigrant residents.

**Discussion**

Taking the earlier definitions of types of co-operatives into account, the fact that The Catering Service and the Turkish Restaurant were started the way they were, with the intentions the project leaders had, one must really call them social work co-operatives. The Catering Service was formed based on the needs more than the interests or individual abilities of the women. Little consideration seems to be taken of their levels of education. The project was top-down initiated and the women were assumed to have enough skills in cooking, in these cases, to be suited for the job. As mentioned earlier it is often the case that self-employment programmes are designed with an underlying assumption of inherent skills of immigrant women. In fact, most of the businesses and co-operatives considered for women involve either cooking, sewing, handicrafts, cleaning or other such tasks. The need to offset this may however, in some administrators’ opinions, conflict with realistic possibilities for (self-)employment. Several of the various project leaders and instigators say this with the motivation that as the women cannot get jobs adequate to their education, they will have to rethink, dig up other skills, and use them in order to secure an occupation. This attitude results in women, of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as spanning the whole range of educational levels, being brought together to start co-operatives in areas traditionally associated with women’s work, for example cooking. Despite the good intentions behind these ventures, this is a form of discrimination. In line with the formulation in Integra’s first section it is a strategy for utilising “their entrepreneurial spirit”, which is a myth in itself, and their own networks, instead of further problematising the situation and perhaps taking measures to support the immigrants’ entry into the regular labour market through investing in their academic merits or professional skills.

In the case of The Catering Service, the difficult step to independence has been taken. In the case of the Turkish Restaurant, though it no longer is in project form, it is not independent either as it has become an enterprise run by a larger economic association that employs the women. In accordance with the second line of Integra, the venture has indeed led to “the highest possible level of self-sufficiency”. The problem with trying to push self-employment is of course if the women in
question really do not want to be self-employed. With the only foreseeable alternative being unemployment, Sabina joined the project for something to do. In cases like this, expecting self-employment to be the outcome of a project may be overly optimistic. The question is also if it is good policy to push unwilling individuals into self-employment, or if in some cases it would perhaps be better to take the step into independence with a manager at the helm and the women in question as regular employees. The outcome would, as has been shown, be the same in the sense of jobs provided and dependency on social benefits thwarted.

In those cases where independence is attained, the main problem seems to be the financial situation. As someone at the seminar on immigrant women’s self-employment said: “Starting up is easy, the problems come afterwards”. Money is of course a key issue in business, and a vital one in starting a new enterprise. Though the available support systems do address the financial aspect, they are not necessarily adequate and not always optimally implemented, as has been mentioned before. An important factor and considered strength in Swedish labour market politics is that the policies are collectively administered by one national public department – the National Labour Market Department. This allows for both co-ordination and overview as well as a radical delegation of decision-making and resource-distribution to a local level (Proposal of operative programme for “Employment” 1995–1999). The problem is that although the anchoring in and adaptation to local contexts is commendable and necessary, this delegation of responsibility allows for subjective and arbitrary decisions to be made by those in charge of the labour market measures and programmes. Without the guidance of clear regulations and procedures from a central authority the risk of inexpert judgements and unfair practices is increased.

Most respondents, including the women in the co-operatives, have indicated that the “start-your-own” benefits are definitely of help in the first period of self-employment, but that they are not enough. Loans, either private ones from friends, family or within the ethnic network, or from banks, are necessary supplements if one is starting a business which entails putting up initial capital. Even in the case of co-operatives money is needed – often more than the members can afford themselves. As banks see co-operatives not as an entity, but as the sum of the individually self-employed members, loans cannot be got by and for the co-operative itself, only through its members. Despite the fact that the members of a co-operative are not supposed to be personally responsible for the economy of the business, the women of The Catering Service, for
example, had to provide large and burdensome guarantees themselves in order to get a bank loan at all.

It is painfully clear and supported by numerous examples that immigrants, and to an even greater extent immigrant women, are seldom if ever granted bank loans to start a new business. Again, the outcome of an application is often dependent both on inter-personal chemistry and the disposition of the bank clerk in charge of loans. Rules are tough and most often based on the current ability to repay rather than on considerations of a long-term business investment. Even when the clerk or official finds the business plan viable, loans are often denied due to the non-existent income at the time of the application. In the case of immigrant women, many testify to not having been taken seriously either as individuals or as potential owners of businesses. The only recourse then is to follow the suggestion in Integra’s programme and have “confidence in /one’s/ own economic network”, i.e. family and friends.

In conclusion, the co-operative self-employment projects instigated by the district administrations in collaboration with ethnic associations, the local employment exchange, the social services and the social insurance offices are very well intentioned, but not overly successful. They appear first and foremost to be too top-down for the participants to be able to make it on their own within a reasonable time from starting up. The immigrant women involved are not provided with enough knowledge or insight into the workings of an autonomous business to actually be able to run it completely independently. An added aspect of this dependency is that with an attitude toward immigrants as helpless and needy coupled with activities based on that assumption, the risk is that the recipients in the long run internalise that characterisation, thus perpetuating the need for support. Secondly, the financial difficulties faced by small enterprises in general are not spared the co-operatives either. In fact, they can be even worse. One of the mentors of The Catering Service suggests that it is unrealistic to start an economic association of five with the expectation of providing full-time salaries for all members from the beginning. She advocates, with rates and taxes being as high as they are, tax relief for the first few years for co-operatives – in fact for small businesses in general. The fact that immigrants most often lack advantages that Swedes have; namely cultural (and business-cultural) capital, far-reaching networks, and “perfect” Swedish, should not be exacerbated by unreasonable financial demands. Thirdly, though touching on both the above points, discrimination at all stages of the self-employment process is a huge, though often denied, issue that has to be taken in hand. On a positive note, though there are no guarantees for the
long-term success of any of these projects, it appears from this small number of cases that even if only one or two of the involved women are able to go on as self-employed, the rest may well have gained enough in experience, self-confidence, and knowledge to have a better chance of regular employment in the future.

Conclusion – national cases

The above section is really a conclusion in itself. The outcomes and consequences of the co-operative projects can be applied to most of the self-employment ventures, started with or without policy participation. Whether a person has started a business with policy participation or not, the financial difficulties can be overwhelming, self-exploitation is almost always necessary, and inclusion does not automatically occur on the labour market or socially. The main reason for becoming self-employed is to avoid exclusion and discrimination, but the ventures most likely to succeed are those where the entrepreneur truly has self-employment as his or her first choice.

