Is Sweden a paradigm of diversity management in the EU?
A case study on the socio-cultural integration
of non white Swedes into Sweden

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Declaration

I, Hugo van Teslaar hereby declare that this thesis entitled “Is Sweden a paradigm of diversity management in the EU? A case study on the socio-cultural integration of non white Swedes into Sweden,” submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within it of works of other authors in any form (e.g. ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the List of References.

I hereby also acknowledge that I was informed about the regulations pertaining to the assessment of the MA thesis Euroculture and about the general completion rules for the Master of Arts Programme Euroculture.

Signed:                             

Date: 08 August, 2016
To my parents, who are always there
Abstract
This thesis studies how a non-white minority integrates into Swedish society in order to better understand the particularities of Sweden’s immigration model and to see if it is as suitable as it is made out to be in EU circles. It does so through an exhaustive review and cross-examination of existing literature on immigration in Sweden, and by collecting opinions from members of a long established immigrant community: the Eritreans in Sweden. It calls for a more nuanced approach in education and society to issues of race and ethnicity, so that the majority of the population realizes that using and discussing these categories should not be avoided, because they are useful to come to terms with diversity. By not focusing exclusively on economic insertion, but by also placing emphasis on the socio-cultural integration of minority identities, it will point out to the need for more comprehensive integration policies that equate opportunities and chances of non-white Swedes with those of natives and ensure equal access to the labor and housing markets. It contends that ‘top-down’ legislation and systemic implementation of such policies foster feelings of ‘belongingness’ among non-white Swedes, and contribute to the creation of social capital and to the overall peaceful coexistence of Swedes of different cultural backgrounds.

Keywords
Immigration, Diversity, Minority groups, Afro-Swedes, Eritreans, Sociocultural integration, Sweden.

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# Table of contents

List of Acronyms ......................................................................................................................... 6  
Purpose of the thesis and relevance of the study ................................................................. 7  
1. Introduction to the study and historical background .................................................. 11  
   1.1. Sweden’s context of immigration .................................................................... 11  
   1.2. Terminology, African immigration to Sweden and the Afro-Swedish community .... 14  
   1.3. Eritrean diaspora and realities ......................................................................... 16  
2. Swedish immigration policies and the integration of minorities ............................... 20  
   2.1. Postwar immigration to Sweden until the 90s, the need for labor ..................... 21  
   2.2. The realities of the 1990s - racism, labor discrimination, and housing segregation .... 25  
   2.3. A reversal to the situation of the 90s? ............................................................... 29  
3. Background and approach to the case study ................................................................. 34  
   3.1. Theoretical framework ..................................................................................... 34  
   3.2. Methodology ................................................................................................... 35  
   3.3. Research design ............................................................................................... 37  
   3.4. Personal reflections and ethical considerations ............................................... 38  
   3.5. Limitations .................................................................................................... 39  
4. Individual experiences and rationales of Eritreans from Uppsala and Stockholm - reflections on the situation of non white Swedes in Sweden ............................................................................................. 40  
   4.1. Uppsala respondents ......................................................................................... 41  
   4.2. Stockholm respondents .................................................................................... 47  
   4.3. Discussion and Reflexion .................................................................................. 58  
5. Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 64  
Bibliography .......................................................................................................................... 70  
Annex .................................................................................................................................. 75
List of Acronyms

BME: Black and minority ethnic

ELF: Eritrean Liberation Front

EPLF: Eritrean People’s Liberation Front

EU: European Union

GT: Grounded Theory

HoA: Horn of Africa

LO: Swedish Labor Organization

MIPEX: Migration and Integration Policy Index

OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

REVA: Swedish 2013 nationwide immigration plan

SCB: Swedish National Statistics

SI: Symbolic interactionism

SFI: Swedish for immigrants

UK: United Kingdom

UN: United Nations

US: United States of America
Purpose of the thesis and relevance of the study

Migration considered as the spatial movement of individuals is not a new phenomenon and has happened for many centuries. Our predecessors in Africa decided about one and a half million years ago to move northwards towards Asia, and our own species occupied Europe in different waves about seventy thousand years ago. Twenty-first century migration is not unique in terms of numbers and Europe has not always been a net recipient for immigration. The population transfer of Europeans to the USA from the early nineteenth century until 1914 is estimated in over thirty million and that of the twentieth century, after the Second World War greatly surpassed present numbers of immigrants to Europe, with the difference that, in that case, Europeans were the refugees. However, today’s rate of migration and the impact it has on socio-economic and human rights issues of several nation-states has led scholars to coin the twenty-first century as the “century of the migrant”. Among factors that contribute directly to this process are economic crisis, (such as the 2008 financial crisis, which according to experts will become more cyclical and recurrent), the loss of acquisitive power by the middle classes, more accessible travel, a globalized economy, ease of communications, inter-ethnic conflicts, repression, climate change, etc.

This thesis studies the Eritrean immigrant community of Uppsala and Stockholm in Sweden, as an example of how an immigrant minority integrates into Swedish society. The case study involves semi-structured interviews and focuses on the sociocultural integration in Sweden of a highly visible BME (black and minority ethnic) population, the Eritrean community, in order to better understand whether Sweden’s management of diversity is as suitable as it is made out to be in EU circles, or whether there is room for improvement. In contrast with more assimilationist approaches in Denmark and the Netherlands, Sweden’s multiculturalist strategy to “merge extended rights of citizenship with a political framework free from essentialist conceptions of national belonging” and to promote inclusion through diversity, though laudable as it is, has, for reasons that will be argued later, steered away from those aims, and is currently facing challenges that have to be actively tackled if its strategy is to succeed in the long term.

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1 Thomas Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2015), 1.
A study about immigration to Sweden and its management of diversity is particularly interesting, given that Sweden is generally thought to have fared better at integrating its immigrants than most of its Western European neighbors. The notion among European circles that Sweden can be considered as a sort of ‘exceptionalist model’\(^3\) for integration, that others should follow, comes from polls taken in 2006 by the Migration and Integration Policy Index (MIPEX),\(^4\) in which Sweden scored the highest marks out of 28 countries.\(^5\) The results referred mainly to economic indicators, but on all other criteria Sweden also scored more points than any other country. The conclusion of the report that Sweden has the “most favorable policies for promoting integration,”\(^6\) coupled with a long standing international perception that it is a highly efficient, open and egalitarian society places Sweden very high on a scale measuring the adequacy of its integration policies. But to what extent is this the case?

A closer look at Sweden’s management of diversity reveals that it is not as exemplary as it is made out to be, and that the reality might not live up to the reputation. This can be largely attributed to the particularities of its model, such as, among other things, very high levels of discrimination in different areas of society towards BME populations, high levels of urban segregation in big cities, and clear socio-economic differences between black Swedes and white Swedes that are not decreasing and are exacerbating social polarization. The term ‘management of diversity,’ which is used throughout the thesis, refers to Sweden’s policies for organizing immigration and integration, and was originally branded in the US to designate the development of public policy and corporate business. It is considered especially apt to describe Sweden’s model of immigration, in relation to the turn in Swedish politics in the 80s towards internationally dominant neoliberal doctrines, led by the Social Democratic party, in

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\(^4\) The MIPEX was developed by the British Council and the Migration Policy Group and is based on a comparative assessment of the degree of legal equality of immigrants across 25 EU member-states, Norway, Switzerland and Canada. Countries score high on the index when immigrants can easily and with minimal preconditions obtain equal rights. The index covers 140 indicators in six areas: Access to nationality, long-term residence, anti-discrimination, family reunion, labour market access and political participation.


\(^6\) Ibid.
which the welfare system gave way to more institutionalized practices that “socially organized”\textsuperscript{7} the life of immigrants.

The objective of the thesis is two-fold; to question the premise that Sweden’s approach to integration is highly successful, and to examine if Sweden’s initial multiculturalist integration policies, (set out in the 1970s, and redesigned in the 1990s), have fallen short of their aims, victims of wider neoliberal transformations. It argues that the Swedish multicultural model implemented through certain institutional practices and organizational strategies has provided many civic rights to immigrants, but has also pushed it to neglect other aspects of integration such as access by non-white Swedes to the housing and labor market in equal terms as natives, creating many potential tensions. Another instance of this shortfall can be seen in the mild response of the state to initiatives of migrant collectives, which as a result of feelings of neglect and injustice, seek to open up more channels of dialogue. The need for more communication with immigrant collectives in which everything should be open to discussion, and the need for legislation against discriminative discourses and practices by the majority is clear. The study of Sweden’s immigration strategies will be done taking into consideration that evaluating the policies of a country regarding integration “entails a normative dimension,”\textsuperscript{8} and that overarching models should not be extrapolated to other cases and are particular to each countries’ dynamics and circumstances.

Not denying that migrants constitute a “mobile labor force within a global economic system”\textsuperscript{9} and an important economic, (as well as cultural) element for receiving societies, the thesis aims to comprehend immigration to Sweden by not only taking into account utilitarian aspects of integration but by also considering aspects related to identity and cultural accommodation in an effort to move beyond theories that view immigrants exclusively as units of labor. In my opinion, a larger number of studies should address the cultural aspects of integration, beyond the economic ones, because if immigrants do not develop a feeling of ‘belongingness’ to the host society then the society loses social capital. As Howard Duncan points out social capital is “at the root of the possibility of


\textsuperscript{8} Wiesbrock “The integration of immigrants” (2011), 57.

co-operation and facilitates the development of human capital, smoothly functioning communities, vibrant and stable economies and an interesting and secure cultural life.”\textsuperscript{10}

The treatment of immigrants in Sweden is pragmatic and has turned into “a state-sponsored containment of the organizational life of immigrants”\textsuperscript{11} resulting in their commodification. This thesis contends that this context has not only had a toll on third country nationals, but has also had an impact on the native population with the surfacing of anti-immigrant feelings. It is reasonable to believe that the attempts of Swedes of foreign background to integrate and develop feelings of ‘belongingness’ are continuously thwarted by the majority, for whom the prospect of a slow erosion of their national identities caused by diversity is uncomfortable. A lack of inter-ethnic contact between the two groups is viewed as a possible core problem. A qualitative approach which collects opinions of one of the immigrant groups in order to evaluate their levels of identification with state policies and society at large has been considered to be the most adequate to refute or validate the hypotheses put forward in the thesis.

To conclude, immigration, with over one billion migrants in the world today, is one of the characteristic elements of contemporary life. The number of people living outside their country has doubled since the 1970s. Given that migration is a highly current concern and that it keeps increasing rapidly, the public management of diversity should be one of the great challenges and also one of the top priorities of many democratic societies. The elevated number of refugees and asylum seekers arriving to European countries in recent years, and the attention given to the differences between the majority and the minority populations will remain a political and social challenge. Studies about how and why immigration policies and cultural accommodation tailored to the necessities of each country can improve the inclusion of immigrants in the host society are of great importance, and this thesis aims to contribute to these topics.

The paper has three main sections: The first section relies on secondary sources and is divided into two main chapters. The first lays out the background for the case study and has three sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter introduces the reader to the dynamics of Swedish immigration, explains the use of terminology and justifies the selection of the Eritrean community in Sweden. The second provides statistics and information on the


\textsuperscript{11} Jim Mac Laughlin, “Racism, ethnicity and multiculturalism in contemporary Europe: a review essay”, Political Geography 17 no. 8 (1998), 1020.
immigration from Africa to Sweden and the particulars of the current Eritrean community in Sweden. The third explains some of the characteristics of the Eritrean diaspora and the experiences of Eritreans abroad. The second chapter starts by pointing out that there is an overabundance of studies that emphasize economics over culture. It is divided into three sub-chapters, the first of which provides a general account of Sweden’s immigration policies and trends in the postwar years, the second deals with Swedish developments in the field of immigration during the 90s, and the third gives an overview of the situation of immigration in Sweden in the last two decades.

The second section is divided into two chapters; the first provides the theoretical framework for the case study, which mainly, but not only, relies on the ‘symbolic interactionism’ perspective and Herbert Blumer’s work,\textsuperscript{12} and then explains the methodology, the ethical considerations and the limitations of the case study. The second is a contribution of primary sources to the work and is based on the field-work/case study itself, where empirical data retrieved from the Eritrean community is presented and individual experiences and rationales are explained.

The conclusions are given in the third section which uses the findings of the case study to assess the overall suitability of Sweden’s management of diversity and provides new insights on the dynamics that affect the integration of non white minorities in Sweden.

1. Introduction to the study and historical background

Before entering into a detailed analysis of Sweden’s immigration policies in the following chapter, some previous clarifications about the Swedish context of immigration and the Eritrean community and its realities are provided so that the reader is acquainted with the topic of Swedish immigration and the causes and characteristics of the displacement experienced by Eritreans.

1.1. Sweden’s context of immigration

Sweden was mostly a country of emigration, until first, refugees escaping the Second World War, and then non European refugees fleeing conflict ridden countries

\textsuperscript{12} Herbert Blumer, \textit{Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method} (University of California Press, 1986).
began to change it slowly into an immigrating one, to the point that its non Swedish-origin population (this includes inhabitants born in Sweden but with at least one foreign born parent) is today more than 25 per cent.\textsuperscript{13} At the beginning of the 90s, for reasons that will be explained in the next chapter, there was a dip in immigration levels, but since then immigration has not ceased to increase, (see Table 1), placing Sweden at the top of the list of OECD countries when it comes to asylum seekers per capita\textsuperscript{14} but also placing, according to some, a strain on Sweden’s capacity for integrating migrants.

Table 1. Number of residence permits approved per year in Sweden, 1980-2013. Source: The Guardian.\textsuperscript{15}

Sweden is a relatively small European country with a population of a bit more than nine million and a half inhabitants, and is thought to have enjoyed a considerable ethnic homogeneity during its nation building process in the nineteenth century. For


Swedes “being Swedish refers both to an ethnic identity (language, culture) and a civic identity (citizenship)”\textsuperscript{16}. Swedish citizens do not clearly differentiate between the two. The nationalist myth about Sweden being an ethnically homogeneous nation -- one people, one race, one language, one church, one historically given territory -- (of which, incidentally, its main regions have never been subjected to foreign occupation or rule), etc. remains today a powerful notion in the collective imaginary. In the public discourse, this mythic notion is used to criticize immigration of a certain ethnic background, and can be associated to what Alünd and Schierup call present day cultural racism, a “pessimistic new racist romanticism that continues to mystify and draw stereotyped images of the ‘alien’ against a background of traditional nationalist symbolism.”\textsuperscript{17}

The cultural homogeneity to which many Swedes refer when defending their national values and identities, is based more on a myth than a reality. For many years, the Saamis, until recently a largely ignored native minority, have always lived within the limits of the Swedish state. If multiculturality is the co-existence within the boundaries of a nation-state of different cultural groups or ethnies, then Sweden has been multicultural for a long time.\textsuperscript{18} For example, going back 300 years, plurality was the prevailing condition and Swedish speakers were a numerical minority. Living in areas that had previously been conquered by war were Finns, Russians, Prussians, Poles, Germans, Danes Latvians and Norwegians that barely intermixed, nor mixed with Swedes. If we even go further back in time, to the fifteenth century, during the heyday of the Hanseatic league, the port cities of Visby, Stockholm and Kalmar were virtually German cities.\textsuperscript{19}

Sweden, like its Scandinavian neighbors, has a strong tradition of Social Democratic Party power and has had, with a few interruptions, majority rule of Social Democrats for more than a hundred years. It is within this context of Social Democracy that Sweden addresses cultural and economic challenges posed by immigration and the integration of minorities and will have to respond to future manifestations of diversity. The arrival of asylum seekers is expected to keep on growing in the future due to, among

\textsuperscript{18} Westin (2000), 1.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
other reasons, instability in the Middle East and the African continent. The number of asylum seekers that arrived to Sweden in 2014 have doubled in 2015 reaching the figure of 160,000. The Eritrean community makes a good subject for a case study about Sweden’s management of diversity, because it is currently Sweden’s second largest asylum seeker nationality after the Syrian in terms of numbers, but has been settled there for a longer period of time, since the major causes of displacement occurred during the 90s.

