"Are you going to write as we think or as you think?"

On troubled positions, borders and boundaries among immigrant women in a Swedish context

MARIE CARLSON

Abstract

This contribution discusses representational power and images/concepts Turkish women attending Swedish language courses for immigrants (SFI) experience in accounts about them as migrants in Sweden. Examples from the past but also from the present are used – from a still ongoing debate on troubled positions, borders and boundaries among/about immigrant women. Empirical data (mainly interviews and policy documents) come from revisiting an earlier study from 2002, but also data drawn from later projects and other research. The critical intersectional discussion concerns ethnicity/migration, gender and class and research related to cultural, migration, ethnicity and gender studies. Three themes are discussed; one is about social interaction and the negotiating of ethnicity from an interview, illustrating how the interviewee as well as the interviewer are caught in prevalent discourses and try to handle the straitjacket of labelling. The next theme is about gender, gender equality, "Swedishness" and nation, where SFI can be seen as an arena for educating about gender equality. The last theme focuses on the institutional level, the welfare state and the power of definitions. This section also discusses how the category "immigrant" including "the immigrant woman" are constituted and negotiated in relation to the labour market. Structural conditions as well as agency are not always considered or problematized. The article, a critical reflection on the production of knowledge that researchers as well as various actors are involved in, includes both an ethical and methodological issue, also discussed in the conclusion.

Introduction

Some years ago when I interviewed a group of Turkish women attending Swedish language courses for immigrants (SFI[1]), one of the participants asked,

[1] SFI ("Swedish For Immigrants") at the time for this study, 2002 was a voluntary education, a language program aiming at providing adult immigrants with basic knowledge of Swedish language

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just as I had switched off the tape recorder: "Are you going to write as we think or as you think?" (Carlson 2002). This question can be related to representational power, and can also be seen as a kind of critical remark about images/concepts the woman and the other course participants experienced in accounts about them as migrants in Sweden – images that also have to do with concrete consequences in everyday life. This issue of representational power and other critical comments has kept lingering on and are something that I want to return to and discuss in this article. I shall use examples from the past and also from the present – from a still ongoing debate on troubled positions, borders and boundaries among/about immigrant women in a Swedish context. The empirical data in the article consist of revisiting the earlier study from 2002[2], but I shall also use data from more recent projects that I have conducted (e.g. Carlson 2006; 2013). In addition to this I have reviewed other research relevant to the critical discussion in relation to the "immigrant woman" and representational power. Since it is a question of an intersectional discussion concerning ethnicity/migration, gender and class, this research takes place in a field that relates, for instance, to cultural, migration ethnicity and gender studies.

In the 2002 study it became obvious in the interaction between me, the researcher (a former language teacher, a Swede, a middle-aged woman) and the interpreter (a highly educated woman from urban Turkey, living in Sweden for many years) that the narratives of the course participants belonged in a wider social and cultural context that we all referred to. In fact, we were/are all part of prevalent extensive societal discourses (cf. Talja 1999). The importance for the women of making themselves understood and being listened to (cf. Bourdieu 1991), can also be understood/emphasized by the way they regarded the interpreter that nine of the twelve course participants interviewed chose to use in their interviews. When the interpreter translated their remarks into Swedish, the interviewees listened very carefully.[3] And they seemed to be very pleased with the result. As one of the participants said in Swedish after the tape recorder was turned off: "You are the best interpreter I have ever had. You have put it exactly like it is". Having the possibility to express oneself in one's mother tongue in more complicated discussions turned out to be of crucial importance, and

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and society. SFI offers "a bridge to the life in Sweden" (SKOLFS 1994: 28). Later on the overall aim of the SFI program is in the syllabus from 2009 described as: "Sfi is a qualified language education program that aims to give adult immigrants a basic knowledge of the Swedish language. A pupil whose mother tongue is other than Swedish will learn and develop a functional second language in Sfi. The training should provide linguistic tools for communication and active participation in everyday life, society, and employment" (SKOLFS 2009:2).

[2] In addition to 12 course participants, a number of "key persons" within SFI and surrounding institutions, as well as 9 teachers and 3 school principals at 2 adult education centres were interviewed in the 2002 study. The "key persons" were a study and career advisor, a school nurse, 3 welfare officers, and 2 employees at an employment agency. The empirical material further included diverse documents about and for the school/language education, such as some of the most important textbooks, curriculum and syllabi.