The research hypothesis “that active social integration policies aiming at the promotion of self-employment of unemployed women and migrant minority members can only be successful if their specific socialisation under unstable biographical and work conditions is recognised and compensation is provided for their discontinuous working careers. These deficits are hypothesised as the principle cause also of business failure and thus require interventions” (TSER Proposal 1997:9) may be describing a deficient point of departure in the first place. To begin with an “active social integration policy” that promotes self-employment of the unemployed assumes that work alone accomplishes this social inclusion. This has been shown not to be true in the cases of most of the respondents. Second, “unstable biographical and work conditions” is ascribed to the majority part of any country’s population – women and immigrants. Perhaps there is a need to discuss the question of whether these conditions are indeed “deficits” to be compensated for or if the labour market structure and societal context ought not instead be considered maladjusted to the needs of the greater part of the labour force. At least, the situation of native-born men, unemployed or otherwise, need also be scrutinised for “deficits” from the same perspective. Finally, if the “deficits” are deemed the “principle cause of business failure”, then what is the point of pushing self-employment in the first place? Surely a better path to take would be to strengthen the women and immigrants in what they really want to do, work they often already
have training or degrees in, and concentrate on opening the whole labour market to them, not just the self-employment sector. Recognition, compensation and intervention would be more helpful if the individuals were seen in their complete contexts.

Commentary

In order to make sense of our world we use types—“any simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognised characterisation in which a few traits are foregrounded and change or ‘development’ is kept to a minimum” (Hall 1997:257)—in classificatory schemes. Stereotypes arise when we take those characteristics of a person and “reduce everything about that person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity” (Hall 1997:258). One of the insights I had was that the concepts used both within the project description and in official policy documents reflected a different understanding of reality than the one I found in my work. Like the ethnologist Lena Gerholm in her book *Kulturprojekt och projektkultur* (*Cultural Projects and the Culture of Projects*), I eventually discovered that the language used in official contexts is often next to unusable in connection to the actual individuals focused in a study (1985:115). Not only do those individuals not describe themselves in terms of “passive” or “resource” or “traditional”, or any other such epithet, but once I had faced my own preconceived notions of “them” and established relationships along the way, neither could I. Part of the learning process entailed developing a critical approach to everything, from official texts to unofficial statements, from policy intentions to my own (re)actions. Prejudice arises over long periods of time in interplay with various social discourses and eventually becomes part of a naturalised knowledge which uncritically reproduces categories and stereotypes. In a society where biological racism is no longer acceptable, a cultural racism has taken its place. “Today’s racist discourses present differences in identities and capabilities, not as a question of races, but in terms of cultures. The ideological baton and tool for legitimisation has been handed over to the culture and the nation and been termed ‘cultural racism’ or ‘culturalism’” (Tesfahuney 2001:197, cf. also Ålund 1997). Though its expressions are sometimes subtle, its effects are not, and thus it is “not relevant to speak of racist discourse as something essentially different from practice” (Mattsson 2001:261).

The fact is that despite the rhetoric surrounding the policies aimed at the integration of marginalised groups, those policies still follow a pattern of separating “them” from “us”. Yuval-Davis warns that multi-
culturalist policies tend to construct the populations, the ethnic minorities, they are targeted towards (1997:10), implying that this may cement stereotypes of separate groups rather than attend to individuals’ needs. "Multiculturalist policies are aimed at simultaneously including and excluding the minorities, locating them in marginal spaces and secondary markets, while reifying their borders" (1997:17). This is a very real danger. In the "naming" we create, as has been mentioned before.

Waldinger et al, in their turn, warn that these policies are too narrowly framed and that in fact the first issue must be to specify the problem that the (ethnic business development) policies are actually meant to address (1990:192). ”If the problem is that of large-scale structural unemployment among ethnic or minority populations /including the marginalised group of ”women”/, then business development policies are clearly not the appropriate response” (1990:192). Societal policies must include a "much larger effort to create jobs and provide relevant skills for the whole population" (1990:197), a strategy that to a certain extent is applied in Sweden today. Despite some progress, however, there are lingering difficulties. Even Waldinger’s “solution” is too narrowly framed, as it is not enough to tackle the ethnocentric and exclusionary tendencies of the society at large, including potential employers.

It is incredibly frustrating not to have an immediate answer to the problems. The last few chapters have shown how stubbornly categorisations hang on, how they permeate old ideas and invade new policies. How can I contribute to deconstructing existing stereotypes, or even to exposing the practice of stereotyping itself, without partaking in a reiteration of ethnocentric and, to use Pripp’s (2001:18) term, heavy discourses?
Winding up the yarn

In the last phase of the project each team was assigned a specific category to do a cross-national comparison with. The one I worked with was “migrant women with policy participation”. At this stage I found the software programme to be a definite advantage. All the interviews carried out by each participant team had been inserted into separate project folders and sent to Frankfurt. There our computer consultant had combined these folders into a common one – the whole project was thus available to everyone. I could just go onto the project home page, bring up the table of attributes (TOA) from each team and select those interviews that fitted the category “migrant women with policy participation”. Then I could bring them up on the screen, read the transcripts and make my comparisons and analyses. For additional input I could read the structural descriptions and analytical abstracts for each interview – a good way to compare the actual interviewer’s analysis with my own. It turned out that, despite small differences in context, the situation was quite similar for migrant women in all six countries.

Migrant women and policy participation
- a cross-national comparison

In the national comparison of cases it was shown that migrant women face a different situation on the labour market than do both migrant men and women of the majority population. Migrant women in Sweden are stigmatised for being both of foreign background and women. This report examines if the same conditions prevail in Denmark, England, Germany, Greece, and Italy as they do in Sweden, though with a case category limitation. Only the cases of migrant women who have become self-employed with policy participation are discussed. A cross-national comparison is conducted based on the themes of “the process of becoming self-employed” and “policy impact” and this is followed by a discus-
sion of the implications and a deliberation on possible improvements to self-employment policies.