The reason for choosing the Eritrean community in Stockholm and Uppsala is because greater Stockholm is the largest and most populous urban area in Sweden and has the largest concentration of Swedes of foreign origin. Another reason, is that Stockholm’s development has always been tightly related to immigration, and for many years now it has had a very large intake of immigrants and refugees, one of the highest in Europe in relation to its population, and is still today a major receiver of refugee migrants. Uppsala, on the other hand, also has a large community of immigrants relative to its population, as attested by the immigrant based riots it, along with other Swedish cities, experienced in 2009.

1.2. Terminology, African immigration to Sweden and the Afro-Swedish community

To be able to talk about immigration in Sweden, first the term ‘immigrant’ and its use throughout the thesis has to be defined. For the purposes of the thesis I use Bask’s definition in which an immigrant “is a person born abroad who has immigrated to a host country,” in this case Sweden. A native Swede is used in reference to a white individual who has been born in Sweden and has Swedish parents. A first generation Swede is a person who was born in Sweden but has at least one foreign-born parent. Danes, Finns, Islanders and Norwegians are Nordic citizens. A naturalized Swede is an immigrant who has Swedish citizenship. Some of the longer established respondents in the case study are naturalized Swedes, and I refer to them as Eritrean-Swedes because the use of the

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21 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
term immigrant can be on one hand stigmatizing and on the other misleading, since it is
often used to refer only to individuals of a specific ethnic background and does not give
justice to the way some would like to be perceived in the society of which they are
members. An example is that a Norwegian immigrant will not have the same challenges
as, for instance, an Eritrean immigrant or a Somalian, because ‘whiteness’ is an important
element determining the options or the challenges and possibilities that one encounters in
Sweden. Therefore, I also use ‘white-Swedes’ to refer to native Swedes and ‘non-white
Swedes’ for black Swedish citizens, such as Eritrean-Swedes.

Due to Sweden’s non involvement in the colonization of Africa the immigration
of African’s to Sweden as early as the 60s and 70s was completely unprecedented. The
report Afrofobi, presented in 2014 estimates there are around 180.000 Afro-Swedes\(^{25}\)
living in Sweden, of whom 60% are foreign born, while 40% were born in Sweden.\(^{26}\)
Eritreans, Ethiopians and Somalian immigrants make up the largest African diaspora
groups, and the numbers of Eritreans and Ethiopians alone are estimated to be 20,000 or
more, distributed among different cities and towns in Sweden,\(^{27}\) including Stockholm and
Uppsala. About 80% of Afro-Swedes are second generation Africans and of these the
overwhelming majority are descendants from Horn of Africa (HoA) migrants.

Before discussing the specificity of the Eritrean diaspora, some comments about
the general features of the African diaspora in Sweden are explored, especially since it
diverges from what Michael McEachrane\(^{28}\) considers the traditional understanding of this
phenomenon in relation to the ‘Black Atlantic’ framework devised by Gilroy\(^{29}\) and others.
According to McEachrane, the African diaspora to Sweden is distinct and different from
others, insofar as the immigrants of African origin there are not shaped by a shared
stigma, very present in the collective consciousness of other citizens of African origin
who are descendants of transatlantic African slaves. He argues that the HoA was never

\(^{25}\) This is somewhat a revolutionary concept since Swedish conceptions of nationality have previously not
allowed for hyphenated identities. The Afrovenskarnas Riksförbund defines the term Afro-Swedes as
http://www.afrovenskarna.se/afrosvensk/.

\(^{26}\) Afrophobia - A Knowledge Overview of the Situation of Afro-Swedes in Sweden Today,

\(^{27}\) Anne Kubai, “Being here and there: migrant communities in Sweden and the conflicts in the Horn of

\(^{28}\) Michael McEachrane, “Afro-Swedes” in Encyclopedia of Afro-European Studies, León University,
Diasporas-in-Sweden-FINAL-II.pdf.

Press, 1993).
extensively involved in the transatlantic slave trade, and the first and second generation of immigrants from this area are more influenced by the experiences of what he calls the New African Diaspora, intrinsically related to the postcolonial realities of the 20th century.\textsuperscript{30}

1.3. Eritrean diaspora and realities

A recent UN human rights inquiry has documented systematic atrocities in Eritrea, and the report concludes that the abuses amount to crimes against humanity.\textsuperscript{34} It says that Eritrea’s regime has enslaved between 300,000 and 400,000 people over the last 25 years through a system of indefinite compulsory military service which is enforced by threats of death or detention and where conscripts are forced to work for the military in very poor conditions, while rape and torture is widespread in military camps. Enslavement through military service is the reason why many risk their lives in the perilous journey to Europe and why the Eritrean diaspora is the largest after the Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi, with a total of 47,025 Eritreans applying for Asylum in Europe in 2015. The regime tries to prevent people from fleeing by punishing the families of those who make it out. Eritreans report that border guards shoot at people that try to leave, and a shoot to kill policy appears to be in place.\textsuperscript{35}

Obtaining exact figures for the total number of immigrants from Eritrea in Sweden is difficult because many of the Eritreans that settled down in Sweden were in fact registered as Ethiopians, however, the Swedish National Statistics (SCB) estimates that 3465 immigrants (aged 16-64) coming from Eritrea lived in Sweden in the year 2001.\textsuperscript{36} The exact number of Eritreans presently in Sweden is more likely to be closer to 35,000 according to a Swedish-Eritrean member of the Afro-Swedish National Association,\textsuperscript{37} constituting a big chunk of the Afro-Swedish community in Sweden, and placing Sweden as the primary Eritrean immigrant receiving country after Italy.\textsuperscript{38} The arrival of Eritrean immigrants to Sweden must be understood as part of a wider process of

\textsuperscript{30} McEachrane (2012), 2.


\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{37} Gabriel, interviewed (06/07/2016), see Annex.

\textsuperscript{38} Hamde (2004), 7.
deterritorialization that has affected several generations of Eritreans and has ramifications in several countries. But before continuing to explain some of the realities that have contributed to make the Eritrean diaspora a very dynamic and transnational experience, the effects of late colonialism in Africa should be recalled.

I do not want to repeat some well-known facts of the European colonial project here, as it has been masterfully explained elsewhere, but I consider it important to mention, albeit briefly, because its impact on the continent has been enormous, and without it, it is difficult to understand later developments such as the Ethio-Eritrean war, which is one of the factors responsible for the repression the country is currently suffering. Numerous problems that Africa experienced after de-colonization stem from the colonization process itself, during which the so-called ‘civilizing mission’ carried out by colonial administration came close to erasing entire cultures and communities. Other consequences were the imposition of geopolitical boundaries that did not map to the indigenous ethnic, linguistic or cultural realities, the siphoning of African resources towards Europe and the creation of European dominant minority societies that made sure to institutionalize inequalities and abusive practices.

The decolonization process in Eritrea was a complicated one because after the Second World War there was no consensus among the victorious powers about what should be done with the state. In 1950 the UN adopted a resolution by which Eritrea would from then onwards become an autonomous unit belonging to the Ethiopian Crown. The gradual incorporation of Eritrea to Ethiopia was finalized in 1962 and served as an excuse for the start of separatist insurgency and the creation of the ELF (Eritrean Liberation Front) and later the EPLF (Eritrean People’s Liberation Front) armed groups. The separatist movement gained momentum after Ethiopia completely denied self-rule and autonomy to the Eritrean territory, leading to a bloody struggle to gain independence, which was finally achieved and confirmed in a UN supervised referendum in 1993.

Since we have no official census on the Eritrean diaspora it is estimated that, due to decades of armed conflict, 25%-30% of all Eritreans sought refuge or asylum

40 Diaspora understood as epitomizing a migration of a forced kind and generally, (though not always), associated to migration of a long duration type.
abroad between 1961 and 1991.41 For Redeker Hepner the Eritrean migrants that have resettled abroad through family reunification programs in several countries, despite being of different backgrounds and ages, all share the historical and political dynamics experienced in their home country. According to her the Eritrean diaspora is “distinct for its geographic spread and highly coordinated ideologies and practices of pro-independence, long distance nationalism.”42 Hepner notes that the Eritrean diaspora is considered as a “quintessential diasporic or transnational state.”43 For her, the diaspora can be divided into two differentiated generations; one prior to 1993, (the year Eritrea attained independence from Ethiopia) called ‘Generation Nationalism’ because their experiences and memories were marked by the armed struggle for independence, and their allegiances to either the ELF or the EPLF, and another that she names ‘Generation Asylum’ characterized instead by experiences of increased internal repression and militarization by the “former liberators turned rulers.”44

One million individuals belonging to Generation Nationalism fled Eritrea more or less permanently from 1961 to 1991 settling abroad in North America and Western Europe while keeping close communication via telegrams, telephone, fax, letters, etc. with their relatives and friends who had remained back home. Generation Asylum in contrast is more a product of globalization and reflects ‘time-space’ compression, to use David Harvey’s term.45 For them, communication across the diaspora is instantaneous and they have a strong will to defy any imposed spatial constraints. In the last decade alone more than a quarter million persons have left Eritrea, making it one of the ten largest asylum seekers and refugee exoduses in the world,46 with a transfer of population that continues at a rate of between 3,000 and 5,000 individuals monthly.47

An interesting study about the transnational dynamics of the Eritreans abroad48 shows the importance of transnational activities in the lives of Eritrean immigrants and the degree of effort and implication that goes into them. A set of dynamic factors, which

42 Ibid., 185.
43 Ibid., 185-186.
44 Ibid., 186.
46 Hepner (2009), 193.
47 Ibid., 187.
include personal circumstances (level of contact with relatives and friends in the home country) and contextual circumstances in both the host country (policy of the host government towards refugees) and the home country (political and economic stability), influence the capacity and desire of immigrants to participate in transnational activities. Capacity defines the immigrant’s will to participate in relief and reconstruction in their home countries, but the lack of means to do so, and desire describes the situation in which an immigrant has the means to do so, but also the option of choosing not to.49 This study concludes that “transnational activities and identities can indeed flourish among refugees”50 and that even after deciding to settle permanently in their host countries the refugees do not break the links with their homelands, but quite on the contrary reaffirm these links through the realization of transnational activities.

In a study that interviews several immigrants from the HoA,51 Anne Kubai theorizes their involvement in the affairs of their homelands through the analysis of the notion of nostalgia, claiming that nostalgia deeply impacts the relations between immigrants from the HoA in Sweden and their home countries. Due to the fact that Sweden grants dual citizenship to those who fulfill the conditions, some immigrants have obtained Swedish citizenship, but Kubai contends that many immigrants see it as a citizenship on ‘paper’ compared to their ‘real’ citizenship. Because of their awareness of possessing both, the disjuncture between here and there becomes a reality, described in their words as “living in Sweden and at the same time ‘longing for, belonging and connecting with the people back home’”52

The notion of nostalgia as theorized in Kubai’s research serves in the context of the Eritrean diaspora as a catalyst for transnational activity, functioning as a strong emotional conductor that structures meaning in relation to memories and past experiences, motivating the immigrant to idealize and affirm his or her home culture, and amplifying the sense of belongingness to their homeland. More so, if to some extent the community is exposed to some degree of discrimination in the host country. This feeling of nostalgia intertwines with what Hepner refers to as a common consciousness of different generations shaped by past experiences. Although nostalgia is stronger in earlier

49 Al Ali, Black & Koser (2001), 626.
50 Ibid., 632.
52 Kubai (2013), 178.
generations of immigrants, second generation immigrants born and raised in their parent’s host countries, can also develop this feeling, resulting as Kubai notes, in that many are easily lured to join in the support of the different factions at home.53

The particular conditions and characteristics of the Eritrean diaspora has led Hepner to affirm that its generations are “more oriented towards each other and their homeland than to the societies where they have settled.”54 Since not only Eritrean immigrants, but those coming from the HoA, and other places such as Syria, will be naturally predisposed to establish contact with what happens at home, and will possibly stay away from the dynamics of their new surroundings in the first stages after their arrival, receiving societies have to be thoughtful of these realities and try to facilitate intercultural contact as early as possible.

2. Swedish immigration policies and the integration of minorities

“[It] is stupid, inhumane and void of solidarity. Moreover, quite personally, I am unwilling to live in a society which is a glossy supermarket for some nationalities and a rigid police state for others.” Peter Nobel, former head of the anti-discrimination board, 1990.55

Before starting with the actual case study on Eritreans, it is important to thoroughly contextualize their situation upon arriving in Sweden so the reader understands how the general immigration context affects the protagonists’ lives.

First, I wish to point out that the subject of African migration to Sweden is relatively new and that there is not much academic literature available in English on the topic of Afro-Swedes. A fair amount of the literature available in Swedish deals with discrimination and afrophobia,56 and specific instances such as, for example, whether a person with a particular name gets treated differently than his native counterpart in the housing market, employment market, etc. However my lack of knowledge of Swedish has prevented me from reading them. This has forced me to quote reports and other information coming from Swedish government agencies by means of secondary sources

54 Hepner (2009), 193.
56 See the Afrophobia report by Mångkulturellt centrum available at: http://www.tobiashubinette.se/afrofobi.pdf
available in English. Despite the evident limitations in the range of sources available to me, I was surprised to find that many of the recent studies on immigration and the integration of immigrants and refugees in Sweden, searched and read via google scholar and academic journals in English,57 dealt more with utilitarian and economic considerations such as flow control (borders), and social and economic insertion rather than with the cultural aspects of integration and the problems, the challenges and the possibilities these issues hold for the future.

I understand that these studies depart from an economic framework, and that their focus does not go beyond social and cultural aspects of integration and I acknowledge that it is important to highlight economic issues, because economic indicators show that immigrants have difficulty integrating at an economic level, but I find striking the lack of deeper reflection on the reasons for why that integration fails. Many socio-economic problems immigrants face, are related to cultural aspects, since the immigrants’ difficulty in finding jobs, stems, at least in Sweden, from discriminatory attitudes of employers towards immigrants, due to cultural racism. I hope that this study will contribute to a debate on these issues, and help reflect in a critical way on the dynamics that perpetuate socio-economic differences, unequal access to social and political capital, and atavistic notions about immigration among the majority.

2.1. Postwar immigration to Sweden until the 90s, the need for labor

Immigration in the postwar years can be broadly divided into two distinct periods; A first one running from 1945 to roughly the first half of the 1970s that concerns primarily labor-force immigration and is characterized by a lack of general planning and definite strategies aimed at regulating the size of immigration. A second period from the 1970s to the 1990s marked by a shift toward refugee immigration arrivals and the adoption of a more emphatic multiculturalist stance towards immigration by the government, but also an increment of societal tensions between natives and immigrants as a result of the new realities that BME communities bring to Sweden. The arrival of the largest wave of Eritrean immigrants coincided with the end of the second period.