[3] The interviewees constantly shifted between Turkish and Swedish in their answers/discussions. They had all attended school in Turkey, for at least 4 to 8 years. They were fluent in reading and writing from their childhood, but in Sweden they were classified as "low educated". Most of them had migrated to Sweden in order to marry men residing there. On average they had two children. When the interviews took place the women were between 22 and 30 years old.

likewise to follow the interpreter's translation into Swedish. In more demanding discussions the opinions of these course participants are not always necessarily heard – not least in institutional contexts. The language used between the SFI staff and the Turkish women is mostly Swedish. This creates a paradoxical situation in which the course participants have to learn Swedish in order to communicate, while already using this language in their interactions with the educators (cf. Norton 2000). This somewhat troublesome situation could be partly ascribed to a lack of economic resources, but, as I argued at the time, it was also related to the question of who is given the right to speak and even more "the power to impose reception" (cf. Bourdieu 1991; Skeggs 1997).

All in all, the interviewees were very communicative when they talked about language and the language courses, both as regards the educational environment as well as for daily life. These conversations can be seen as achieving identity positions with relation to different institutional frameworks and social interactions. One of the dominant discourses that the Turkish women recurrently related to was about "the modern woman" and "gender equality", something of which they were not always considered to be a part. However, this was something they questioned in the interviews. Following my empirical research from that time, the course participants very clearly also experienced a "deficiency discourse" that functioned as a structural principle – a kind of boundary[4] – especially among the educators and the staff at the institutional level, who commented on the students. Depending on various debates and political and economic circumstances, this discourse has continued over time to emerge in relation to immigrants (cf. Carlson 2013; Neergaard 2006; Rosén 2013) – particularly in relation to "the immigrant woman", a category that I shall particularly discuss in this article. In line with a sociocultural perspective and from a postcolonial point of departure I shall scrutinize the troubled positions, borders and boundaries related to immigrant women in a Swedish context (cf. Mohanty 2003; Yuval-Davis 1997; Yuval-Davis, Stoetzler 2002). In relation to this, three themes will be discussed.

The first theme is about social interaction and negotiating, with examples from the 2002 study illustrating how the interviewee as well as the interviewer are caught in prevalent discourses (cf. Talja 1999) and try to handle the straitjacket of labelling. This example, linked primarily to labels of ethnicity and to the minority/majority society, shows the difficulties of avoiding reductionist and homogenizing labels – even if there is a strong intention not to be involved in such processes. When I revisit the old empirical data, I can also see that I overlooked some of the complexity by which Turkish women were surrounded. Even if I tried to problematize how the Turkish migrant women within SFI were actually located in an everyday life situation, where power and subordination were embedded in a network of complex structural relations, institutional arenas, and interpersonal activities, this took place, for example, by not paying enough attention to the gendered narratives per se in relation to a broader social/societal context. So, after the section on ethnicity and the straitjacket of labelling I shall

[4] In accordance with Nira Yuval-Davis and Marcel Stoetzler in their article "Imagined Boundaries and Borders – A Gendered Gaze" (2002) I use the term boundaries "when talking about limit-lines of collectives" and borders "when referring to legal/territorial ones" (ibid, p. 330).

discuss anew gender, gender equality, "Swedishness" and nation. A focus on gender equality as a central part of "Swedishness" has, for example, resulted in a hierarchal division between immigrants and Swedes – not least also between "Swedish women" and "immigrant women". SFI can be seen as an arena for educating the participants about gender equality and for changing the understanding of gender roles.

The last theme before the concluding remarks will focus on the institutional level, the welfare state and the power of definitions (cf. Mohanty 1991; Ålund 1988). This section will also discuss how the category "immigrant", including "the immigrant woman", is constituted and negotiated in relation to the labour market. Structural conditions as well as agency are not always considered or problematized in these discussions. Although discursive shifts are taking place over time, culturalist conceptions continue to have strong explanatory power for all sorts of conditions, instead of, for example, a critical discussion of the labour market, economic fluctuations and discrimination. Taking all three themes together, this article can be seen as a critical reflection on the production of knowledge that researchers as well as various actors are involved in. Knowledge production is both an ethical and a methodological issue (e.g. Kvale 1996; Mauthner et al 2008). I shall return to this issue in the concluding discussion.