The process of becoming self-employed

The process of becoming self-employed appears rather similar for migrant women in all six countries: Denmark, England, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Sweden. Discrimination in various forms is a leading motive for starting a business: The difficulty in securing a job on the regular labour market at all, alternatively the only, if any, offer of jobs being in cleaning or other “immigrant jobs”, regardless of levels of education. In Britain, Bernadette says “when I moved outside Spain I did typical immigrant jobs like washing up in kitchens, chamber maid, domestic help . . .”. She puts into words the plight of most immigrant women, regardless of which country they have migrated to. Wanna, a Greek woman in Germany, was offered nothing but jobs in the cleaning sector. She says it was not the kind of work she wanted to do “because at home I had cleaned enough”. University degrees, work experience or other qualifications are often left disregarded and/or not accepted at all. When employment is found, it is most often in menial jobs and/or without possibility of advancement or even permanent engagement. Pega is an Iranian woman in Sweden. She has a law degree from Iran where she had taught philosophy and literature in upper secondary school and worked three years as a lawyer before having to flee to Sweden. After studying Swedish and taking numerous other courses she found it very hard to get a job. Eventually she worked variously as a library assistant, in home-help service and as a home-language teacher. “It held no future for me. I could not even get a permanent job.” Exploitation of immigrant labour is a reason to actually leave employment, exemplified by Silia (Dutch) in Greece and Frances (English) in Italy who both found themselves working under illegal employment conditions. Frances recalls that “the first year everything was regular, but then they changed it and I didn’t know that”.

Self-employment is frequently perceived as the only way out of unemployment, exclusion, and often welfare dependency, by the respondents as well as the labour market institutions, which often leads to the feeling of being forced into it. In Greece there is hardly any other choice for the returnees of Greek descent. The Reception and Restoration Programmes provide support, grants and training provided the immigrants start a business, and as most of them arrive with a minimum of capital, that is what they do. In other cases, the respondents have been pressured
by authorities. Donna, a Jamaican woman in England, says “I was forced to go to it [an enterprise course] as I was on benefit and it was a case of ‘right you either go on it or you lose your benefit’”. Tatjana had a career in accountancy in Romania. She dreamt of resuming that career in Denmark, but was eventually forced to realise that she would not be given the chance either in a public or private company. This led to her starting her own firm. If not literally forced into self-employment, the discrimination experienced on the labour market, even within the labour market measures, is enough to make the respondents feel it is the only way out as well as a way to restore autonomy and self-respect.

There are, of course, other reasons for starting businesses as well. Some of the women felt the need for more independence and control, others wanted to realise a dream of self-employment. Carol, a Jamaican woman in England, started a paralegal agency out of the desire to be independent and in control. She wanted to work within the legal field, “but I didn’t want to /work/ as a secretary or a solicitor because I wanted to be able to do my own thing and be able to . . . you know free lancing. / . . ./ I don’t like working for people”. The dream of self-employment can be based on a strong interest but lack of education in an area. Jennifer is a French woman in England with a life-long passion for design and fashion. She has no education in the field, though she has worked in the business for some years. As it is a highly competitive field, she eventually became self-employed in order to stand a chance. Lisa’s dream is partly based on a passion as well, this time for antiques, but also by the determination to do something by and for herself. She explains: “When I divorced him it was... how should I explain... then I wanted to start something on my own. / . . ./ I wanted to do something myself”. Lisa, a Yugoslavian woman in Sweden, is today the owner of an antiques shop, but started out selling “second hand things” – anything to be self-sufficient.

Flexibility is often expressed as a desirable condition by women with children and one that is believed to be achievable through self-employment. In reality however, though it works for a few, most feel even more tied down by their businesses than in employment, and often more isolated too. Lana, an American woman in England, talks of being torn between wanting to be there for her children and working. Being “at home and in control and self-employed you can deal with those things and it really is the best way to combine the two”. The flexibility is the “beauty of being self-employed, but the downside is that it can be isolating, even though I quite like being on my own, but still too much is not good”.

Winding up the yarn
Policy impact on the self-employment project

The policy impact is quite similar in the different countries too, though the set-ups differ. In Denmark, one could (this has now been discontinued) receive starting up benefits for up to two and a half years. In Sweden, this was only available for a maximum of one year. Women of both countries nevertheless concede that it was not enough. Tatjana describes how she had to watch every penny when she started her business “because the money I got ././, the establishment grant, it is ././ One can’t manage on it!” She had no room for investments or expenses, though she did manage to buy a computer. In Greece the Reception and Restoration Programmes provide grants and often better housing if the immigrants start their own businesses. This, however, is only for immigrants of Greek descent and tends to put them in a situation without any real choice. Otherwise, Italy and Greece appear to have the least developed policies for supporting self-employment. It appears quite difficult to find support and once found, the process is long. In one of the Italian cases a special Honour Loan was available only because the woman, Frances, was married to an Italian.

Extra loans, either from banks, family, friends, and ethnic network, or other institutions such as credit or investment companies were necessary to get the business on its feet in almost all cases. Meygol, an Iranian woman in Sweden, describes her process this way: “Well it was like this. I had no initial capital, so I borrowed from two of my friends. And I thought, ‘I’m technical, very technical. I had friends in this business, mobile telephones and accessories. And they told me that it can be a good branch. So I borrowed money from two of my friends, and I applied for loans in banks, but they didn’t give me any. So I continued to borrow. Privately”. Meygol was refused a bank loan, so borrowed from friends within the ethnic network. Once the business was started, she also received credit from suppliers within the ethnic network. Only after four months of successful business did the employment exchange agree to give her “start-your-own” benefits and at the same time she came into contact with the IFS and through them with ALMI, a state-owned credit company. ALMI then gave her a loan. The difficulty in securing bank loans is confirmed by almost all respondents, even in England where this kind of loan is more common than in any of the other countries. Jennifer calls the experience a nightmare and explains: “First of all I was about twenty-six when I went for the loan so that’s quite young and then the bank manager I think was at least double my age so there was that. Then you know on top of that being a woman. I felt that too ././ nothing
obvious but it was like the way he was talking to me, really condescending and he kept smiling . . . really patronising while he was looking at my business plan”. Meygol also believes her age, gender and ethnicity contributed to the bank loan being refused her. Carol believes she only got her bank loan due to the manager being a woman. “I find other women help you a lot.”