Just after the end of the Second World War Sweden’s approach towards immigrants was assimilationist,\textsuperscript{58} which involved a ‘*laissez faire, laissez passer*’ attitude towards them because it was expected that the ease of access to the welfare system, and the possibilities of interaction with the natives resulting from the elevated number of jobs available would eventually lead to their assimilation into Swedish society. During the 1960s, the trade unions and the Labor Organization (LO) began to demand a stricter control on immigration flows because some of the latest waves were having a number of negative side effects, such as keeping wages low in industry and, in general, preserving the traditional industrial structure at a time when it should have undergone significant transformation.\textsuperscript{59}

Although ludicrous at the time, the preoccupation that in the future the lack of control of immigrants could escalate in Sweden towards a scenario similar to that of the US of the 60s, in which images of civil unrest were all over the news, was real. Almost instinctively the government reacted by rejecting a guest worker policy such as the kind practiced in Germany and Switzerland. In 1965 the first steps to facilitate the integration of immigrants were taken and state planning started to be applied to immigration. Employers and labor unions were important actors in deciding who would obtain a work permit and, though the curbing of labor immigration was also taking place in the rest of western Europe, in Sweden it produced renewed efforts to formulate inclusive immigrant policies. In 1969 a new agency, the National Swedish Immigration Board (SIV) was established to regulate and take charge of immigration policy.

In 1975 a bill passed unanimously in parliament would implement from thereon integration policies at a national scale. It was a radical break with the previous assimilationist strategy of the government and an implicit commitment to a multiculturalist approach that would, in time, become an important element in the Swedish model of welfare state politics.\textsuperscript{60} Ålund and Schierup remark that this approach became known in Europe for its


consistent rejection of a ‘guestworker’ strategy for labor import, its ambitious quest to create social equality among ethnic groups, its respect for immigrant culture and its emphasis on providing immigrants and ethnic minorities with resources with which to exercise political influence.\textsuperscript{61}

This policy of ethnic pluralism was based on three pillars: \textit{equality}, \textit{freedom of choice} and \textit{partnership} which can be generally interpreted as a warrant that immigrants “were to enjoy the same social and economic rights as Swedes,”\textsuperscript{62} and needless to say, the same obligations.

\textit{Equality} means that immigrants in Sweden would share the same rights as natives and would be permitted to bring back their families to Sweden.\textsuperscript{63} As we shall see in the following chapters, civil actors, particularly immigrant associations, question that this premise concerning “same rights”, is indeed being fulfilled. The slogan \textit{freedom of choice} conveys the idea that individuals are responsible in determining their personal and cultural affiliations and identities to the Swedish society. This notion seems in most cases to have always been upheld. \textit{Partnership} reflects the idea that immigrants and minority groups are partners in developing society and should work together to achieve mutual tolerance and solidarity. It should translate into support for immigrant organizations, and in the extension of political rights to immigrants, but this last slogan has also been problematic.

The \textit{partnership} goal of the 1975 integration policies bill was characterized by an emphasis on projects for partnership in society through activities but were dependent on the co-operation between Swedish ‘folk movements,’\textsuperscript{64} “the traditional vehicle of political socialization and moral supervision,”\textsuperscript{65} and immigrant associations, which effectively led to the strategy for the “organized socialization of immigrants in Sweden.”\textsuperscript{66} This created what Ålund and Schierup called the ‘Ethnic Tower of Babel’\textsuperscript{67} that defines a situation in which culturalist and administrative practices by the

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{64} Folk movements are highly institutionalized popular social movements closely related to the state elite, of which the trade union movement is the most important, although there are others such as the women’s movement and the youth movement.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 110-113.
government “have helped create a fragmented political stage populated by many parallel national organizations” held together by a generous system of subsidies, but characterized by the inhibition of trans-ethnic communication between them and the confinement of activities of a group to its own ethnic reserve.

One of the state initiatives was aimed at developing the premise of partnership by way of voicing the demands of foreigners. In 1976 the right to vote in municipal and county elections was extended to foreigners and in the 80s the state entertained the possibility of extending these rights to include parliamentary elections, but this never materialized. In these years there was a considerable increase in the arrival to Sweden of asylum seekers coming from Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia due to instability in the Middle-East and North-East Africa. In 1985 a deliberate state policy known as the “Whole of Sweden Policy” introduced a scheme by which refugees started to be moved from refugee camps to specific designated municipalities, which in return received state compensation. This was done in order to curtail the concentration of migrants in the big metropolitan cities of Göteborg, Malmö and Stockholm.

Immigration, integration and Sweden’s management of diversity have been heatedly debated over the years. After the Second World War Sweden’s approach to immigration was characterized for being disorganized and unstructured. Immigrants were accepted into Swedish society on the basis of the need for them in the labor market. There was no specific immigrant or minority policy in place, nor were there any reliable polls about people’s opinions on immigration. Later studies have uncovered that many Swedes felt anxiety at the rate of immigration and perceived it as a threat to Swedish values, but a powerful taboo “on the subject of expressing xenophobic sentiments” kept these opinions in the private sphere, and no visible tensions were to be seen. For reasons that will be explained in the next chapter, this changed at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s when the prevailing tolerant atmosphere was broken and “historically sedimented and latent” racial tensions surfaced.

2.2. The realities of the 1990s - racism, labor discrimination, and housing segregation

Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted. It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable, called cognitive dissonance. And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalize, ignore and even deny anything that doesn’t fit in with the core belief. Frantz Fanon, Black skin, white masks.

In the 90s Sweden was in the middle of a fiscal crisis and economic recession that was especially affecting middle class workers who were beginning to lose acquisitive power. As this happened, a sense of frustration and insecurity started to surface among them. Many needed a scapegoat other than the government on which to externalize their discontent, and their attention shifted towards those with an unmistakable otherness; the immigrant or ‘alien,’ who was seen as stealing jobs and an extra burden for the hard pressed state and welfare funds. Sweden had changed dramatically in a relative short period of time: from being a country of emigration, it became, due to a very liberal refugee policy practiced in the postwar years, one of the highest net immigration countries in Europe.

Between 1984 and 1989 the amount of immigrants annually granted residence, and mostly arriving from places other than the Nordic countries, such as the Middle East, Latin America, Africa and Southeast Asia doubled, reaching 45.000.\(^72\) Echoes of the discontent and the voices suggesting that the economic problems were being caused (or at least exacerbated) by the arrival of immigrants reached the Social Democratic government, that, towards the end of the 80s, decided to apply a more restrictive and selective refugee policy, which Ålund and Schierup read at the time as a sign that Sweden was moving closer to the strategy of ‘Fortress Europe’.\(^74\) However, despite a first dip in immigration rates due to the redefinition of immigration policy, it again shot up between 1992 and 1994, showing that the immigrants were not being discouraged in their goal of reaching Sweden.

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\(^72\) With an estimated one million Swedes emigrating to the United States from the mid-nineteenth century to about 1930.
\(^73\) Pred (1997), 390.
\(^74\) Ålund & Schierup, in *Racism and Migration in Western Europe*, eds. John Solomos and John Wrench (Oxford & Providence: Berg, 1993), 105. ‘Fortress Europe’ is a term employed at the time to define the practice carried out by many EU countries of enforcing stricter border security management and migration policies to deter irregular migration flows towards Europe.
Another, yet graver, consequence of the new immigration restrictions was that some government officials were publicly associating certain integration problems to cultural differences between natives and immigrants, treating ‘culture’ in an essentialist way, as if it were homogeneous within nations or ethnic groups. The attribution to immigrants of negative connotations in the public discourse, appears to be related to a general increase in societal hostility towards refugees and asylum seekers, seen in acts of racist violence and discrimination. Examples are the 1993 burning of a mosque in Trollhättan, the 1995 senseless slaying of a young Ivory Costian in Klippan, the frequent arson attacks on asylum hostels during this period, or the notorious shootings of immigrants between August 1991 and January 1992, by a man nicknamed Lasermannen, because of his use of a rifle equipped with laser sight. In a later interview the author of the shootings claimed he was inspired by the debate about immigrants in these years and felt he had the moral support and backing from the people.

Coinciding with a generalized context of rising populist anti-immigrant parties such as New Democracy, the cultural differences that native Swedes suddenly brought to the fore, were only those felt with non Nordic immigrants and BME populations. Voices were suddenly raised against what some considered favorable treatment to immigrants, as if the state in the last years had granted them too many benefits. What before was tolerated, suddenly became a problem.

The increasingly important role that public discourses on ‘culture’ in these times were having in the upsurge of discriminatory practices and the legitimization of restrictive immigration policies cannot be underestimated. An example is an article published in 1990 by Sverker Åström, an ex-member of the administration, in which he states that:

> It is neither amoral nor against the law to investigate whether an applicant has a criminal past, maybe as a terrorist: nor to ask oneself whether the individual in question appears to be willing or is capable of becoming a loyal member of Swedish society and whether he has what it takes to thrive: nor to try to judge whether he or she comes from a country and culture [my emphasis] whose customs and usages are so extremely different that a reasonable harmonious adaptation is difficult or impossible.75

His comments, clearly reveal his thoughts regarding the difficulty in the integration of immigrants because their ‘culture’ is too different, and the use he makes of the term, which he uses to draw a clear line between those capable of being Swedish and those who

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are not. Even more alarming was that the former social democratic minister responsible for immigration approved Åström’s comments. Allan Pred states in 1998 that cultural racism\(^{76}\) in Sweden is “now clearly the most prevalent form of racism.”\(^{77}\)

The significant differences in unemployment rates for Swedes and persons of foreign origin may be a sign of discrimination and xenophobia,\(^{78}\) and can help us understand better the general context of immigration in the 90s. In 1993 Sweden’s unemployment rates had risen from 1.5 percent in 1989 to reach 8.1 percent,\(^{79}\) with unemployment rates for foreign citizens 2.5 times higher than among native Swedes. All this happening, says Pred, despite the fact that refugees and migrants that had arrived during the 1980s were all intellectuals and skilled professionals, had a greater average education than the Swedish population and were commonly fluent in Swedish.\(^{80}\)

A study on discrimination carried out during the 90s, by the office of the Ombudsman against ethnic and racial discrimination, directed at vulnerable groups, including migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and from a range of Arabic speaking countries, show that discrimination had turned into a serious problem. The study reveals that 67 percent of all men of African origin had experienced some sort of discrimination while seeking work, 48 percent were harassed at the work place, 65 percent were refused entry to a restaurant and 60 percent openly threatened and abused in public spaces.\(^{81}\) A young woman, with a Senegalese father, born in Sweden and living there her whole life stated in these years:

> You are constantly aware [of your difference], you are constantly very conscious of it. For example, when you apply for a job, you maybe phone an employer and since I speak the Skåne dialect he thinks I’m Swedish and after a while he asks: “What’s your name?” “Sawda Abdal.” “No, unfortunately the job is already filled,” and you have already talked about the job’s specifications and what the salary will be and blah, blah, blah...but suddenly, when you say your name, the job is filled! Then I think it’s really aggravating.\(^{82}\)

Discrimination and overt racism though widely (if unconsciously) practiced, is denied by many Swedes, who avoid making any references to them and have trouble with

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\(^{76}\) ‘Cultural racism’ is a notion that can be traced back to Franz Fanon, who saw the stress on cultural difference as a recycled form of biological racism and part of a larger system of oppression.


\(^{78}\) Westin (2000), 34.


\(^{81}\) Westin (2000), 35-36.

\(^{82}\) Quoted by Pred (1997), 393.
acknowledging their presence. This, has no doubt to do with the fact that, and in agreement with Franz Fanon’s quote at the beginning of this chapter, their core belief, in consonance with an environment steeped in social democratic ideals is that Sweden is an egalitarian, open and tolerant country. Denial of cultural racism by politicians and mass media is not exclusive to Sweden and has been documented for the UK, Holland and other Western European countries, but it is particularly painful for Sweden, once the world’s conscience, because it champions itself as the most egalitarian of egalitarians.

Allan Pred points out that confronted with the facts many Swedes resolve matters by reworking their identity through denial and projection, and by telling themselves that they are not racists; it must be someone else, somewhere else. These citizens prefer to believe that racism is only attributable to groups receiving media coverage, skinhead youths, Nazi and extremist groups such as the White Aryan Resistance. The truth, however, is that denying these attitudes in public, to acquaintances or work colleagues, but then, practicing them in private through an improper remark, or a defying look, perpetuates a stigmatizing dynamic towards non-white residents.

The concentration of immigrants in certain neighborhoods, wrote Hammar in 1985, “is not the result of any conscious, direct policy,” however, this statement, in hindsight, has proven to be incorrect. A shortage of housing in the 1950s and 60s led to an ambitious construction program designed to build one million apartments in Sweden. These housing developments consisted of individual flats characterized by high standards of construction and a modernist style that was perceived as harsh and alienating. They lacked a rich local environment with work places and cultural activities and satisfactory public transport, aspects which quickly made them lose their appeal, leading many Swedish families to move out to other places. The sudden availability of apartments prompted the housing and welfare authorities to assign them to newly arrived refugees and immigrants.

85 Pred (1998), 647.
86 Ibid.
87 Pred (1997), 400-401.
88 Hammar (1985), 35.
While immigrants moved in, Swedes moved out, and a prolonged repetition of this process led to the concentration of immigrants in the satellite towns built around the larger metropolitan areas of Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö. Official Sweden largely ignored the problem, but the immigrants residing there performed worse at school and in the labor market, which, coupled with “increasingly hostile views towards immigrants now voiced by many young Swedes,”89 blocked, according to Westin, “the option for many children of international migrants to assume a Swedish cultural identity.”

2.3. A reversal to the situation of the 90s?

Following a relative period of social peace running from the end of the 90s to 2009, it is now obvious that the tensions had been simmering under the surface. Refugee immigration continued and in 2005, at the time of the riots in the Paris ‘banlieus,’ Sweden was still generally perceived as a quintessential multicultural welfare state. But in 2009, only four years later, Malmö, Gothenburg and Uppsala experienced their own urban rebellions, Sweden’s first immigrant fuelled riots. They were interpreted by the government and media, as an expression of cultural deviancy and a failed socialization of youngsters and migrants, particularly those of Muslim background,91 in a context increasingly hostile towards multiculturalism.92 Most of the rebelling youths lived in the immigrant satellite areas of the larger Swedish cities denominated by the official discourse ‘exposed city districts,’ where a close correlation between public housing, low income, unemployment and welfare dependency can be found.93 Internationally, the Swedish riots of 2009 received very little attention, and domestically they were already fading into obscurity, when in May 2013, the killing by the police of a 69-year-old man in the socially disadvantaged neighborhood of Husby, in Stockholm, triggered five days of violence, with rioting and clashes with the police across the city. The way the death was handled by the police was an important factor in the violence that ensued, and many immigrants considered it a result of an excessive use of force, a view strengthened by the fact that the police gave contradictory information about

89 Westin (2000), 27.
80 Ibid.
92 In the following years the prime ministers of Germany, France and the UK announced the failure of multiculturalism.
the circumstances surrounding the man’s death. A locally based movement for social justice called *Megaphonen* immediately questioned the circumstances of the death, and one of its members said: “How can a team of SWAT-police break into a flat against a sixty-nine-year-old man and kill him??...The police teach us in practice what the school teaches us theoretically: as a poor working man and non-white you are worthless, in Sweden and in the entire world.”94 Later studies revealed a major problem of ‘discriminatory policing’ in Sweden.95

The riots in Stockholm have to be read in relation to a wider context of discrimination and institutional disregard for the civil rights of minorities. A great source of distress among Swedish immigrant minorities had been the implementation at the beginning of 2013 of a nationwide plan, called REVA, to detain and deport undocumented migrants. This plan ended up being extended de-facto to numerous Swedish citizens of color from socially disadvantaged city districts, where they were subject to continuous police surveillance and multiple identity checks. This was considered as a practice of ‘ethnic profiling.’96 Cases of racial discrimination were common in this period. In 2015 Kyle James, a black New Yorker, accused of having punched a bouncer, when many eye-witnesses later claimed he did not, was brutally thrown out from a bar in Stockholm, and then laughed at by the police when asking for explanations.97 Taking into account other incidents, such as the murder of two people of immigrant origin and the attempted murder of another five between 2009 and 2010 by a Laserman like sniper and the increase in attacks on asylum centers, as well as serious racist incidents,98 we sense that the scope of the problem is broader.