The straitjacket of labels – social interaction and negotiating

During the course of the project "Swedish for Immigrants …" I repeatedly called attention to the fact that it was not a so-called immigrant study – it was not the immigrants who were in focus, but SFI as an arena in which I was studying the significance of social and cultural practices for the way various actors perceived knowledge, education and learning. Starting from this approach, I had for a period the aim of avoiding labels that were too reductionist and homogenizing and trying to arrive at other labels which the course participants would find more appropriate. One way of handling this complex of problems concerning interpretation and writing was for me to come to grips methodologically with the empirical data at hand. Among other things, this took place by paying more attention to the interview as a kind of social interaction and negotiation, where it turned out to be important to also transcribe oneself as interviewer/researcher, analyze oneself and analyze the interaction. This issue can be seen as ethical, but it is also a question of methodology that Beverley Skeggs emphasizes when writing about "respectable knowledge":

> *To ignore questions of methodology is to assume that knowledge comes from nowhere allowing knowledge makers to abdicate responsibility for their productions and representation. To side-step methodology means that the mechanisms we utilize in producing knowledge are hidden, relations of privilege are masked and knowers are not seen to be located…* (Skeggs 1997, p. 17).

The interview as social interaction – negotiating

In actual fact the transcriptions of the interviews gradually became a support for regarding the interview as a social interaction, in which both the researcher and the informant are involved in a symbolic game of negotiating (cf. Kvale 1996). Here follows one example, when I interact with one of the course participants about which designations she would consider to be acceptable in my writing about her.

> Marie: *...what is most important for me is that I when I write this up – how shall I describe you? Shall I write that here are three Turkish women who are immigrants from – yeah, is it three women who are immigrants from Turkey or shall I write three Turkish women who are living in Sweden? Or are you Swedish-Turkish or are you Turkish or…? What do you consider to be a good description of yourself? How should you like to describe yourself?*
> Songül[5]: *Eh, it is not so much like...*
> Marie: *Is it not that important?*
> Songül: *No, I really do not think so.*
> Marie: *You have Kurdish parents, don't you?* (Here I remember that Songül once told me that her parents were of Kurdish origin even if the study was designed to only meet course participants who had "Turkish" parents).
> Songül: *Yes… oh yes…*
> Marie: *You might simply think that if you ...* (Songül interrupts).
> Songül: *No, no* (in a resolute voice).
> Marie: *If you would like to describe yourself primarily as a Kurd* (I return to the Kurdish origin in my thinking…)
> Songül: *No! It is not like – I do not think like that. It does not matter for me.*
> Marie: *No? It makes no difference?*
> Songül: *No.*
> Marie: *If I write that it is about women who were born in Turkey, who once came from Turkey – would that be okey for you?*
> Songül: *No, but you can write – she is Turkish as well* (laughs)...
> Marie: *What did you say?*
> Songül: *She is Turkish or yes – but it does not matter.*
> Marie: *No, no – okey. I just wanted to know, because for some of you it is really important* (Songül interrupts).
> Songül: *Yes, I know* (saying this in a quite resolute voice, yet with a certain resignation).

This excerpt clearly shows that collecting and producing data is an active negotiating process, even before what we call the analysis begins. The phrase 'data analysis' in fact wrongly implies that there is a prior stage of data collection that takes place without the interpretive involvement of the researcher (cf. Alldred & Gillies 2008, pp. 159-160). Neither transcription is a passive straightforward process. As Alldred and Gillies put it (2008, p. 161): "Transcripts are artefacts and we should acknowledge that we researchers produce, rather than retrieve them shell-like from the sea-bed". In addition, the excerpt from the

[5] All names are fictious.

interview is somewhat problematic for me; one might even say that I was trying to impose my preconceived designations unduly on the interviewee. In the 2002 study I tried to trouble[6] /disturb this shortcoming by bringing in a poem – a protest against the category "immigrant" in the Swedish context setting up too many borders for identity politics. The poem was written by a former secretary to the Minister for Integration, Ozan Sunar (1999). The secretary had resigned in protest against, among other things, excessively weighty categorizations: boundaries resulting in borders in social and cultural practices.

YOU SHALL NOT SAY WHO I AM
by Ozan Sunar

This bloody, unusable language rubbing like a tight-fitting pair of briefs stuck up between my existential buttocks. Can it be that an eternal relationship is falling apart, that the robust and self-evident connection from primordial times between geographical location, a surrounding culture and a concomitant identity, is once and for all blown to pieces?

That the secure triangle, which could give human beings a framework for a distinct and manageable identity, has finally cracked? That the individual, this indivisible 18th-century dream, nowadays is divisible? Like a magic pack of cards in the hands of a magician, I am going to tell you who you are, the aggressive identity politician yells, so that I know who I am myself.

Do not listen, my friend. Blow up your identity. Become a transvestite of cultures, a perversity of ethnicities, a Jewish pastry, a Christian Muslim. Become a lubricated body, which the ethno-clergy and their ministers cannot capture.