In England the women took training courses to a far greater extent than in Denmark or Sweden. Through a friend Jennifer found out about a training course in fashion, with the aim of self-employment, being run at a local college. “Something they were running . . ./ for people who wanted to get to grips with fashion and maybe start a business in the field.” For her, this was perfect. The course combined practical fashion experience and use of machinery etc. with useful business advice. Also, it provided the opportunity to meet a wide range of people and the part-time character of it enabled Jennifer to continue her employment. “I remember the moment she [the friend] mentioned it, I felt a little tingle in my spine and I thought ‘yes, I’m going to go for it’.” Courses that provide this kind of broad learning appear more successful than those geared simply toward self-employment in general. In Greece the Reception and Restoration Programmes provide language and training courses and in Italy the Honour Loan is granted on condition that one attend a two month course in business management and other, for self-employment relevant, subjects.

Germany and Sweden appear to have similar ideas about social work co-operatives, and the results are perhaps equally questionable in both countries. A positive aspect of the ventures is nevertheless a sense of doing something valuable, especially for one’s own self-esteem. Ayssa, a Turkish woman in Germany, felt respected in the co-operative and appreciated doing something she really enjoyed. She especially liked the idea of “many women working together”, doing team work and says “this is interesting for me, this is good for me”. Sabina, another Turkish woman, though in Sweden, has similar experiences. She describes her insecurity at the outset of the project: “I didn’t dare speak to the customers, I couldn’t speak, I didn’t dare anything the first months. I preferred to just be in the kitchen, I didn’t want to stand by the cash register, didn’t want to serve”. With time, however, she has become braver and more open. “But I dare everything now. I’ve noticed that they are very warm people, one should not . . . prejudices . . . one must talk.” Her last words imply an earlier isolation as well as alienation from the majority population, which the project appears to have lifted. It is interesting that neither of the two women became self-employed, although Sabina
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is employed, and yet both appear to have got what they wanted and/or needed from the projects. It is also interesting to consider both their emphasis on the respect they felt and the joy of working together with other women. A possibility is that some women’s isolation combined with the attitude towards them from the majority population cause a rather difficult situation. Social co-operatives may be a step on the way to integration, though should probably not be primarily aimed at self-employment.

The problem of discrimination surfaces not only in the decision to become self-employed, but throughout the whole process: in projects and programmes offered to the women (they are very often limited to traditional female occupations), in attempting to secure loans, in setting up as well as when actually self-employed. In total, the main factors that contributed to the decision to become self-employed are in fact identical to those found in the Swedish national case (see Chapter 5).

The policy impact, in the majority of cases, does not have the intended, or expected, outcome. Not only are the policies not nearly enough as far as financial or other support goes, and thus do not often lead to economically successful businesses, but they also do not lead to social integration or inclusion in the majority society. However, the main factor governing what that impact actually will be is the extent to which the respondent has chosen self-employment voluntarily and with a genuine desire to run a business. Thus an important point for discussion must be whether the intention behind and the expected outcome of the self-employment policies are actually realistic, or if they are in fact based on preconceived notions and naturalised assumptions about the target groups and their predisposition to self-employment.

Discussion

In conclusion there are a few general points to make about self-employment in the countries compared. Financial difficulties are a fact in all cases. Those that manage the best are those who for example have husbands with good salaries – enough to pay for food and rent and also to provide security when applying for loans – or start off with a significant amount of capital of their own. Otherwise, the difficult task of applying for and being granted a loan is necessary. The strategy of setting up business in the home first and only expanding to include office space or other premises after securing a number of clients appears to work in some cases and in some lines of business. Self-exploitation is paramount.
The women work very hard, long hours, evenings and weekends. Several work more than they get paid for, just to stay in business, and often rely on unpaid help from family members. In addition to this, the women, whether single or in partnerships, most often have the largest responsibility for home and child-care which leads to even more work and stress. In only a few cases does self-employment actually bring more flexibility and control over one’s time. Self-employment also leads to isolation, as the women hardly have time to socialise or meet with other businesspeople.

In a situation where self-employment appears to be, and is often presented as, the only solution left to avoid unemployment, professional degradation, and/or welfare dependency, it becomes a forced issue, a choice made out of necessity rather than desire, and as such can only be seen negatively. Where respondents have had a genuine desire to start their own businesses, however, available policies have been of some help, but have not been the decisive factor in the decision to become self-employed. On the positive side, self-employment often brings a feeling of self-confidence and control over one’s life. The independence it brings may be bought at a high cost, but it can be worth it, especially in cases of self-employment replacing a position of dependency either on a husband or on a host country’s welfare system.

**Steps for improvement**

Several respondents have themselves offered specific suggestions for making the move into self-employment easier. Among the more common ones are that the support systems be improved – less bureaucracy, more flexibility, better courses – and that financing is made easier. Business rates must be cut, taxes lowered, rent for premises reduced, and banks made much more small business friendly. Naturally there are difficulties in presenting recommendations, or “best practices”, that would apply to the whole of the European Union – conditions of legal/illegal immigration, gender structures, political, welfare, and legal systems, and market conditions vary widely – as well as to all categories focused in the project. However, certain aspects appear to cut across the different nations’ category of “migrant women with policy participation” and thus some consideration of possible improvements of policies is warranted here.

Regardless of country of immigration, a new system of bureaucracy often appears like an impenetrable jungle to the uninitiated. In the case
of self-employment policies and practices there are a number of separate thickets to get through: signing up with employment exchanges/labour offices, producing acceptable business plans, applying for loans and other sources of support, handling book-keeping and tax declarations, to mention but a few. In a situation of not completely mastering the majority language, these tasks can become overwhelmingly difficult. An additional obstacle to the process is the lack of co-operation or even communication between different authorities. In order to alleviate this situation, several measures can be taken. Better communication and co-operation between relevant authorities, particularly employment exchanges, social insurance offices, and social services, are a must for the initial self-employment process to be at all smooth. In addition, a more holistically contextual approach is necessary for all aspects to be covered. A migrant woman without the close support structures of family, for instance, will need adequate child care before she can start a business. Once the stage is set, education, guidance and support must go hand in hand. This in effect means that self-employment policies must be linked to education and other relevant policies. Without a reasonable knowledge of the majority language, for example, self-employment either fails or is limited to operating within a confined ethnic community.

The chapters on the national cases mention two different yet separately successful approaches to the above problems. The “House of Entrepreneurs” started out as a top-down project venture, but has become a part of the general policies available to those starting their own businesses. It provides office space at low rents, necessary equipment such as telephones and fax machines, store rooms, business management courses, advice and counselling, information seminars, collaboration with a bank branch office and the opportunity for sharing experiences with other self-employed people all in one and the same building. Naturally there are limitations due to space and other resources, but the operation encompasses most aspects of the process of becoming, and remaining, self-employed, including collaboration with the employment exchange.