For instance, Schierup et al. say that “the police are not in themselves the deepest source of the conflict, nor its solution, but the ‘bluejackets’ are a symbol of a society perceived as racist.”99 There seems to be a gap between the attitudes and values that society upholds and the practices people actually carry out, with too many racist related incidents. Some scholars point out that while Sweden has made efforts to address its past

95 Ibid., 7.
96 See Ibid.
98 Hate crimes against the 200.000 or so black people of African origin in Sweden have increased by more than 24% since 2008 according to the Afrofobi report, 2014.
connections to the Third Reich and race biology, it has not done enough in terms of questioning its involvement in the slave trade and the dehumanizing ideology that made that possible, and has only recently begun to study its colonial past. These recent studies reveal that there was not much difference between the treatment slaves received in Sweden’s Caribbean colony of Saint-Barthélemy and other countries’ colonies.

Despite the rapid growth of far-right parties all across Europe in the last decades, Sweden had managed to keep its parliament free of them, but in 2010 the Sweden Democrats managed to enter parliament with 6 per cent of the total vote. The roots of this party can be traced back to the old Swedish National Socialist movement of the 1930s and the explicitly neo-Nazi movement of the 1980s called Keep Sweden Swedish. Liz Fekete argues that its resurgence coincides in a large degree with a situation that mirrors that of the 90s, not so much because of the global financial crisis of 2008, which Sweden barely felt, but because of the current refugee crisis that is seen as putting a strain to the very fabric of Swedish society, and has led in 2015 to Sweden’s sudden reversal of its generous asylum policies.

Another similarity with the situation of the 1990s is that again today, at the height of the refugee crisis, there has been a resurgence of public speeches that “range from blatantly xenophobic and racist statements to discrete and sometimes almost imperceptible” referrals from the media and government to ethnic and cultural differences. An example is Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt’s comments in 2012 on the unemployment rate in Sweden: “It is not correct to describe Sweden as a country in a situation of mass-employment. If one looks at ethnic Swedes [my emphasis] at the prime of their life, we have very low unemployment.” Prime Minister Reinfeldt’s comments refer to Sweden’s above EU average difference in unemployment levels between Swedes

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of foreign background, particularly non-white Swedes and native Swedes, with the gap widening in recent years. Immigrants are now twice as likely to be unemployed than their native counterparts, due, among other things, to the challenges immigrants face when searching for jobs, which is seen in discriminative practices such as non-white Swedes with foreign surnames having to send twice the number of CVs compared to native-born applicants before they obtain a job interview.106

To sum up; social polarization in Sweden has become more acute in the last decades as a result of the deep socioeconomic crisis of the early 1990s. Measures such as the ‘one million’ housing policy that increased urban segregation, and the neoliberal turn in Swedish politics have all contributed to worsening the conditions of Swedes of immigrant origins. While in the 1970s migrant organizations were to be supported as autonomous corporate actors in civil society, according to Schierup and Ålund, in the 90s, in keeping with Social Democratic corporatism, migrant associations came to receive bureaucratically conditioned funding that responded “to an ideology and institutional practice driven by market incentives that focused on equal opportunities.”107 This conditionality in the granting of the subsidies seemed to leave very little room for these migrant organizations to make political claims and pursue political goals.

When Swedish society undergoes periods of stress, such as the crisis of the 90s or the current refugee crisis, much of the discontent falls on migrants, who already have to bear with additional pressures in their everyday lives that come from an increasingly hostile treatment by government and society. Some examples of this hostility are ethnic profiling, greater difficulties in finding a job, a rise in acts of racism and discrimination, the mistrust they are object of, etc. However, despite the heightened experience of these problems caused by their ‘difference,’ there is a considerable lack of efficient channels for them to bring up legitimate grievances, since on one hand it is not in the governments agenda to listen and create dialogue with immigrant associations, and on the other, the same government makes no significant efforts to tackle the socio-economic differences that affect non-white citizens and the source of these differences. This state of affairs only reinforces feelings of separateness and erodes the guarantees against discrimination and

107 Schierup and Ålund (2011), 50.
The riots in 2013 that followed the killing of a man in Husby, mentioned earlier, were in first instance a reaction to feelings of neglect and injustice, but grew in size and virulence when, after the killing, no dialogue with the police or government representatives ensued.

Speaking hypothetically, how would have things unfolded if the situation that triggered the 2013 riots had involved a white man living in an upper class neighborhood, instead of a colored one living in a socially disadvantaged one? Would the police have acted in the same way? If so, would their response to a public outcry in that neighborhood been as lukewarm as in the case of the Husby killing? How would the media have reacted? The government’s reaction would certainly have been different. It would have responded more energetically, questioning the police’s reaction sooner, and opening channels of dialogue with the bereaved’ family or circle. And, on the other hand, if these had not been satisfied with the solutions offered, they could have channeled their discontent by voting for changes in the municipal team, but the exclusion that immigrant minority groups face, is a starting point for their exclusion from citizenship in a wider sense. In socially disenfranchised neighborhoods voting turnout in municipal elections is much lower than the national average.109

The combination of all these factors is a sign that the Equality and Partnership goals launched by the government in the 70s are falling short of their initial objectives. To quote Schierup, Ålund and Kings, “there is an obvious lack of democratic space in which the ‘alternative voices’ of suburbia can be promoted.”110 On the other hand, the issue of racism has become a pressing problem in Swedish society. Nobody talks about it, but its presence in many echelons of society is undeniable, and should be opposed in a more proactive way, if it is to stop or diminish in the future. Without a long term education plan and tools to fight labor discrimination and racism, social polarization will only get worse, and Sweden’s official liberalism will increasingly seem like a paradox.

110 Schierup, Ålund & Kings (2014), 17.
3. Background and approach to the case study

In this chapter I justify the choice of Symbolic Interactionism and Grounded Theory (GT) as the theoretical framework and the methodological approach for the case study and give some information about their characteristics and strengths with respect to the objectives of the research. I also explain the research design and reflect on the ethical considerations that the study raises, as well as its limitations.

3.1. Theoretical framework

The use of the Symbolic Interactionism perspective following Grzegorz Pozarlik’s definition is a well-known and widely used interdisciplinary framework in which to conduct in-depth inquiry on identity construction.\textsuperscript{112} It is considered the most suitable for a case study that aims to explore feelings such as difference and belongingness among a minority group, and the more general dynamics of integration of minorities into Swedish society. Understanding identity along the lines of Stuart Hall, who suggests that it is shaped by interaction and contrast and actively constructed, produced and reproduced within changing contextual conditions and through relations of power,\textsuperscript{113} this thesis regards the construction of identity as a dynamic and negotiated process involving symbols and shared meanings that arise from, and are interpreted in, an interactive context.\textsuperscript{114}

Since research on migration and ethnic relations is an intrinsically multidisciplinary effort,\textsuperscript{115} the multidisciplinary character of symbolic interactionism seems especially well suited for conducting a case study on this topic. Coming from Sociology, SI is based on an earlier doctrine of interactionism that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, developed the idea that society is a web of interactions. It is deeply indebted to the ideas of North-American scholars George H. Mead and Herbert Blumer, who later coined the term ‘Symbolic Interactionism’ and developed and expanded


\textsuperscript{115} Tomas Hammar, “Repeal the Monopoly!: Open up for IMER!” in Nadia Banno Gomes et al. eds. \textit{Reflections on diversity and Change in Modern Society: a Festschrift for Annick Sjögren} (Mångkulturellt centrum, 2002), 314.
Mead’s concepts. Because SI is a well-established and known framework, I will not delve into its history and characteristics.\footnote{See Herbert Blumer’s seminal work: Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method (Univ. of California Press, 1986).}

The case study focuses on individuals belonging to a highly visible minority group in Sweden that are involved in a continuous process of meaning interpretation deriving from communication with countrymen back home and interactions with other members of their community and with the native population. Key to making inferences about their relation to society is to construe and decode these meanings in order to comprehend how these individuals relate to their context and the extent to which the relation is smooth and straightforward or patchy and textured, and the degree to which they embrace or reject it.

SI does not view individuals as interpreting and forming meaning in relation to some set of needs, but places interaction at the center of how people give meaning to their lives. The act of interacting that Ted Cantle claims is essential for community cohesion,\footnote{See Ted Cantle, Community Cohesion, A New Framework for Race and Diversity (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 11.} and for a society’s’ minority groups to create shared experiences and values with the majority. The use of the SI perspective for this study can help reach a better understanding of the social dynamics involved in the cohabitation between native and immigrant citizens in Sweden, and shed light on the terms upon which minorities relate to society as a whole.

3.2. Methodology

The reason for choosing a qualitative instead of a quantitative approach are manifold. The first is that finding enough respondents to produce reliable statistical information can prove difficult. The second, is that the type of inferences I seek to make on Sweden’s immigration policies and its management of diversity needs ‘thick data’ or what Clifford Geetz referred to as ‘thick description’ as opposed to ‘big data’.\footnote{Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture”, in Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973) pp. 19 - 35.} The objective of a qualitative approach is to unveil the life stories and views of the Eritrean respondents and thereby uncover models of their world that can provide insight into the social reality I am investigating. My judgment is that this type of information will be more useful for organizations or civil agencies interested in this topic and can lead to more fruitful debates and discussion.
Another reason why the Symbolic Interactionism perspective is relevant for this work is that it has influenced, along with other currents of thought, such as positivism and pragmatism, the Grounded Theory (GT) research approach which is used in the case study. GT was first established by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss and stresses that the action of individuals occurs in determinate socially structured conditions, but that they are not powerless in the face of these conditions and react differently depending on their circumstances, making choices on the basis of what they perceive. This theory also accepts that an intrinsic exchange occurs between the researcher and the object of his study and assumes that neither data nor theories are discovered, but they are constructed from the result of this interplay between participants and researcher. The approach stems from a pragmatic point of view which holds that there is no division between subject and object, but just an interaction between the two.\footnote{Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, \textit{Basics of Qualitative Research Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory} (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 2nd ed. 1998).}

The key element of GT-based research is that the approach to data collection and analysis takes place simultaneously. GT moves between induction,\footnote{Induction is when from a series of empirical and individual cases a pattern is identified from which a general statement is reached, which is probable and provisional.} and the more complex task of ‘abduction’ that involves constructing or choosing a hypothesis that explains an empirical case better than others, and is a worthy candidate for further investigation.\footnote{Robert Thornberg and Kathy Charmaz, “Grounded Theory and Theoretical Coding” in \textit{The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis} ed. Uwe Flick (London: Sage, 2013), 153.} The case study on which this thesis is based distances itself from GT’s most dogmatic version in which hypotheses emerge from the ongoing fieldwork, because the researcher already handles certain hypothesis derived from the explored literature and the research done on previous studies dealing with the subjects of minorities and diversity management in Sweden. It also diverges from the traditional GT approach in its ambition and scope. Due to the limited period of time available for conducting the study, it does not seek to develop a full blown theory grounded in data; it simply aims to answer questions about the success of Sweden’s immigration policies and its suitability as a model for other EU countries.

GT methodology is used because it distinguishes between the ‘theoretical codes’ of pre-existing theories and the ones that come from the data collection of the case study, and analyses actions and processes using narratives and descriptions, rather than themes and structure, since in GT “researchers concentrate on what people do and the meaning
they make of their actions and on the situations in which they are involved.” The empirical data will ultimately validate or refute some of the hypotheses handled and may suggest new ones. For example, an underlying hypothesis about the Swedish model of immigration managed by this thesis is that the simple lack of interaction between members of the immigrant groups and the wider society is frustrating a more systemic integration of minorities of immigrant background.

To know more about the dynamics and processes under research there are certain areas of social activity that the researcher determines beforehand as important for the object of study. This is known in GT as theoretical sampling. Questions are designed to obtain information in these areas because it is foreseen that they will yield insightful information related to the subject and can reveal more aspects of the topic being studied. Examples of variables that are deemed pertinent would be: urban settlement, transnational relations, education, mobility, discrimination, interaction, everyday life activities, etc. The questions are never fixed but change depending on the answers received and the emerging data is always cross-referenced and contrasted with previous results, examples of which are sought to check the suitability of the latest conclusions.

3.3. Research design

To tackle the questions put forward in this essay, a case study in the form of semi-structured interviews with a number of Eritrean immigrants, combined with field observations was considered the most adequate approach. In order to carry them out, the researcher relied on a previously designed interview guide which included a statement of informed consent123 and a list of questions of fairly specific topics to be covered, and left the interviewee a lot of leeway on how to reply. Questions that did not appear in the guide were asked when the interviewer picked up on things said by the respondents. In order to gain experience, the researcher first carried out pilot interviews to test how well they went. As a result of these pilot interviews some of the questions to which the respondents were seen to be unable to respond were eliminated or modified.

The interview questions were aimed at Eritreans who had been residing in the country for at least 1 year or more, and Swedes who were second and third generation

122 Thornberg & Charmaz in Uwe Flick, ed. (2013), 154.
123 The informed consent statement is provided before any interviews are undertaken and is voluntary and based upon the participant having been informed of the research purposes and rights to anonymity and confidentiality.
descendants of Eritrean origin. Pseudonyms were used and certain details omitted or coded in order to avoid disclosing the identity of the respondent. The questions tried to be neither too general nor too specific, short and flexible so that the respondent could feel free to talk about other things if he felt the questions led to that. Some of the answers that at first instance seemed unrelated to the topic, on a second evaluation, often contributed interesting insights to the issues under discussion.

The interviewer first became acquainted with the respondents by collecting some background information of a general order (name, age, gender, etc.) and by re-assuring them on any doubts they might have regarding the interview. It was explained to them that they would all remain anonymous and that any reference to them would be done by using pseudonyms. A computer was used to record the interviews. For this to be done in the best conditions, the interviewer made sure that the interview took place in a quiet and private setting.

3.4. Personal reflections and ethical considerations

As a multi-national citizen and a bearer of multiple (western) passports I am deeply aware of the privileged position and advantage in which this circumstance places me. The ease of travel and access to social and economic services in different countries are some of the benefits that I enjoy, and I am conscious of the grueling conditions migrants arriving to Europe go through, sometimes waiting for months to be granted asylum or a residence permit and enduring on one hand very challenging situations that I can only faintly grasp, and on another, asymmetrical power relations in the host society that affect cooperation across social and ethnic boundaries.

As a researcher, I am also very conscious of how my life story guides my work. Studying and living in Western Europe shapes my understanding of the world and imbues me of certain preconceptions and biases that are sometimes difficult to identify and recognize, and certainly influences assumptions about the subjects I explore. Because I write from a privileged position and my personal views and experiences necessarily intertwine with those of the participants, I am careful and make an effort to refrain from imposing my own views and values onto them. A case study such as the one undertaken inevitably involves a certain degree of subjectivity that is bound to condition the

researcher’s interpretations and results. It is my hope that the reader can grasp the variegated nuances that affects research built around ongoing ‘living’ stories, and be indulgent with any momentary and unintentional lapses of objectivity.

An important ethical concern to reflect upon and a possible risk when conducting interviews is that of being too obtrusive, or in other words, invasive of the privacy of the individual, which can provoke reactions such as irritation, refusal, conflict, etc. I have tried to prevent this, but some degree of obtrusiveness is sometimes unavoidable, even if the interviewer is sensitive and respectful. Given that in order to address the research topic, the interviews include questions of a personal nature and some can be considered sensitive, the participants are informed individually of the purpose of the research before the interview begins, are guaranteed anonymity in their responses, and are reassured that they are free from having to answer any questions that are unclear or makes them uncomfortable.