The other approach is more bottom-up. It is an economic association started in order to alleviate the unemployment among Turkish residents, mainly the women, of a specific city area. Finding that the women were caught in a thicket of unemployment, lack of child care opportunities, social and linguistic isolation, and general exclusion, several ventures were started. A crèche provided day care for the children as well as jobs for some of the women, courses were offered and projects instigated. The Turkish Association took the initiative, but collaboration
with the city district administration as well as other authorities has led to a continued expansion of the project.

It is important that relevant information about various forms and instances of support is available to and provided by the various authorities, not least the employment exchange. Facing less and less of their own policy resources, the employment exchanges in Sweden are increasingly referring to the IFS or even directly to ALMI when approached about self-employment support. The Swedish Association of Ethnic Entrepreneurs (IFS) has become an important and ever more successful intermediary and support organisation for immigrants either already self-employed or wishing to become so. IFS is a non-profit independent association whose aim is to support ethnic entrepreneurs in Sweden by among other things persuading banks and lending institutions to provide capital for immigrant entrepreneurs with the same contractual conditions as are provided for Swedish businessmen, establishing a loan fund to provide capital for loans to the members, and making out standard agreements – in both Swedish and the native language of the immigrant for ease of negotiation. The all-round support provided by IFS starts by helping the potentially self-employed formulate his/her business plan in his/her native tongue. Once the plan is viable, the switch to Swedish takes place. A personal advisor supports the client in his/her negotiations with banks and other authorities and remains closely associated to the client, or member, even after the establishment of a business. The member can phone in or make an appointment to obtain advice on legal or other matters pertaining to being self-employed. ALMI, a state-run credit company, has since its collaboration with IFS greatly increased the percentage of its total credit allocated to immigrant entrepreneurs. This kind of co-operation between state authorities and support organisations makes for far-reaching improvements in the total self-employment situation.

The time the support lasts increases when there is a long-term commitment to the promotion of self-employment. Most regular state policies have failed in this respect – often enough a short course, if that, and some “start-your-own” allowances have been expected to be enough for a successful business to be started, and even for it to expand and employ more otherwise “unemployable” immigrants. The cases of “migrant women with policy participation” in the six countries studied tend to show that this is indeed not enough. Not only do the business courses need to be far more comprehensive, but the policies themselves need to be more flexible in their adaptation to individual needs and plans. One aspect of this is the importance of dialogue. With a greater focus on the
individual and her capabilities, bottom-up ventures and participatory aspects of citizenship are stimulated. Policy flexibility should also address the financial aspects of self-employment. To start with, a business must be financially viable. This means the market conditions, the potential clientele and the saleability of the product or service must be established before it is invested in.

Second, depending on the kind of business it is, it will require more or less initial and risk capital. One cannot expect a one-person accountancy firm, a restaurant, and an antiques shop to need the same set amount of money to start up. The tight economic situation does not end with the successful establishment of a business, however. Regardless of what country they run their business in, the respondents have all mentioned the difficulty they have in making ends meet. Only a few of them have managed to become financially successful even after several or many years as self-employed. This would indicate that tax laws, levels of business rates and other economic dues ought to be looked over in all European countries for the drive for self-employment to be a long-term success rather than just a temporary measure to bring down unemployment figures.

Last but not least, the question of discrimination must be brought up again. There are clear signs that top-down policies of self-employment for migrant women are informed by stereotypical attitudes of what a migrant woman is and what she is suited for. Throughout the process of becoming self-employed the women are confronted with preconceived ideas of what they can and cannot do and often enough they have to adapt their original plans to suit these ideas in order for them to receive the support necessary to start a business. Regardless of education or vocational experience migrant women are seen as less skilled in anything but traditional female areas of work than men of all ethnicities as well as women of the majority population. Migrant women face discrimination at the employment exchange, from potential and actual employers, while attending courses, in attempting to get policy support or bank loans, participating in projects and even when actually self-employed. The combination of having a foreign background and being a woman puts them in a doubly marginalised position on the labour market and in society as a whole. Therefore the belief and trust in self-employment being the solution to exclusion must be reviewed and any policies aspiring to improve the situation for migrant women must be based on fulfilling at least the following criteria for citizenship: The right to participate, the right to education and the right to the same services as the majority population.
Commentary
With the realisation that the situation was similar in all the six countries included in the study, came a stronger than ever determination to put my finger(s) on the sore spot(s). At the time of writing the Final Report, discrimination was the main thread that had accompanied me throughout the project process. I sensed it in the statistics and preliminary interviews during the first phase of gathering background material. While talking to the “expert” respondents, though I was temporarily lulled into expecting only well of the policies, certain discursive formulae set my warning bells ringing. In my interactions and conversations with the self-employed respondents it became evident that discrimination was a reality they faced on a more or less daily basis, and with a close reading of documents, the embeddedness of discrimination in the structures of society was further revealed. When in the last phase it turned out that the picture was pretty much the same everywhere, I must have felt that it was fitting to round off the whole project documentation with a paragraph on discrimination. I am glad I did, though I am a little doubtful about the last sentence. In the deadline-induced rush to finish I suppose it “sounded good”, but with a little more time on my hands and a more critical eye I would probably have chosen a different “punch line”. Because the rights are there, they do exist, but only on a formal level.

Research and reflexivity
If I had kept rigidly within the bounds of the methodology and theoretical framework presented for the project, I would not have come as far as I believe I did, even during the project time, in my understanding of either the research problem or the results. By combining the ethnological perspectives and tools for analysis that I brought with me with the other participants’ mainly sociological ones, a fruitful collaboration was created and more learned than if the work had been “monotheistic” (Bourdieu 1992:226). Later, in the rereading of the Final Report, yet other perspectives were brought in to further enrich the analyses. Although I felt, during the project time, that the questions were too narrowly framed and the structures too rigid, the fact of the matter is that the questions and issues that arose both within and without the project have opened up for an increased understanding of the advantages of multi-disciplined research as well as for multi-perspective analyses. Bourdieu claims that “social research is something much too serious and too difficult for us to allow ourselves to mistake scientific rigidity, which
is the nemesis of intelligence and invention, for scientific rigor, and thus to deprive ourselves of this or that resource available in the full panoply of intellectual traditions of our discipline and of the sister disciplines of anthropology, economics, / . . ./, etc.” (1992:227).

Working on the project, and later the thesis, brought home to me that neither the geographical nor the theoretical field benefits from being limited. Globalisation and migration have given rise to the “movement of people, products, capital and symbols in unbroken streams across the planet” (Eriksson et al 1999:13), which in turn has challenged the notions of easily delimited “culture areas” and local identities (cf. Passaro 1997). I have earlier in the text criticised the idea of “globalisation” as an autonomous force with effects that bear no sign of human involvement. This notion of globalisation may have its origin in that the flood of literature on the topic during the 1990’s has mainly been “conducted by sociologists and culture theorists” and that their research focus has lain mainly on “theorising about the workings of culture and society” (O’Dell 1997:226). Combining this research with the ethnological attention to the details, the personal and the everyday advances the possibility of “finding and developing bridges” between the local context and global phenomena (1997:228). The EU-project provided a site for working on the interconnectedness of the two.

Not only is Sweden a “multicultural” society today, but the situation for “immigrants”, at least within my category for cross-national comparison, appears to be similar across a large part of Europe. Theoretically, this inspired me to seek as many tools as possible, to “mobilise all the techniques that are relevant and practically usable” (Bourdieu 1992:227), for understanding the complexity of the field of research I was in. I felt that the questions and the problem of the project were “wrongly” formulated – the categories “immigrants” and “women” were preconstructed (though confused by the subcategory “immigrant women”) and the solution, improved possibilities for self-employment, likewise preconstructed. By expanding the web of theories, and not behaving as one of Bourdieu’s “mono-maniacs” (1992:226), I also expanded understanding and knowledge. Postcolonial theory, for example, helped me to see that in fact the globalisation of culture is perceived in a eurocentric perspective (Eriksson et al 1999:14) – globalisation is something that originates in the West and spreads out to the rest of the world (even within nations). Colonial as well as traditionally gendered relations of power play a role in the creation of “us” and “them”, the actual categories of the project. Both feminism and postcolonial theory are supported in discourse analysis “as a powerful critical tool, / . . ./ through
exposing the assumptions and claims to truth of the dominant discourses" (Eriksson et al 1999:22), and so on. The reflexive approach is also furthered in this way. By taking various standpoints through the use of varying methods and theories, and thus presenting a multitude of analytical possibilities, one can come closer to deconstructing the hegemonic discourse within one's own sphere of direct influence.

Naturally, it is impossible to “do” every perspective or every theory within one research project. Sometimes, however, one can be implicated in a standpoint position one was not even aware one was part of. As the project “focused on the evaluation of social citizenship policies” (TSER Proposal 1997:1), we were in effect also policy analysts. Recommendations of “best practices”, that were expected to work throughout the EU, were being asked for. According to the political scientist Rune Premfors, this is something that characterises the policy analyst’s task as “the ultimate purpose of the analyst’s work is to formulate recommendations” (1989:16). In his definition, however, a policy analyst is someone who “readily allows himself to be integrated into the political process – which the social scientist ought not do”. The social sciences ought instead “in a completely different way than policy analysis be independent in relation to all actors in the political process” (1989:12). The social scientist should “in principle” stand outside and observe – not let himself be pulled into the political game. This is a definition of the social scientist that not all would agree to. Those committed to action research, for example, must inevitably get involved.

In the debate on reflexivity that started in the 1980’s, an understanding formed of the impossibility, for the researcher, to just stand outside and observe. The expectation that the researcher create a distance to her research object has nonetheless lived on – perhaps as a strategy for avoiding both politics as such (though not the observation of its consequences) and ethnology’s role as political practice (Damsholt T. & Nilsson F. 1999:5–7). My political approach, however, is to move between standpoints from which I can both criticise and analyse, present perspectives and represent the marginalised. Through the movement itself it becomes possible to alternate distance and nearness. Since I developed this political ambition during the project time, I suppose, in Premfors’ view, I was part policy analyst and part social scientist. Both within and without the political game. With the growing insight that I not only wanted to produce knowledge but also wanted to work for an improvement in the conditions my respondents lived and worked under, I was obliged to find a position that would allow that. Action research is a concept and an approach within which, according to Gerholm, there is
a will to combine research and political action (1985:22, 25). The kind of action research where the researcher “takes part in a planned process of change by delivering knowledge to authorities or interest organisations /is called/ established action research” (1985:23). In a section of her text Gerholm describes my own standpoint and desire quite well: “A large part of so called established action research has as its starting point an identification with the people, and the thought is that the research will provide a better foundation for the actions of authorities which in turn will improve conditions for the people. Through various forms of social reporting the state or different organisations receive knowledge about people’s circumstances so that these can be improved” (1985:25). This cannot take place, however, without an awareness of several aspects. The researcher’s, the “people’s” and the state’s often different ideas of what “reality” looks like must all be considered. In his discussion on policy analysis as a “form for the production of ideology in society”, Premfors calls for a greater responsibility for “how knowledge is connected to politics” (1989:17, 34). He brings up “the awareness of values – the repudiation of false claims of neutrality and objectivity” as one of the ethical building blocks in policy analysis and explains that the policy analyst must be his own moral philosopher and his own politician (1989:177).

My intention has not been to bring in new theories or concepts that would have a bearing on the thesis itself. They do not, other than to demonstrate that the expansion of the theoretical and methodological field has proved impossible to halt. As my “own politician”, however, I had to stop somewhere and work with what I had. I also had to find a personal purpose to my writing. Recognising that I took part in the political rhetoric of representation by carrying out this commissioned research, I also realised that at the same time I was as much an agent as anyone else. One aspect of this process of self-orientation was to see the project for what it was – a “doing” of the politics that informed it – and that I could utilise my position within the project to exercise cultural criticism in my thesis. The researcher’s power of position lies in the possibility, on a scientific basis, to question and analyse these representations and discourses and their consequences in politics as well as in society. The realisation that I found myself in an all-pervading politicised field forced me to articulate my own standpoint in order to clear a satisfactory path through that field. Since my product of knowledge was to be used for a political purpose, I did not want to be part of an uncritical reproduction and consolidation of prevalent notions on what it is to be an “immigrant” or a “woman”. A typification that is not just a generali-
sation of a group of people, but also a stereotypification, can not, without due examination, just be accepted by the critical researcher. I could not, therefore, stand on the outside and “hide behind a mask of objectivity”, something Premfors also claims is impossible for a policy analyst (1989:168).