3.5. Limitations

Before I decided to do the case study, I knew from the offset of the difficulties of finding respondents for interviews. I was confident nonetheless that in time I would find someone willing to be interviewed that could then introduce me to other potential participants, a sort of mediator or intermediary with the community, but unfortunately this did not happen. The reality was that I encountered many difficulties in finding respondents willing to be interviewed at length, and despite my words of encouragement people were generally reluctant at the prospect of being interviewed. This, I assumed to be largely due to the fact that, besides enriching scholarly research on the topic of Swedish immigration, an abstract notion for many, they did not really have incentives to participate, deeming that their time could be more wisely spent on other things. As a result, the sample size is relatively small and I have interviewed more recently arrived young respondents than older, longer established ones.

Another limitation of a case study in which collecting and analyzing the opinions of others is carried out, is that part of the original meaning and intention behind the

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126 I was informed by a member of the Afro-Swedish association that anonymity is especially important for them, because most of the people are afraid that the information they disclose might be used against them by the authorities of their country, who are responsible for their exodus in the first place; i.e. that the information may end up in the Eritrean embassy, etc.
answers of the participant is inevitably lost in the process of interpretation. All the more so if the questions and the answers have to be translated from Swedish to English, as was the case for some of the interviews. The author of this paper is aware of these limitations and has done his best not to force the interpretation of ambiguous or unclear answers about what the respondents were trying to convey based on his own thoughts and guesses, and hopes that he has not misconstrued any of the answers from the interviewees.

4. Individual experiences and rationales of Eritreans from Uppsala and Stockholm - reflections on the situation of non white Swedes in Sweden

“The main line of social difference in Sweden beyond aspects such as gender, age, etc. is race, an element that has a very heavy impact when it comes to the living conditions of people.” (Gabriel, interviewed on 06/07/2016)

It is a difficult task to talk about your life experiences of a country in which you are not a native, especially when you have to disclose your views and feelings to a total stranger. For this reason, I am grateful to the informants for their efforts. The information in this chapter is largely based on the recorded interviews of nine respondents and informal non-recorded conversations with another three, as well as observations, particular discussions and exchange of opinions with a small number of native Swedes. Most of the recorded interviews were arranged through the SFI center in Uppsala, and include the testimonies of recently arrived young respondents to Uppsala.

The Stockholm interviews on the other hand include the information of long established Eritrean-Swedes, residing in Sweden for more than 20 years and is based mainly on one recorded two-hour skype interview, and three non-recorded conversations that took place in the neighborhoods of Hallonbergen, where the largest community of Eritreans reside. I consider the two-hour interview with Gabriel (pseudonym) a key testimony for the case study because of the background of the respondent, the wealth of information provided and the valuable exchange of ideas that took place between interviewer and respondent. An influent member of the Eritrean community as well as the Afro-Swedish Association, and a prominent advocate of Afro-Swedish rights in

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127 SFI, ‘Svenska för invandrare’ or ‘Swedish for immigrants’ is a language program offered by Folkuniversitetet, which is an educational association that offers Swedish language courses to foreign students, academics and immigrants.
Sweden, Gabriel showed during the interview that he was very well acquainted with the realities to which non-white Swedes are exposed in Sweden.

In the following pages I will first present the information gathered from the interviews held in Uppsala, which included questions on urban settlement, transnational relations, education, mobility, discrimination, interaction, everyday life activities, etc. I will treat these replies as a unified block, since, with very few exceptions, they all gave similar answers. Next, I will analyze the Stockholm interviews carried out with longer established Eritrean-Swede residents to then finish with some preliminary reflections based on the study. The questions in the interview guide were continuously modified in response to the relevance of the information received, also adapting them to the profiles of the interviewees. Some of the questions about the labor market and identity issues were not pertinent for recently arrived respondents and were hence excluded from some of the interviews. In the following pages, direct quotes of respondents are transcribed in cursive letters.

4.1. Uppsala respondents

All of the Eritrean respondents from Uppsala were aged between 17 for the youngest, to 33 for the oldest, and most, but not all, lived in the districts of Gränby and Gottsunda which count with a high density of immigrant population. Half of the population of Gottsunda, which had a total population of nearly 10,000 inhabitants in 2007, was from a foreign background. And most of the buildings of Gottsunda were erected during the 1960s as a result of the ‘Million Programme.’ None of the respondents were born or raised in Sweden and all have arrived recently to Sweden, 5 years being the longest period of time any of them had been living there. Most of the respondents spent their time in their areas of residence because they did not work and only left their neighborhoods to study Swedish in the city center, or, in one case, attend classes at a University campus. Out of 8 respondents, 2 were Muslims, 5 Christian and 1 non-religious; 3 were women, 9 were men. Tigrinya is usually their first language and used among themselves, with Arab, English and Swedish as second languages. For some, the interviews had to be conducted in Swedish because they were more proficient in Swedish than English, with the opposite being the case for others.

For the Uppsala group, when asked about their involvement in associations related to Eritrea in Sweden, 6 out of 8 claimed that they were members of Eritrean associations,
or participated in cultural activities organized by these. For example, one female respondent participates in meetings of an Eritrean association in Gränby every Saturday and Sunday, while another participates in activities of an Eritrean cultural group there (he did not specify whether it was an association or not), that meets regularly and organizes activities such as eating Eritrean dishes, listening to Eritrean music and talking about Eritrean history and culture. He also said that not all the Eritreans in this area go to the meetings, and that approximately 20 to 25 of them attend. Concerning their levels of contact with their home countries, all respondents appear to have a certain amount of contact, mostly through phone calls to their families and relatives that occur generally once or twice per month. The only respondent that had less contact with his family and only speaks to them once every three or four months is Jordan, a 17-year-old living in the city center. Nearly all of the respondents considered that their Eritrean cultural heritage was important to them, answering that they want to keep it alive in Sweden; this includes food, hair styles, garments, music and so on.

In relation to the respondents’ lives in Sweden and the extent to which they have undergone change after their arrival, they were asked to say something about their lifestyles there, and if they were very different from those of their parents. With some exceptions all agreed that the lifestyles in both countries and between them and their parents were significantly different, without really going into details about what were these differences. Kristin, a female respondent, while comparing her parents to herself said that her mother got married when she was 18, but that now many Eritrean girls have the possibility of studying and most want to do so early on, and if possible in another country. Peter, a university student of 33 residing in Sweden for five years, noted that despite the harshness of life, most of the Eritrean parents like to live in Eritrea because they really value their social life there, and that the initiative to leave the country, experience new things and seek a better future comes from the young, rather than the parents.

Most of the changes in life-styles of first generation Eritreans in Sweden were voiced in terms of habits and interaction. Yohan, a male respondent who had been living in Sweden for 21 months, admitted that he was still surprised each time he saw a woman smoking or drinking, and that to his eyes this was inappropriate behavior. For others, Swedish people are less communicative and talkative than back home and this seemed to be an aspect of concern for many, because they considered increased communication with
native Swedes to be the fastest way of improving their knowledge of Swedish. For example, when Jeff, a male respondent, was asked whether there are elements of Swedish culture to which he identifies to some extent, he replied: “people must speak more in the bus and in the train, I would prefer if people were more open when talking to other people.” Kristin expressed herself in similar terms when she explained that in the bus “I will ask somebody where this bus is going, even if I know where it is going, so I can have a little conversation because people do not speak to me.” When talking about the differences between Eritreans and Swedes the youngest respondent of the sample, known as Jordan, a 17-year-old Eritrean, said “oh, Eritreans, we want to laugh and talk more, and we stay out more, and Swedish people, they just sit at home” adding that its “easier to hang out and meet people from other countries than native Swedes;” an opinion shared by all of the respondents.

An indication pointing to the fact that making native friends is hard for non-whites in Sweden is that only 3 respondents in the Uppsala sample out of 8 claimed to have one or more close native Swedish friends. The levels of interaction are much higher between Eritreans and other communities such as the Sudanese, Somalian, Nigerian and Syrian, with whom many can speak Arabic, than with native Swedes. This also depends largely on where they live and who they have as flat-mates. They also share more activities such as sport, food events and music parties with people that come from the countries mentioned. When asked if activities in which both native Swedes and Eritreans participate are important, the unanimous reply is that they were. Most point out that such activities are important for integration, communication and to learn more about each other, and to improve their knowledge of Swedish.

When asked what kind of activities she thought would be positive, Angela, a female respondent answered that “I would appreciate if some Swedes were to show interest about my cultural heritage and country, and I would like to speak in Swedish with Swedes about Eritrea and how life is there, and interchange stories about our traditions with one another, rather than saying your opinion is right and/or mine is wrong and vice-versa, and this is good and this bad” adding that “this could actually work in Sweden because here you can talk about whatever you want.” Peter, the university student, answered that taking part in activities with both Eritreans and natives is “very important because those kinds of events give you the opportunity to learn from each other in a better way;” and went on to say that he had not heard of any such activities in Uppsala, and that
the only inter-ethnic events or activities he had been to were related to the University. He also said that interactions differ from city to city, and in his opinion Uppsala and Stockholm are somewhat better than smaller towns.

During the course of the study the question of whether they had ever experienced racism, felt discriminated, or been treated unfairly by others, received mostly a negative answer from the respondents, and almost everyone thought the authorities and particularly the police force treated everyone equally. Only the opinions from two of the respondents differed slightly from those of the rest of the group. Jordan, the only respondent living in the city center, (in what I suspect, although I have no confirmation, was a foster home), spoke very highly of the immigration and social services staff in Sweden, saying that he had never experienced any racist attitudes whatsoever from them. Before arriving to Sweden he had lived in Norway for one year and a half, revealing that he had felt the treatment by the immigration staff there unfair and derogatory. As for the police in Sweden he had been involved in two incidents with them and his opinion was that “there are some problems of racism within the police force.”

In response to the question about whether the authorities treated everyone equally, Peter stated that he had not personally encountered any situation that would prove otherwise, although “I have heard before some complaints, such as a group of Swedish youngsters breaking and entering in a house in Uppsala, and not being charged in court, and a very similar situation, only this time involving a non-white Swede, in which the court sentenced him to one year of prison, a sentence which seemed at the time to be excessive, considering that the individual in question was very young and had no previous record.” Racism and equal treatment were not the only areas in which Jordan and Peter’s opinions differed from the rest. An interesting opinion held by both was that their cultural heritage was not important to them. Jordan expressed this by saying that “it is not important for me to keep any of those traditions when I live in Sweden” and Peter went further and stated “I don’t think it is part of my identity, I think the idea of nationality and belonging to a certain country is too static. I believe that as long as you are a human being you have shared common elements with other people, and those shared universal elements is what I would like to emphasize instead of specific cultural traits”.

All of the respondents wanted to settle down in Sweden in the future to study and work. Some preferred to do more technical/practical courses, and others planned to study longer programs such as chemistry. Jordan and Peter shared the fact that they had at least
one close Swedish friend. Peter, who shared a room with a Swedish native in the dorm where he lived said that eventually Swedes open up when confidence builds and then you can get to know them better. Jordan stated he has three or four close Swedish friends. Other common aspects between Peter and Jordan included not participating in any Eritrean cultural groups or associations, and having previously lived abroad in a European country before arriving to Sweden. Jordan did not have a good opinion of his stay in Norway but Peter, on the other hand, had enjoyed his previous year long stay in the Netherlands, and though levels of interaction there between natives and non-natives were, according to him, higher, this did not change his overall high opinion of Sweden. All of the respondents coincided in that Sweden is a welcoming and tolerant country for immigrants.

With respect to housing, all agreed that the situation is difficult in Uppsala, and many had had to wait long periods of time before finding a place. I assume that the immigration authorities provide assistance in finding a place for those who have been granted asylum, which, I believe, was the case for most of the interviewees of the SFI group. Questions about the labor market were eventually omitted since none of the respondents had been exposed to it. Peter was the only one who had had something resembling a work experience when he had applied to a program for professionals, Korta Vägen, with the help of his university tutors. He was selected and attended a 4-month Swedish course aimed at building professional skills, followed by an internship or placement lasting 6 months. In the course of this program Peter came to learn that it was not easy to find a job in Sweden, especially for non-white Swedes and people of immigrant background. He said that he had come to understand that Swedish employers are more inhibited when it comes to hiring a foreigner, (or somebody with foreign sounding surname or appearance). “They are more willing to hire Swedes than someone they perceive as an outsider.” It was also his impression that “having a network of contacts greatly increases the opportunities of finding a job and this kind of a network is much easier to build if you are a native Swede.” He also believed that the current refugee crisis had worsened the situation and that as a result, the mentality of those hiring has toughened towards people of immigrant background.

A question on identity and of whether they felt more Eritrean or Swedish, was included in the last part of the interview guide because, although an elusive concept, I believed that reflecting on such notions would provide interesting insights on the levels
of integration into society of the respondents, but I soon realized that it was a misplaced question when answered by respondents who had been living in Sweden for a short period of time. Those whom I asked all felt more Eritrean and said that this would be the prevailing feeling in the future. Peter, the university student was the only one who replied that he did not like to think in those terms, because in his opinion identities change and are not static, “I would just like to combine the good attributes and values that I have learned in Eritrea with those of Sweden.”

Another question asking how close they felt to Sweden, --to its culture, traditions, festivities, history, etc. -- was also somewhat futile considering the small amount of time they had been in Sweden, but I decided to continue asking the question anyway, because the respondents reactions to it and some of the answers I received were revealing. Most of the respondents showed a reluctance to answer, not knowing really what to say. The logical reply was that they felt closer to Eritrea than to Sweden, and indeed, after some hesitation, that was the most common answer, but a few said they felt half-half, even though so recently arrived, they obviously had more ties to Eritrea. When asked whether he felt maybe more attached to his neighborhood, Gottsunda, than Sweden, Jeff, who was beset by hesitation answered with a short yes. When asked what they liked and disliked about Sweden, none had any notable negative remarks and most said that they were happy to be in a country that was at peace and where they enjoyed freedom of opinion. Angela said “I can do everything I want in Sweden, such as having a walk at 9 o’clock in the evening safely, while in Eritrea it is unsafe and pretty much anything can happen.”

The last question in the interview guide asked the respondents whether they felt they were full members of Swedish society, with equal rights, obligations and opportunities, to which 7 out 8 respondents answered affirmatively, without really giving an explanation for their answer, even though I tried finding out more about the reasoning behind the answer. One of the respondents, a 23-year-old male who had been in Uppsala for 19 months answered that he understood the question but was unable to answer it at present.

Last, when the interview with the student called Peter was drawing to an end and because of how it had progressed, I decided to confide in him my impressions and considerations of how in Sweden the subject of ‘race’ and ‘racism’ did not really exist in the public sphere, and seemed from what I had been told, a sort of taboo topic among native Swedes, which no one really seemed to discuss openly, despite clear indications
of prejudice and discrimination in the labor market for example. I asked Peter if in his opinion these things should be more openly discussed in society. His answer was that “it is important to talk about race, and debate about prejudice levels in the job market and other issues because if you just ignore them, at some point they will explode and become a serious problem.” I think we both agreed that immigration, cultural differences and integration issues should be talked of as naturally as somebody expressing their opinions about the weather, because the only way of finding solutions to them is through communication, not the opposite.

4.2. Stockholm respondents

I will begin this section by quickly referring to some important aspects of the conversations held with three senior Eritrean-Swede respondents from Hallonbergen called Richard, Hank and Gregg (pseudonyms). I say ‘refer’ because these conversations were not recorded, and despite my efforts to write down the main points of what had transcended as soon as possible, (the same day or the day after), I do not want to rely on them too much, since some of the original meaning of the information is likely to be lost in the process of recollection. The reason for not recording the conversations is that the individuals whom I first encountered constantly wielded feeble excuses to avoid talking to me. I then changed my approach by telling them I was a student living there, and was interested in their opinion on the life in the neighborhood, etc. By not mentioning at all a case study, or statement of informed consent, I managed to initiate conversations which eventually progressed towards interesting aspects for the case study. These are briefly outlined here. Next, I will present the key recorded testimony of Gabriel, and then end up with some general reflections before the final conclusion chapter.

Richard and Gregg spoke good English, so I did not have too many difficulties understanding what they told me. Hank, however, was harder to understand so I only took notes on those things which I was very sure not to misconstrue, (which left not much information at the end). The conversations usually started off with me introducing myself as a student and asking them where they were from. If Eritrean, I would casually ask them if they spoke Tigrinya, and then a follow up question like: Are there many Eritreans around? or How long have you been in Sweden for? etc. Richard, Hank and Gregg told me they had been living in Sweden for a long time, all of them for more than 20 years.
When I mentioned that as a student it was quite hard to find accommodation in Sweden, they all told me that it was hard for everyone in general, and all but one, were sharing flats and had been changing places regularly to find less crowded accommodations and better ‘deals’. When I asked if they had ever considered moving to another area, they told me that theirs was fairly cheap, but still expensive taking into account the meagre wages they were receiving and that all their social life took place there, acquaintances, friends, activities, etc. They told me that they liked to spend long periods of time in the park, especially in the summer, just talking to each other about everyday things. This, they added, is more difficult to do in a predominantly native white neighborhood since, as Gregg pointed out, people ‘will look at you oddly if you approach them in a park to start a conversation.’

They mentioned that they mostly talked in Swedish amongst themselves, and Richard told me that his Tigrinya was a bit ‘rusty’ because there were long periods of time in which he did not use it. About their contacts with Eritrea, they were quite vague. They did say that they had contacts, but I could not really determine if they were referring to family or they were just saying that they followed what was happening there and were aware of the situation in the country, etc. Hank pointed out he had some cousins with whom he sometimes spoke. When asked if there were cultural events that they attended in the neighborhood, they answered that there were many informal events which the Eritrean community organized, like food and music parties and games for children, etc. They told me that no native Swedes attended these events.

About jobs, they said that the situation was quite bad at the moment and that in the past it had been easier to find a job. Of the three, Richard was unemployed, Hank worked as a newspaper delivery man, (to kiosks and such) and Gregg had mostly worked in construction, but a back injury had forced him to leave the job for a while, and was now applying for a position of night guard on a construction site. He also told me that the job application was not going very well. When I asked why, and if the process of recruitment was hard, he told me that the problem was not that it was hard, but that it ‘is harder for me.’ When I entreated him to elaborate more, he told me that during the recruitment process he recalls having been asked more questions than other candidates, realizing that the interviews with other native Swede applicants prior to his were significantly shorter.
I let him know that I was aware that the process of selection for jobs in Sweden towards Afro-Swedish people could be slightly unfair, to which he answered that this was precisely one of the problems about life in Sweden for him. Despite having worked and stayed in Sweden for many years, he claimed he was still subject to close scrutiny and in his opinion the subject of totally irrelevant questions in job interviews that had nothing to do with assessing whether he met the requirements for the job. Since Gregg was the most receptive and talkative of the subjects from Hallonbergen, I asked him whether he had openly experienced any racism, and he answered that he had, referring to one concrete example which had occurred fairly recently. He was at a bus stop in the city center late one evening when he had heard some derogatory remarks thrown by a group of native youngsters that were passing by. He recalls being told by one of the individuals to go back to his neighborhood, where he belonged, and while he was at it, to his country too, to which he replied in perfectly courteous Swedish that this was his country, and that they were spoiled kids. He then told me he did not blame the individuals or feel angry towards them, because he felt their attitudes were probably a consequence of how they had been raised and educated, an education he believed was not showing why people emigrate and doing enough to dispel cultural stereotypes.

**Gabriel:** The next pages are a result of a fruitful exchange of ideas between the author and the respondent called Gabriel over a nearly two-hour skype conversation. The interesting insights and examples with which Gabriel colorfully illustrates his ideas have been completed with my own reflections and digressions following the transcription of the interview.

Gabriel arrived to Sweden in the fall of 1988. He did not live in his current place with any other family members, but his mother also resides in Stockholm. He completed primary and secondary schooling, but never finished the *Gymnasium* which is the equivalent of the Swedish secondary school. He attended school in Sweden when he was younger. He speaks Tigrinya, some French and some Spanish, besides Swedish and English. The language spoken with fellow countrymen is quite interchangeable, switching from Swedish to Tigrinya, depending on the person’s level of knowledge of each language. If the person has a weaker Swedish, then they speak more Tigrinya, but he claims that in general the speaking happens more predominantly in Swedish, with some elements in Tigrinya. He currently lives in Husby, a neighborhood in the periphery of Stockholm where he arrived in 2001. Before that, he lived in the region of Småländ, in
southern Sweden. He is quite mobile as he goes to work in the city center at Stockholm University.

For Gabriel, the housing situation in Stockholm is difficult for everyone, but it is more difficult for a non-white Swede. First of all, it is a question of resources. “If you do not have the means to buy an apartment you either have to register in a public queue or find some private landlord willing to lease you an apartment, and of course this is more difficult if your name does not sound Swedish. In general, white Swedes have more resources, hence the possibility to buy an apartment increases.” On the other hand, “a Swedish name to present as co-renter when trying to rent an apartment gives you seniority over someone with a foreign sounding name and no native to present as a co-renter.”

When asked about his schooling and if it took place in a school which was more multicultural, (with a balanced proportion of both native students and ones with a foreign background), or more mono-cultural, (with predominance of students from one specific background) he answers that “the first 5 years in school were pretty much white, with a slim attendance of non-white students, from 7th grade up until 9th it became somewhat better, but still generally white and during the years of Gymnasium and University there was a slight increase of non-white students.” He attributes this to a change during his years of Gymnasium from a small town to the city of Linköping, where the presence of non-white Swedes was higher, and then his move to Stockholm and the attendance of University there, where the presence of non-white Swedes was the highest. He remarks however, that in his opinion “the world of Universities in Sweden is disproportionately white in relation to the number of non-white Swedes currently in Sweden.”

Regarding transnational contacts with Eritrea, communication with relatives and cousins living there happens predominantly through his mother and Facebook. “The rate differs, it does not happen on a regular basis, it is more of a spontaneous now and again kind of thing.” He sends money every month to Eritrea. As for contacts with Eritrean associations, he had been working for the Afro-Swedish Association for some time and in 2009 had founded the Eritrean Student Association “that serves the community by having homework help every Saturday, except holidays, and has been going on for five years now.” Other than that the Student Association also have inspirational and informative gatherings prior to the deadline to choose education for university. He participates often in Eritrean community events.
Concerning the differences of culture between Eritrea and Sweden and his and his parents’ lifestyles, he does not think there is a sharp dichotomy between the Swedish and Eritrean culture, but “the fact I have been raised in a different context than my mother, informs my views and influences my cultural outlook.” In his opinion there are obvious differences in the lifestyles of older and younger generations of Eritreans. “As much as a generational matter, it also depends on the context you have been brought up in.” For him, one distinct difference between his generation and his parent’s is that the latter spends more time with other Eritreans, while the former, while also spending time with Eritreans, do not limit their contact and friendship exclusively to Eritreans. In terms of friends, he had a couple of close white Swedish friends with whom he confides, but most of his friends are non-white.

For Gabriel, his cultural heritage is important. He loves the food of Eritrea which he considers “delicious” and occasionally wears comfortable typical Eritrean clothes, such as a traditional t-shirt, although not on a daily basis, but more in the private context of gatherings with family and close acquaintances such as weddings or ceremonies. So his cultural heritage is a significant element of his identity, but he considers important to stress the fact that he has been raised in Sweden, in a multicultural/postcolonial environment, and is influenced by the people he has around him, and therefore “when in Sweden I would not say the primary identity I push forward in my contact with other people is my Eritrean identity, unless I am going to an Eritrean festival, gathering or event, since it is my ‘eritreaness’ the main element that takes me there.”

Gabriel thinks that Sweden is a welcoming country for immigrants if compared to other countries, especially when it comes to its policies, but points out that in recent times Sweden has been moving towards adopting a less welcoming stance. He believes that the immigration policies in Sweden, despite their good intentions, are falling short of their objectives because of aspects such as the inherent segregation in the labor market, Sweden being one of the OECD countries with the highest differences of employment between native Swedes and those of foreign background. “When it comes to the labor market the Afro-Swedish community is among the most discriminated, and differences in opportunities to find a job are sharp compared to citizens of other white communities such as Nordic citizens.” There is ample research that supports this claim.

In his opinion one of the fundamental problems of Sweden “is its self-perception of not being involved in the European colonial project, a perception that sustains the idea
in Swedish society that race and ethnicity is not really an issue that applies there, a very distorted perception if you have in mind that Sweden was in fact one of the countries that was in the forefront of the knowledge production behind racism.” Knowledge production of racism here meant as the practices that helped create racist discourse and ideologies. Sweden was the first country where a government-funded eugenics (or ‘race biological’) institute was created, or where Romani race inventories were kept. “A consequence of these self-perceptions is that there really isn’t any data available when it comes to the living conditions between white Swedes and non-white Swedes, since ethnicity in the data is a non-existent category.” We have to recall that people belonging to the Swedish Lebenswelt or Lifeworld, are too politically correct to talk about races and ethnicities, “the law assumes that all people belong to one and the same race - the human race.”

The data available is based on where someone is born, of which you can deduce ethnicity, but making assumptions based on where people are born is not enough to gain an efficient understanding of socio-economic differences and inequalities of non-white Swedes in Sweden. The Alternative Report on the elimination of racial discrimination of 2013 has highlighted and criticized this fact.128

To the question of whether he has experienced racism, Gabriel replies that “it is impossible as a black man in this country to not have experienced racism,” a statement that contradicts the answers given by the Uppsala respondents. To whether the police is sensitive to the realities that some minority immigrant communities face, Gabriel answers “I believe they are not, some attempts to address these issues have even come from within the police force, but no significant progress in that regard can really be seen,” despite mounting pressure from civil society actors aimed at raising awareness in institution such as the police force and the justice department about the realities non-white Swedes face. Gabriel says that progress is very limited because discrimination is really endemic in Sweden, and is present in all echelons of society including the civil service and the government.

To a question asking if he felt that the Eritrean community’s concerns, requests and complaints were listened to by the Swedish authorities and if channels of dialogue

129 Ibid.
and exchange of opinions were in place, Gabriel gave a very specific example to illustrate his view that the community is not listened to, and that dialogue with the authorities is scarce, or follows hidden and personal agendas. In 2013 there was an incident where three Eritrean community centers in different areas of Stockholm were burned down within three hours in a manner that was obviously coordinated.\textsuperscript{130} This led the community to organize itself and articulate a response to these heinous acts and transmit their concerns to the government and the police authorities. The response from the government was interesting. According to Gabriel, the government invited the community leaders to have a talk with government representatives. The subject of the talk, however, was about the ways Sweden and Eritrea as countries can improve and build closer communication. “It was clear from the outset that the government representatives perceived the community as a bridge to Eritrea, rather than an entity in itself with which to find solutions, and its members not as Swedes, or participants of its society, but as strictly Eritreans.”

A more sensible response would have been if the department of justice had received the Eritrean community to discuss the realities of racist violence in Sweden, and to find ways of improving the response to acts such as those befallen on the community in order to send a clear message that these would not be tolerated in the future. Instead, however, it was the foreign department that invited them for discussions. Gabriel thinks that “this speaks volumes of the perception the government has.” When I mentioned the incident of the killing of an old man in Husby, he explained to me that in the aftermath of the killing “there was a demonstration in which I took part, whose central message was a demand to the police that there should be an independent inquiry into what had happened, and that the police force cannot investigate itself.” Gabriel says that this request was not met with any dialogue, and thus an uprising ensued in Husby, that extended to other parts of the city and were of course violent, but also a result of a profound feeling of discontent, and the impression by the immigrant community that it was not being taken seriously.

Talking about the importance of interactions between Eritrean Swedes and natives, Gabriel says that in the 90s, the terms ‘bridge building’ and ‘ethnic integration’ were in vogue in Sweden, but “this has somewhat changed since then, and today there is a higher focus on having and enjoying civil rights and tackling inequalities rather than

\textsuperscript{130} See Thomas Mountain’s online article on the incident, accessed 06 July 2016, http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/03/26/firebombing-eritrean-centers-in-sweden/.
building bridges.” He says that the term bridge building, “what it does when formulated that way, is cement and solidify the notion that there are two distinct static societal segments of ‘us’ and ‘them’, when of course that is not the case.” He goes on to say that rather than build bridges, the emphasis today must be placed on achieving the same rights and the same opportunities for everyone. These basic objectives are unfortunately not being reached. “Interaction between native-Swedes and Eritrean-Swedes in the same neighborhoods depends more on personal interests and the kind of activities each person likes to do in their free time.” He goes on to say that in Husby, where he lives, activities between Eritrean Swedes and natives are not organized in any particular manner, (i.e. football matches, music concerts, etc.), where someone would necessarily have to invite non white Swedes and natives to an interethnic exchange. If they happen, they happen spontaneously.

Keeping in mind that Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö are probably the three most segregated cities in Western Europe, he says that “yeah, one spends time with his neighbors, whoever you happen to live with, and if there aren’t many white Swedes around, then of course you will not be spending much time with white Swedes.” Gabriel does not see the issue of interaction as something to be solved, because he does not think that it poses a significant problem, or is a solution to anything. “Reflecting for instance about the expatriate communities, nobody stops to think twice whether they integrate well enough or not, or whether they have meaningful contact with natives.” Likewise, he would not consider that the high concentration of people of foreign background in Husby is in itself a problem. “The problem is that there is a high level of unemployment and also high levels of employment within low qualified jobs among the people living there. The social conditions, those are the problems that I would say need to be addressed rather than, you know, the integration of people living in the same area.” The former issue affects practices and phenomena of social life in a much more determinant way than the latter.

He considers solutions promoting more interaction marginal, and places the focus on the causes of systemic discrimination. A close analysis into who is producing the dominant hegemonic discourse in the country points to the media, the school system and other central institutions. These instill the ideas into society of what people are, and are not, of who fits in the description of ‘Swedish’ and who does not. “If a person is scared of someone else coming to take their jobs, that fear is not neutral, it does not come from
a vacuum, it is mediated and nurtured by a prevailing discourse.” There is a greater need “to closely examine who is cultivating this fear, and who is benefitting from it, and in what ways can it be counteracted.” This is directly linked to Sweden’s self-perception of its non-involvement in the colonial project or the knowledge production of racism “that misleads people to think that there is no need in Sweden’s society of today to deconstruct the idea of racism.”

An example that illustrates this is how Germany after the Second World War, focused on ‘de-Nazification’, by which, for example, the construction and legitimation of anti-Semitic discourse was explored through an exhaustive examination of the literature, the theatre, movies, and so forth to try to find in what way anti-Semitic values were cultivated. The result of this research were spread and given wide publicity by the state. This does not mean Germany erased overnight any trace of anti-Semitism, but the self-perception there that something should be done to address and tackle this form of racism led them to try to debunk the knowledge production behind anti-Semitism. This has also been done to a similar extent in Sweden. During the 90s there was a vast project called ‘Living History’ put forward to address the issue of the Holocaust there, and explore how anti-Semitism was fostered. Its objective was to create awareness among the population. “The result is that if in Sweden someone is to publically say today that a Jew is cheap, people will connect that to anti-Semitism and immediately condemn such commentaries” says Gabriel. Again, this does not mean that Sweden is completely free of anti-Semitism, but that “there are mechanisms in place to fight it.” Unfortunately, however, the same cannot be said when it comes to other forms of racism, such as cultural racism regarding non-white Swedes.