Once I had defined a personal purpose, another issue followed. What was I to do with the actual accumulated material, including the Final Report of the project? What and who was I going to write my thesis for? Convinced of the inseparability of ethnology and politics, O’Dell exhorts us to closely examine our motives for doing our research. ”/T/he political context that motivates us today may not be the place for tomorrow’s pressing questions. Politics is certainly not a static unity but a dynamic force whose shifts of emphasis can be rather subtle when they are observed from the perspective of today. And I would like to suggest that it therefore becomes even more important that the researcher clearly reflects on and explicitly states what he/she writes towards” (O’Dell 1999:75). What was my political purpose? I had received contradictory information from my various respondents. There were dedicated persons involved in carrying out projects and programmes for self-employment – individuals with the best for their “subjects” in mind. There were also those with preconceived ideas about those subjects. Some of the immigrant respondents felt discriminated against, others not. Some were not even “immigrants” in the literal sense of the word. Nonetheless, I perceived the “political context” to be so heavily discursive, and the discourses to be so heavy, that although there were likely to be subtle shifts of emphasis the problem would still be as topical by the time my thesis was written as at the beginning of the project. In other words I wanted to write towards a clearer perception of the existence, problems, and consequences of ethnocentric representational practices.

Doing research, participating in a project, and writing a thesis – they are all learning processes. Perhaps my biggest gain has been a more confident approach to ”politics”, that I have become aware of the political potential inherent in research and thus in the position the researcher takes. In the words of Handler: ”Indeed, it seems to me that I have a responsibility to be critical of the social and cultural values of the world that I inhabit” (Handler 1993:73). Practising reflexivity induces a critical perspective that can have far-reaching consequences. If nothing else, it will expose aspects of one’s existence that are taken for granted, and though it complicates, it also emancipates. As far as the project results are concerned, I believe the best strategy is to see ”the political task not as ‘sharing’ knowledge with those who lack it, but as forging links be-
between different knowledges that are possible from different locations and tracing lines of possible alliance and common purpose between them” (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:39). By passing on the knowledge of the respondents as well as sharing my own learning experiences, my hope is that a more effective dialogue can take form in which all parties have a voice. That way “the field” expands even further, to become even more than an arena for constructing the research problem and grinding forth a purpose, as well as an actual physical place – it ultimately becomes a “site for strategic intervention” (1997:39) and a place for political reflexivity.
Notes

Chapter 1: Beginnings
(p. 11–28)

1 Targeted Social Economic Research.
2 The situation on the labour market has changed since 1997. Those changes that occurred between 1997 and 2001 are to a certain extent reflected in the Final Report, but those that have taken place since then are not.
3 The practice of reflexivity: in its narrower focus, as the self-reflecting anthropologist engaged in the interpersonal relations of fieldwork and, in its broader sense, as a searching probe of the discipline itself, questioning the conditions and modes of producing knowledge about other cultures. (Scholte 1972, as quoted in Okely & Callaway 1992). See Ehn & Klein 1994 for a discussion on the application within Swedish ethnology, and Bourdieu 1992 for a comprehensive discussion on the topic. Also Clifford 1986, Marcus 1994, Clough 1994.
4 The other teams were provided with other case categories and conducted their own comparative studies. These were then brought together in the Final Coordinating Report (2001).
5 The works of Schütze (1992), and Riemann and Schütze (1987) were the basis for what was presented as biographical method as well as texts by project participants Apitzsch & Inowlocki (2000) and Feiwel Kupferberg (1995). Texts on ethnicity issues were supplied by participants Aleksandra Alund (1996c) and Floya Anthias (1982), and T.H. Marshall’s Citizenship and Social Class (1992 and 1996) was the basis for our understanding of citizenship. Articles on self-employment were written by participants Maria Kontos (2000) and F. Kupferberg (1998). R. Waldinger’s work with H. Aldrich and R. Ward (1990) was the main text concerning this latter topic. As most of the authors (at least the project participants) used qualitative methods in their work, the above texts overlap as far as topics and theoretical usefulness is concerned.
6 “Det rörliga sökarljuset” (the mobile searchlight) is an established term for the way in which an ethnologist best ought to do his or her fieldwork. Åke Daun, inspired by a fellow ethnologist, Börje Hanssen, first used the term in a description of how the participant observer works heuristically (see Bringéus, Nils-Arvid 1976/1981:63).
7 All quotes and passages taken from Swedish texts or interviews are translated by the author.
8 Simply expressed, “representation is the production of meaning through language” (Hall 1997a:16). This is the definition used throughout this text. In other words, when I “represent” someone it is not as a “representative” in e.g. a political party, but in the form of how I describe and depict a person in text or speech.
A discursive formation is really only an expansion of the concept “discourse”. The same discourse / . . . / will appear across a range of texts, and as forms of conduct, at a number of different institutional sites within society. /When/ these discursive events refer to the same object, share the same style, and support a strategy, / . . . / then they are said by Foucault to belong to the same discursive formation” (Hall 1997a:44).

This combination would place the text in the style of “methodological reflexivity” as defined by Denzin. “In practice, methodological reflexivity often leads to texts that combine poetic and first-person narrative accounts with standard, ethnographic arguments” (1997:219). Denzin refers to A Thrice Told Tale (Wolf 1992) as an example of such a text.

I will not contribute to the discussion on “constructivism” and “constructionism”, but will use constructionism as explained in the text.

Sometimes “migrants” is used instead. This is mainly due to the fact that this was the preferred term within the EU-project.

The Final Report was made up of the six phase reports and thus separated into chapters on that basis.

Chapter 2: Facts and apprehensions

(p. 29–54)

See the brief discussion on ethnicity in the introductory chapter. In addition, postcolonial theory problematises the fact that “it is always ‘the Others’ that have ethnicity, and not we here in the West” (Eriksson et al 1999:45). Defenders of the concept claim this can be corrected if we speak of eg. Swedish ethnicity. This strategy, however, involves the assumption of a relatively homogenous and stable notion of culture, which postcolonial theory also criticises (ibid.). I use the term well aware of the essentialist connotations.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the concepts “immigrants” and “Swedes” are used for a lack of better terminology. The same applies to “native women” and “immigrant women”. It would be too complex to present official definitions and/or theoretical applications every time the terms come up. Using the concept “persons of foreign background” can perhaps be seen as a slight improvement, but this also is problematic. See discussion in Chapter 3.