The implications of Sweden treating racism as non-existent, says Gabriel, can be visualized by picturing someone going to a doctor and trying to deny his symptoms or disease. How does the doctor then prescribe a treatment? Before giving treatment the first thing that the doctor will try to do is to determine as precisely as possible what disease exactly is afflicting the patient. This in general is what Sweden lacks, “there are no real attempts to understand what the problems with racism are, and where they stem from.” The impact of racism, how it has come about, and its nature, has to be understood in order to properly address and fight it. This brings us back to the issue of positing solutions in

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terms of increasing interaction to decrease the fear of others. As mentioned before, this would be a marginal solution. Gabriel rightly indicates that “the focus must be put on those who cultivate the fears and also those who reproduce them, because not only are these fears cultivated, but they are also reproduced in a manner that does not necessarily need any bad intentions on the side of the individuals involved.”

A close examination of why and how these fears are reproduced shows us that in order for the collective identity of the majority, the ‘swedishness’ so to speak, to be reaffirmed and asserted, there has to be a fear of ‘the other,’ and cultivating it strengthens the bonds of the majority group. Prolonging the dichotomy of ‘us’ vs ‘them’ has a useful social function, it galvanizes collective national identity and encourages people to preserve and reassert fixed cultural markers. In a context, to use Bauman’s term,\textsuperscript{132} of liquid modernity, where everything is elusive and changing, and people’s feelings of insecurity increase with the instability and contingency of the world they live in, where firm established principles are constantly crumbling, and the salience of identity is slowly but relentlessly being eroded by globalization, it is fairly comprehensible that people need a feeling of security, that belonging to a group provides; a group where the ‘authentic’ Swedes belong. However, the possibility of ‘belonging’ cannot be the prerogative of only one group, a monopoly of the majority, it has to be all inclusive. Understanding why the feeling of belongingness is sought, does not legitimate or justify in any way the majority’s recourse to discrimination, denigration, agitation, the promotion of fear, and ultimately violence towards others.

Gabriel points out how interesting it is, to see that “this swedishness is closely tied to whiteness,” going on to say that terminology used in everyday life is important. “I intentionally use a specific terminology aimed to challenge the idea that swedishness is intertwined with whiteness, and often use the term ‘white-Swede’ to refer to native Swedes because to hear it said by a black ethnic Swede is provocative for natives who are color blind.” Its use, he claims “makes them literally hide their eyebrows because it points out that there are Swedes of different color.” For some who would no doubt see Gabriel and his children as immigrants or aliens, although raised in Sweden, instead of non-white Swedes, this is an uncomfortable term.


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While we discussed issues of racism, Gabriel alluded to the ‘limpieza de sangre’ in fifteenth century Spain, and how some consider it the prototype of modern racism because of its structure and the way Spain refused its Jew and Moor population, even after converting to Christianism. The ‘cleanliness’ of the blood of those who strove to achieve high working positions would sooner or later be challenged by a member of the dominant white Christian majority. Though this might seem a priori a rather trivial example, mostly because in that case discrimination and racism was legally practiced and backed by the state, I consider it relevant when reflecting on what a non-white Swede might experience when his job applications are rejected day in and day out. When it comes to qualified jobs there is a high level of discrimination, “a glass ceiling that is very evident in Sweden. Sweden is also one of the countries where the return of years invested in one’s education is lowest for the non-white population.” Despite the fact that many Afro-Swedes have an education, and that they are qualified for certain jobs they do not get them. Non-white Swedes clearly do not feel that their investment in education yields the expected returns.

To the question of whether as an Eritrean-Swede he feels more Swedish, or more Eritrean he replies that it is an interesting question “because there is currently heated debates everywhere about identities, and Sweden is no exception.” He states that to a certain extent he does have a bi-cultural identity but then again hesitates to answer with a straight yes, because as Peter, (the student from Uppsala), had previously reflected, “the whole concepts of culture and identity should be revised, since they are often spoken of as something static when in fact it is very dynamic and in constant flux.” He goes further in saying that “to a certain degree the core understanding of race that was used in racism has been replaced by culture.” Since culture is an ambivalent term and identities are prone to be dynamic he considers himself poli-cultural in the sense that “I have been raised in an environment of people with diverse influences, and therefore I feel uncomfortable in situations where people around me try to be mono-cultural.”

Gabriel says that going back to when he was in Eritrea and used to spend time with friends there and talk about several topics, he realized that each time a conversation would lead him to express his opinions on other cultures, “my friends would ask me how I had arrived to those perceptions, and I would answer that a close friend is from there and so forth, realizing that I do not consider myself mono-cultural or multi-cultural.” In the moment of finding a word to define himself and realizing his struggle in doing so, my
suggestion of the term ‘transcultural’ turned out to be exactly the word he was looking for. He considers himself transcultural. “If I were to meet someone from a Paris banlieu I would probably have more in common with him than with, for instance, somebody from Sweden’s countryside.”

Regarding the question of whether he feels a full member of Swedish society, with equal rights, obligations and opportunities, his answer is unequivocally no. “The main line of social difference in Sweden beyond aspects such as gender, age, etc. is race, an element that has a very heavy impact when it comes to the living conditions of people. As a non-white Swede my swedishness is constantly questioned. If I am to meet somebody in Stockholm out in a pub, the first or the second question I am asked is: where are you from? If I answer Husby, people are not satisfied with the answer, and pursue further questions until eventually I have to say I am from another country. This is just another everyday example of how my swedishness is continually questioned,” and a symptom of what is amiss in Sweden’s society.

Another example of how immigrants do not hold a strong sense of belonging is that “many non-white Swedes would never use the term ‘non-white Swede’, or would hesitate to employ the term Swede to refer to themselves,” instead of immigrant or Somalian, Nigerian, Syrian, etc., even if born in Sweden. Calling themselves Swedes does not come to them naturally and unconsciously, because it runs counter to their experiences of how society sees them. On paper they are Swedish citizens like the rest, but this does not necessarily manifest in how the interactions with fellow white countrymen happen, since these interactions are mediated by unequal power relations and politically correct discourses on color blindness, in which white Swedes are rarely the ones to be ethnically or racially marked.

4.3. Discussion and Reflexion

Before concluding I would like to offer some words by way of a preliminary reflection on the findings. First of all, immigration must not be considered as just a strictly physical movement that happens when someone crosses some borders and settles in a different country, but also as a process that is very closely related to the different historical and political realities the migrant encounters and which, in turn, affects his or her identity. Someone who emigrates willingly for economic reasons will experience altogether different situations from someone who is forced to do so, such as a political refugee. The
realization of the permanence of the move to a new country is different from person to person and never happens overnight in a clear cut way, but usually takes time and is a result of constant adjustments and adaptations which involve various processes such as negotiation, acceptance, etc. The refugee immigrants tend to be more conscious that the possibility of returning to their home countries, at least in the short term, is remote, and early on in their stay envisage their lives not as sojourners, but as eventually settling down permanently in the host society.

This study reveals that immigrants from non-European countries and especially those belonging to non white communities struggle to keep close relationships with native Swedes outside the household, confirming what other studies say about contact levels in Sweden. It is also surprising that longer-established Eritrean-Swedes, who have been residing in Sweden for more than twenty years, do not have a larger group of close native Swedish friends, but this, as I discovered during the study, is of secondary importance to their overall well-being and lives. I will say more about this further on. Living in segregated or immigrant-dense neighborhoods is a reason of weight for many of the Uppsala respondents claiming to have no native Swedish close friends. Jordan, the young respondent who has three Swedish friends lives in the city center and not in an immigrant dense neighborhood. The same happens with Peter, who lives in a student dorm where one of his flat-mates is a native Swede. After analyzing the information, I also realized that it was not a coincidence that Jordan and Peter were more predisposed to embrace the Swedish way of life or cultural identity. They are the only ones from the sample that say that their cultural heritage is not important to them; they are not involved in Eritrean groups or associations and Jordan only has contact with his family every three of four months.

An aspect of the first group of interviews that also greatly surprised me was that according to the respondents, none of them had experienced any racism or discriminative attitudes. The only ones who spoke out about unfair treatment towards non-white Swedes from institutions such as the police force and justice system were Jordan and Peter, who were according to all indicators the ones who showed the greatest levels of integration and whose answers seemed the more confident and secure out of all the interviewees from Uppsala. Needless to say that I did not expect all of them or even half to have felt

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discrimination, but considering that statistics say that at least 8 percent of all foreign-born individuals have experienced threats or violence which cannot be explained by sex, age or area of residence, I expected at least one or two people mentioning something about this issue.

I now realize that it is perfectly possible that none had been exposed to these behaviors because they had not been living long in Sweden, had mostly lived in very multi-ethnic areas, or in the context of university, and had no experience of the labor market. However, there might be other reasons behind such a high outcome of negative answers to the issue of experiencing racism and discrimination. I have cause to believe that even if they had experienced some of these problems, they would not be inclined to speak about them openly and critically with a stranger, in contrast to someone that has been living in the country for a longer period of time, because on arrival to Sweden their hopes of a better future are finally fulfilled and they are generally grateful to be among those that “have made it.” There is an emotional symbolic dimension that must be taken into account. The category of refugee is accompanied by the condition of an ‘underclass identity,’ and their confinement to “non-places”, labelled as refugee or asylum-seeker camps to distinguish them from the space where the rest, the ‘normal’, the ‘complete’ people live and move.” The harshness of their travels and the situation in their home country infuses them with fears that slowly dissipate and are replaced by feelings of hope and appreciation upon arrival.

Another possible reason for not talking about these sensitive issues is that in the first stages after their arrival to Sweden, refugees are highly dependent on the welfare benefits of the state, and may not be predisposed to unveil critical opinions towards it. On average the proportion of foreign-born recipients receiving welfare benefits is four times higher than among Swedes, a rate that levels to the rate of the native Swedes after 15 years of life in Sweden. People who have been raised in Sweden are readier and feel freer to speak up about their experiences in the country, because they expect to be treated like anyone else. When commenting with Gabriel my surprise upon finding that nearly none of the interviewees of Uppsala had mentioned situations of racism, he told me that “it might also be a generational thing. First generation Afro-Swedes tend to be much less

134 Bask (2005), 76.
136 Ibid., 40.
137 Bask (2005), 75.
inclined to give critical opinions than second and third generation ones; my mother for instance would give a more positive picture of Sweden and the opportunities available for her there, than me.” In light of this information, those conducting official statistics on discrimination and racism in Sweden should be careful on how they use the opinions of recently arrived first generation Afro-Swedes.

On the other hand, scant references to racial incidents is a sign that the ‘race card’ is not being used indiscriminately by the respondents to ventilate their personal disagreements or differences with the state or society. Immigrants attributing their misfortunes exclusively to problems of race or, of a racist nature, is not unheard of, especially in countries that implement multicultural policies, and in the same way that attention must be paid to discrimination, vigilance should also be applied to discern real racially motivated incidents from unwarranted accusations and slander of other individuals and institutions for personal reasons.

From the information gathered in the case study it can be said that interaction is important for the Uppsala respondents because it allows them to practice their language skills, (which is one of the necessary but not sufficient prerequisites of integration into the labor market and society), and allows them to socialize and learn more about the customs of native Swedes and life in Sweden. Even if the culture is very alien to them, they go through great pains to learn the basic social norms of the society that has welcomed them, and believe that more interaction with natives would facilitate this task. In traditional immigration countries with limited welfare support, such as the UK, most immigrants have to acquire the necessary linguistic and cultural skills on their own to earn a living, but in countries such as Sweden, where welfare support is very high, immigrants can live without necessarily making these adjustments. It is positive to see that the Eritreans respondents from Uppsala are all taking Swedish courses and making efforts to acquire the cultural skills that will later allow them to be self-dependent.

To my knowledge, initiatives for cultural interaction, which are very welcomed by newly arrived migrants and also students and natives alike, exist to some extent in Sweden. Uppsala for instance holds an event known as ‘culture day’ where an initiative

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called *Kulturkompis* (“Make friends through culture”)\(^{140}\) is sponsored by different organizations and private businesses with the aim of promoting inter-cultural contacts and exchange among immigrants and Swedes through cultural activities, food, music concerts and different events. I attended this year’s in Uppsala, where I saw Syrians interacting merrily with natives through music. I was surprised at the low turnout of students at the event. It was a native Swede who had worked as organizing staff a previous year who introduced me to the event, and when I asked some foreign and native students the reasons for which they did not go, most told me that they had no knowledge of its existence. They also told me that they considered it a very appealing and interesting initiative to which they would have gone had they known about it. In my opinion these events are very helpful in ‘breaking the ice’ and should be better marketed and held more regularly in every Swedish city or town with a multi-ethnic population.

In an article Michael McEachrane argues that there is, as of yet, no such thing among Afro-Swedes as a collective Afro-Swedish identity, since for them black identity is not culturally inherited from a pre-existing black diasporic community, but something that ranges from being central to marginal according to each individual.\(^ {141}\) I do not agree with this statement because the findings of the case study suggest that the concept of Afro-Swedes is well-established among all Swedes of African origin, particularly among those having resided in Sweden for a long time, and that many use it to define themselves. Moreover, there is more than enough evidence showing that a long-established diasporic African community is present in Sweden.

McEachrane also adds that being black in Sweden is likely to have more weight in shaping the individual’s identity in young first and second generation immigrants, than those of first generation that established themselves there as adults.\(^ {142}\) Here, the findings of the case study corroborate this point of view.

Long established Eritrean Swedes are aware of the acute social-economic unbalances that affect their lives and the difficulties of finding a job in a society where being accepted as one more already presents a daily struggle, but there is not much that they can do to change their situation. The lack of contact with natives due to extreme

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140 *Kulturkompis* is described in the brochure as giving asylum-seekers and new arrivals the chance to meet established citizens and experience cultural activities together (concerts, movies and museums) for free. More information available online: [http://bilda.nu/kulturkompis](http://bilda.nu/kulturkompis) (accessed 16 of July 2016).


142 Ibid.
segregation is secondary: More contact with natives would not change the fact that the Swedish housing system plays a role in the creation and reproduction of socio-economic inequalities and that an effective integration of non-white Swedes into the labor market is inexistent. Some studies suggest that the successful integration in the labor market of populations of immigrant origin has only happened in periods of economic boom and high demand for labor. The turn to neoliberal doctrines in the last decades has had the negative effects of turning habitat into an increasingly commercialized merchandise, and has aggravated segregationist movement patterns in which BME populations tend to be pushed to the margins of cities. Although cultural preferences for living among people of the same ethnicity or religion can determine some of the reasons for segregation, a higher impact is caused by the majority’s preferences, who have greater opportunities to choose where they live because of their higher income and better knowledge of the housing market.