SOU stands for Statens Offentliga Utredningar, or Official Reports of the State.

Ministry of Labour.

Swedish Immigration Board.


“When this term has been used / . . . / it has almost always implied a structural relationship of dominance and a discursive or political suppression of the heterogeneity of the subject in question” (Mohanty 1999:195).

Swedish Objective 3 Programme 1996.

The information on YOUTH START, NOW and HORIZON is taken from the Proposal of operative programme for “Employment” 1995–1999. The information on INTEGRA is taken from the Supplement to the Operational programme for Employment: INTEGRA 1997–1999. The programmes are implemented on a national level, but the
decisions on which projects are prioritised for financial and other support are in the hands of the County Labour Committees and the local labour exchanges. In total, Objective 3 has as its goal to spend in total 67 million ECUs on Measure 4 (the measure that includes self-employment) in the time period of 1995–1999. The Swedish public contribution will be 82 million ECUs, bringing the total to 149 m ECUs. Within the “Employment” initiative approximately 25% of the budget goes to NOW and YOUTHSTART respectively, 30% to HORIZON and 20% to INTEGRA.


Chapter 3: Fiery souls and ascribed identities
(p. 55–92)

1 The method of analytical thematisation follows a mainstream epistemological tradition of Swedish ethnology called kulturanalys (analysis of culture), influenced by the international fields of social and cultural anthropology. See Ehn, B. & Löfgren, O. 1982. Kulturanalys. Ett etnologiskt perspektiv.

2 After much deliberation about how far to go with anonymisation – taken to its extreme, even “Sweden” would have to be given a pseudonym – I decided to limit it to the actual people in the study (and not anonymise places).

3 ALMI is a state-run credit company.

4 A poor agricultural area of Turkey.

5 See Pripp 2001:25–26 for a discussion on “subjective” and “objective” identity. In the process of creating the objective (or ascribed) identity of “immigrants”, there is an unequal balance of power between the interpreters and the interpreted. The practices of the interpreters have the effect of making distinctions between population categories and of making them objects of knowledge. That knowledge focuses on the fact that “they” are immigrants, the social attribute that informs all the other characteristics as well as the personal identity. “They” are “immigrant youth”, “immigrant women”, “immigrant shopkeepers” and perhaps “qualified, but immigrant”. “The point of distinguishing between objective and subjective identity is that the two do not need to be in accordance with each other” (Pripp 2001:26).

6 As do other such abstract concepts. See my discussion on the effects of globalisation in Chapter 2.

7 Instituted in 1975.

8 “Antagonism is the term for conflict within discourse theory” (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:55).

9 During a research information project: “Kulturmöten i Blandsverige – etnologisk forskning om svenskar och invandrare” (Cultural meetings in a mixed Sweden – ethnological research about Swedes and Immigrants).

10 This is a policy that varies from municipality to municipality and is also in the process of changing in many places. The question of how the adult is supposed to be able to actively look for work when constantly tied up with her little ones is one reason for the rethink.

11 Eldsjäl could be literally translated as “fiery soul”, but the dictionary says “dedicated person”.

Notes
Chapter 4: A critical phase
(p. 93–116)

1 Research hypothesis: “that active social integration policies aiming at the promotion of self-employment of unemployed women and migrant minority members can only be successful if their specific socialisation under unstable biographical and work conditions is recognised and compensation is provided for their discontinuous working careers. These deficits are hypothesised as the principal cause also of business failure and thus require interventions.” (TSER Proposal 1997:9). See also Chapter 1.

2 A phenomenon not unknown to “non-immigrants” either. Epiphanic events such as childbirth, deaths, divorces and so on can cause the same splitting of life into a before and after.

3 See also Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:43. They discuss “objective” discourses, or discourses “deposited in layers”.

4 Ethnopoetics originated in American folklore and linguistics during the 1970’s and was introduced to Swedish ethnology by Barbro Klein in 1990 (see Arvidsson 1998).

Chapter 5: Victims and agents?
(p.117–137)

1 Zsuzsa Ferge’s (1979) contrast between societal and social policy: ”The concept of societal policy ./ ./ is used in a special sense. It encompasses the sphere of social policy (the organisation of social services or the redistribution of incomes), but also includes systematic social intervention at all points of the cycle of the reproduction of social life, with the aim of changing the structure of society” (as quoted in Marshall & Bottomore 1992:62).

2 I will not delve into discussions on economic theory any more than is necessary to illustrate the point.

Chapter 6: Struggles and aspirations
(p. 139–159)

1 There are some brief parts – often only a sentence or two – in this text that are repetitions from earlier report sections. This is due to the fact that the two texts were originally written separately and for different purposes.

2 See Chapter 2.

3 The aspect of “contributing” on the labour market ties in with the more recent trend of calling “our immigrants” a “resource”. Seeing the “immigrants” as a “resource” is problematic in itself. It breeds associations to an economic viewpoint where “they” are either profitable to have here or not, which in turn excludes a more humanistic approach.

4 Kooperativt IdéCentrum, Stockholm.

5 This Conclusion covers the report in Chapter 5 as well as in Chapter 6.
Chapter 7: Winding up the yarn
(p. 161–176)

1 Parts of this discussion have been published previously in the article “Strategier på sträckbänken” (Mason 2001) in Lundgren, Britta & Martinsson, Lena (eds.) Bestämma, benämna, betvivla. Kulturvetenskapliga perspektiv på kön, sexualitet och politik.

2 “Identification” in the sense of empathetic understanding through an inside perspective, rather than an actually shared position.
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This is a study of how immigrant women use self-employment policies to start businesses. It is also a critical investigation of that study. After partaking in a three-year European research project, the author looks back and in a rereading of the final report critically examines the research process. With a reflexive approach issues such as how the "field" is determined in research and why stereotypes are prevalent on all levels of society are addressed. In examining the concepts, values and understandings that inform both research and politics, the subject of the researcher’s role in the production of knowledge becomes especially significant. What steps can be taken in order not to contribute to the reproduction and consolidation of preconstructed categories?

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