Although integration is often an ambiguous concept and its goals vaguely formulated, I consider integration as an “egalitarian exchange of ideas and practices between the host society” and its population of foreign background. However, as we see from the testimony of the Stockholm respondents, there is nothing egalitarian in the exchange of practices that occurs between the majority and the minority in Sweden. As Bauman rightly points out: “Once identity loses the social anchors that made it look ‘natural’, predetermined and non-negotiable, ‘identification’ becomes even more important for the individuals seeking a ‘we’”, an identification which, for the majority in Sweden means negating it to the minorities. An example is how Gabriel’s swedishness is constantly questioned. I wonder how often this pattern is repeated, in which native Swedes shower non-white Swedes with questions when they realize the person they are speaking to is ethnically so different, speaks perfect Swedish, is versed in Swedish matters, is university educated and is possibly more friendly and open. It is as though natives need to hear the words: “I’m not from here originally” to feel reassured. I suspect that the issue for people like Gabriel is not that they are distrusted, feared or hated for being different, but for not being different enough.

145 Ibid.
5. Conclusion

The initial hypothesis of this thesis considered that levels of interaction in Sweden between Swedes of immigrant origin and native Swedes was not high enough and was hindering integration, and contributing to the proliferation of ‘parallel lives’ and an ignorance and lack of understanding between the two groups, that was ultimately leading to a loss of social capital. The concept of parallel lives refers to extreme segregation and societal groups not relating to each other. I was first introduced to this concept by Ted Cantle in his book on community cohesion and diversity.\textsuperscript{147} In it, the community cohesion concept is put forward to tackle the problem of parallel lives experienced by white and black communities in the UK.\textsuperscript{148} In the case of Sweden however, the emphasis on interaction as a key element to create tighter and more cohesive communities and thus decrease the fear of the ‘other’ is not a determinant factor for integration in light of the findings of the study.

The findings show that strong interaction with the larger society and natives can be important in the early stages, after the arrival of the immigrants, because it is then when they are most vulnerable and disoriented in relation to the new cultural milieu in which they find themselves. It is then when the development of social contact across inter-ethnic boundaries is essential to gain the necessary tools such as knowledge, positional resources and soft skills, to integrate successfully, and which would otherwise take longer to acquire. Initiatives such as the one known as \textit{Kultukompis} in Uppsala should be common practice in multi-ethnic cities and towns. However, community cohesion and building bridges is not a meaningful solution to any of the long-term integration problems experienced by non white Swedes. Moreover, recent research backs the hypothesis that although racially heterogeneous neighborhoods can foster respect for diversity, they are not necessarily good for building community cohesion because they prevent the formation of dense inter-personal networks.\textsuperscript{149}

The main factors hindering inclusion and integration of black ethnic minorities in Sweden is, on one hand, that socio-economic chances and prospects are not the same for them as for white Swedes due to jarring inequalities in wealth and income distribution,

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, 10.
and on the other, that the majority repeatedly but subtly denies them equal access to opportunities and rights, despite the government’s apparent efforts to curb discrimination and disarm cultural stereotypes through a color blind approach to ethnicity. I agree that “equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination”150 are essential in creating community cohesion and enhancing a sense of belonging among minority groups, but in Sweden interaction is not the way to accomplish it.

The problem in Sweden is that cultural discrimination still happens at many levels, while there are no real tools yet in place to fight it or to study how the problems of socio-economic inequalities affect non-white Swedes. Local initiatives advocating for more interaction and dialogue will not substantially change anything in the long-term, nor will state funded reports or statistics on aspects such as hate crimes, or unemployment figures, etc. Although they help to raise awareness on the problems minorities face, ultimately they do not put an end to patterns of inequality. Any initiatives whose goal is to improve the lives of non-white Swedes, need to implement deep, ambitious structural ‘top-down’, rather than ‘bottom-up’ policies. These policies should necessarily be applied, as a priority, to education, and the labor and housing markets.

Education is a key aspect of society that can change the self-perception of individuals, and schools are an influential force in a child’s life and a medium whose messages can be monitored more easily than others.151 A lack of self-reflection and biased accounts of historical events can build a sense of exclusiveness and superiority among the youngest elements of the population that can lead to discriminatory practices later on. The teaching of Sweden’s involvement in colonialism in Swedish schools and its contribution to the knowledge production of racism, can generate a more informed view of Sweden’s (and Europe’s) whiteness superiority complex, and the struggles of non-European people in the past and the present, and help dispel the Swedish self-image that holds that because it was not involved with colonialism, issues of race and racism are not relevant in today’s Sweden. The Afrofobi report states that the treatment of race as a non-existent element in Swedish society is an obstacle for constructive discussions about the effects of racial discrimination and overcoming the long-lasting taboo of talking about these issues, and prevents Afro-Swedes from coming to terms with experiences of

150 Ted Cantle (2015), 11.
everyday racism. This feeling was shared by Gabriel and some of the native Swedes to whom I informally talked during my stay in Sweden.

The impact of the European colonial project, in which the forefathers of many Western Europeans took part, should be underlined as the cause of a lot of the conflicts that afflict the world today. The aim of explaining history in such a manner is to generate awareness among the young so they understand that Europe greatly contributed in the past, and in some cases still indirectly does, in producing the current terrible conditions that force refugees from Syria and Africa, for example, to flee their countries. It is imperative that native Swedes comprehend that many of the refugees coming to Europe are not economic migrants -- most come with phones, watches, etc.-- but are political refugees. Rather than becoming the object of distrust and disdain they should be respected for their courage to hold true to their opinions and values, most of which are moderate and democratic, even when doing so may endanger their lives. Native youngsters have to be encouraged early on to create bonds and build trust with Swedes of immigrant background and encouraged to interact with them in order to help dispel atavistic fears and break the vicious circle of Swedish exclusiveness. However, as previous research on contact suggests, contact will have positive outcomes only if it is carried out under conditions of equal status between interacting groups; if this condition is not met, contact can actually increase intergroup tensions.

Sweden should implement legislation and programs that are conducive to raising awareness about social inequality, and that improve the opportunities and living standards of non-white Swedes so that they are on par with those of the white majority. The state ought to put all the means necessary to increase the average income of black ethnic minorities in Sweden, stop discrimination in the labor market and end the neoliberal norms that are behind the creation of privatized spaces of exclusion. Gabriel’s testimony shows that the planning and housing regimes structurally exclude non white, low income residents, because the municipalities cede power to private actors instead of choosing residential empowerment. At the same time this is backed by a traditional nationalist discourse which denies swedishness to some and draws stereotyped images of the ‘other’. The white majority associates the condition of ‘other’ with non white Swede residents,

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who are perceived as outsiders. If the objectives of incrementing the acquisitive power of black ethnic minorities by equating their opportunities and standards of living to those of whites are pursued and accomplished, structural residential segregation will cease because minorities will purchase residences in different areas of cities, and in time, contact, interaction and the creation of social capital will ensue. In this way ethnic homogeneity in schools would be reduced and a true ethical inclusive multicultural education, where difference is taught to be considered an integral part of modern societies and a positive value in itself could be practiced.

Immigrants, refugees and their children are, or will become, settled inhabitants and a vital part of Swedish society, whether they have arrived as immigrant workers or as refugees. They are an integral part of the Swedish landscape, and should be given the same treatment as everyone else, be it in regard to their affiliations, or to their socio-economic rights and opportunities. However, despite good intentions, the facts indicate a very different reality. Not all individuals are equal members of society that start on an even footing, have equal access to the education system and are treated equally in the labor and housing markets, this assumption is incorrect. Greater efforts from the government to tackle the salient inequalities affecting non-white residents and many expressions of racial discrimination have to be made, or it is difficult to foresee any improvement in the future. Young non white Swedes have to regain the lost confidence in their possibilities and start believing that investing in their education will translate into finding jobs.

Sweden’s social setting, the place where social moors are anchored, learned and reproduced is characterized by a paradoxical condition. On one hand intentions to disarm cultural stereotypes through discourses on color blindness are prevalent, on the other, continued pervasiveness of ethnic categorization and differentiation is commonplace in everyday relations. Swedish nationality can be acquired more easily than in most other EU countries, and Swedish law is also favorable towards dual nationality. The granting of formal rights and recognition to immigrants is not questioned, but normative theorists of multiculturalism should examine more closely the outcomes of integration policies in terms of participation, equality and segregation. Individuals may have Swedish nationality but fostering feelings of ‘belongingness’ among immigrants, where they see themselves as equal, integrated members of society is far from being accomplished. Non white Swedes feel that their access to identity choice is hindered, and that they do not
have a say in deciding their preferences, ending up “burdened with identities enforced and imposed by others…stereotyping, dehumanizing, stigmatizing identities.” To fully come to terms with difference, ethnicity and race should be included in state released statistics and reports, and openly and willingly talked about in Swedish society.

Although identities cannot be compartmentalized and a person has many affiliations and beliefs that are made up of different experiences and components in a mixture that is unique to them as individuals, a person has to develop a sense of ‘belonging’ in order to become part of a place, without aspects ‘sticking out,’ and without feeling that his choices are constantly questioned --non white Swedes reasserting their cultural heritage are more visible and therefore a clearer target of racial discrimination, but the act of forgetting their origin and cultural heritage is felt as a genuine loss. To counteract cultural discrimination carried out under the backdrop of ethno-national discourse, Sweden has to abandon its politically correct rhetoric that stresses tolerance, equality and diversity and start enacting specific and far-reaching policies that yield visible results. The white majority has to stop measuring an individual’s degree of swedishness according to his or her color of skin or cultural background, (there are certainly other variables that can be taken under consideration when making such an appreciation), or to put it in Stuart Hall’s words:

Since cultural diversity is, increasingly, the fate of the modern world, and ethnic absolutism a regressive feature of late-modernity, the greatest danger now arises from forms of national and cultural identity - new and old - which attempt to secure their identity by adopting closed versions of culture or community and by refusal to engage...with the difficult problems that arise from trying to live with difference.

Studies, my own as well as others, shows that the ‘state sponsored’ Swedish measures of integration, a series of programs aimed at facilitating Swedish language skills and job access have achieved little real progress in integrating non-white minorities, because race is the main aspect guiding socio-economic differences between ethnic minorities and the majority. Sweden cannot be considered today as a paradigm of an egalitarian society because it’s integration legislation, much lauded in EU circles, is not delivering on the ground any significant results, hiding racialized and unfair practices

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154 Bauman (2004), 38.
towards migrants. In conclusion, Sweden’s management of diversity is falling short of the multiculturalist aims which it set out in the 70s, and in light of the findings can no longer be considered as an ‘exceptionalist model’\textsuperscript{159} for others to follow, or pride itself internationally for its policies, programs and declarations,\textsuperscript{160} regardless of what the MIPEX reports may trumpet.

The uniformity of Swedish society is something of the past. Sweden must be a place where diversity is an added value of and in itself, and not something to point out or ignore. If no action is carried out by the state to correct the present course, social polarization will continue to get worse and more riots can be expected. However, the problems related to Sweden’s management of diversity are in my opinion, still far from being unresolvable, if the country adopts stronger measures against discrimination and effectively tackles the socio-economic inequalities between the native and non-white population. Other countries are also grappling with the accommodation of differences within their borders and each year further research is available precisely to give solutions to these problems. In the current era of ‘superdiversity’\textsuperscript{161} in which we live, Sweden should not relent in its efforts to become an example of a pluralistic society but redouble in its resolve to make it happen.

\textsuperscript{159} Schierup & Ålund, “The end of Swedish exceptionalism?”, Race & Class 53 no. 1 (2011), 47
\textsuperscript{160} Knocke (2000), 374.
Bibliography


http://www.afrosvenskarna.se/afrosvensk/.


Nail, Thomas. *The Figure of the Migrant.* Stanford University Press, 2015.


Annex

Interviews (dates, time and place).\(^{162}\)

Angela: 09/06/2016, 11:55am, SFI center, Uppsala *
Jeff: 09/06/2016, 12:15pm, SFI center, Uppsala *
Myles: 09/06/2016, 12:31pm, SFI center, Uppsala *
Yohan: 14/06/2016, 12:15pm, SFI center, Uppsala *
Kristin: 15/06/2016, 12:04pm, SFI center, Uppsala *
Anne: 16/06/2016, 12:27pm, SFI center, Uppsala *
Jordan: 17/06/2016, 9:30am, SFI center, Uppsala *
Richard: 21/06/2016, 13:00pm, Hallonbergen, Stockholm
Hank: 22/06/2016, 12:15pm, Hallonbergen, Stockholm
Gregg: 22/06/2016, 13:30pm Hallonbergen, Stockholm
Peter: 27/06/2016, 11:08am, Ekonomikum, Uppsala University, Uppsala *
Gabriel: 06/07/2016, 18:10pm, skype Madrid-Stockholm *

(Basic Template) Interview guide for Eritrean respondents / Case study on sociocultural integration into Sweden by a minority group

Before the start of the interview, the interviewee will be informed of the following:

- All participants will remain anonymous. The information you provide is completely confidential. By agreeing to be interviewed, you give consent for the results to be used in the researcher’s thesis and for publication.

- The researcher is interested in your **opinion**, there are no right or wrong answers. If a question makes you feel uncomfortable or is unclear you do not have to answer it.

\(^{162}\) An asterisk means audio is available. Anyone interested in hearing the interviews is welcomed to contact the author.
• The intention is to gain in-depth information on the subject being researched. Please be as honest as you can, take your time to answer the questions, explain your answers and try to give examples and as much detail as possible.

What is your name, age and profession? If a student, what do you study? What is your religion?

When did you arrive to Sweden? Do you live with any other family members here?

What is your level of education? (Primary education, Secondary education, College/Bachelor, Master, PhD).

What languages do you speak? i.e. Tigrinya, Blin, etc.? Do you use any here in Sweden with fellow compatriots?

Where do you currently live? Have you always lived there? Do you work/study in the same area you live in, or in a different one?

Is it easy to find apartments to live in?

Do you have any close Swedish friends?

Did you attend a Swedish school in your childhood? Where? Was the school you went to more multicultural, (with a balanced proportion of both native students and ones with foreign background), or more mono-cultural, with predominance of students from one specific background?

Do you still have contact with Eritrea? How? I.e. Do you communicate with family members there, do you send them money, gifts, etc.? Do you participate in any associations in Sweden related to Eritrea?, etc.

Do you feel that your culture is very different from the Swedish?

Do you think there is a lot of difference between the life styles of your parents and you? I.e. They are more traditional.

Is your Eritrean cultural heritage important to you? (afro-hair cut, traditional garments, veil, food tradition, music tastes, etc.) Why?

Do you think that Sweden is a welcoming country for immigrants?

Have you studied or want to study in a Swedish University?

How is it to find a job in Sweden? Difficult, easy? Do you think that opportunities are the same for everyone or is it harder for immigrants? (For those who work: Did finding a job go how you expected?
Have you ever experienced racism, felt discriminated, or been treated unfairly by others in Sweden? I.e. menacing looks, insults, threats, etc.?

In your opinion, does the police treat everyone equally? Do you think they are sensitive to the realities that some minority immigrant communities face in Sweden?

Do you think that the Eritrean community’s concerns, requests, complaints or grievances, are listened to by the Swedish authorities?

In your opinion, are the levels of (cultural and social) interaction between Eritreans and native Swedes high? And what about between the Eritrean community and other immigrant communities? I.e. through culture, (music, art exhibitions) or sports, (football matches), or food events, etc.

Are there many cultural activities in which both native Swedes and Eritreans participate in the area where you live?

Would you say that activities in which both native Swedes and Eritreans participate are important?

Have you lived in any other European country? Are there any cultural aspects of Sweden you feel more identified with, and others less? I.e. management of time, strictness for some things, easiness of others, etc.

Do you feel more Swedish, or more Eritrean? explain. Follow up question: Are you happy with having a bicultural identity?

How close do you feel to Sweden? (To its culture, traditions, festivities, history, policies, etc.) I.e. Close, not very close, etc. Do you feel closer or more attached to your neighborhood?

Do you feel you are a full member of Swedish society, with equal rights, obligations and opportunities?