Tell me, am I too much of a human being to fit into that category you call "immigrant"?[7]

During the research, I used this poem mainly to disrupt the situation at the institutional level. On several occasions when I presented the ongoing analysis for both fellow researchers, educators and key persons within the SFI, I read the poem and got positive feedback – a kind of communicative validity such as Kvale discusses in his book InterViews (1996). I was more interested in disturbing the actors at the institutional level than the participants.

Identity positions – social, partial and local knowledge

Anyhow, altogether the course participants in my study indeed talked and reflected from various subjectively defined positions. In my material the empirical data could really be analysed as "relational", "situational" and

[6] Troubling can be seen as a methodology that aims to question ideas that are typically accepted or considered as self-evident.

[7] The Swedish publishing company "Ordfront" published this poem in the series "The Wind of Time" in 1999.

"contextual" (cf. Carlson 2006). Dependent upon what was actually articulated in the situational context, the women emphasized different subjective positions in their execution of identity positions (ibid.). They talked about being a mother, a woman, a course participant, Turkish, Muslim and so forth. Displacements were taking place in the narratives of the women as they talked in various contexts. In their conversations the women turned backwards as well as forwards in time and in a way they were also engaged in a reflexive dialogue with themselves. There were no neat linear narratives presented, but tensions, contradictions and ambivalences. Many instances of what, in feminist research in particular, are known as social, partial and local knowledge were discernible – "situated knowledge" (e.g. Harding 1991; Mohanty 2003; Skeggs 1997, pp. 50-54).

In the example about ethnic labels it should be added that this issue was not something that the students raised but a question that I as a researcher asked. It was an issue that had occupied my attention during a period when there was a debate within the research community as to what the researchers risk reproducing through their choice of designations. The example from the interview in a way, in Bourdieu's terms, shows the researcher as "the objectifying subject" (Bourdieu 1992). What the participants themselves talked about more was about being a woman from various aspects. In narrating the SFI-studies, it was obvious that the course participants related their experiences to various gendered and ethnified discourses connected to social relations also at a national level.

Gender equality, "Swedishness" and nation

A number of researchers have over the years investigated how certain understandings of gender equality and a feminist consciousness are constructed as an essential part of the Swedish national identity – and even Nordic identity (cf. de los Reyes 1998; Towns 2002; see also Keskinen et al 2009). A recurrent narrative, a discourse about Swedishness linked to gender tells how Sweden, through the struggle of the women's movement and a number of state-initiated policies and projects, became a gender-equality country. The concept of state feminism has also been identified as characteristic of the Swedish welfare state (e.g. Hernes 1987). In relation to immigrants, this gender discourse was in accordance with Swedish norms – an ethnocentric discourse that positions both men and women who migrate to Sweden as more tradition-bound and less gender-equal than men and women born in Sweden. Immigrants are in this way constructed as a collective opposed to the imagined modern and gender-equal Swedish national community (cf. Carlson 2002, 2007; de los Reyes, 1998; Knocke 2011; Magnusson, Rönnblom & Silius 2008; Rosén 2013). A number of scholars have argued in a similar way, depicting this viewpoint as very essentialist and having universalistic claims (e.g. de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005; Knocke 2011; Tesfahuney 1998). Above all, in the Swedish context the specific understanding of gender and gender equality has become a critical marker – even

a kind of 'success story'.[8] A dichotomy is constructed that functions as a kind of boundary between "Swedes" and "Others" in the country.

Gender equality a normative structure

The gender-equality standard was/is also part and parcel of the normative structure of SFI-education.[9] The discourse was very noticeable in the 2002 study, but has been articulated both earlier and later on, in, for example, educational documents, textbooks and learning aids. The Turkish course participants I once met were fully aware of gender equality as a core Swedish value – retrieved from the surrounding society as well as from the SFI classes. The steering documents for SFI highlighted the gender equality – something that the participants would be educated in. A government bill in 1983/84 on Swedish education for adult immigrants stated:

> *For immigrant groups with a different understanding of gender roles from the one applied in Sweden, it is significant to clarify how the Swedish society understands gender equality and gender roles* (Prop 1983/84:199, p. 15).

Later on, a government bill on equality between women and men in education (Prop 1994/95:164) underlines that adult education is of great importance for many "low-skilled" women in Sweden and especially for immigrant women. Adult education not only offers opportunities for studying and chances for future work, but also claims to inform the students about important values and norms in Swedish society.

> *Some immigrants come from countries with a significantly different view of women's position in family and society; therefore, education has a specific responsibility to inform immigrants in Sweden about their rights and obligations, inform them about Swedish views on gender equality, and familiarize them with laws and regulations that apply in Sweden* (Prop 1994/95:164, p. 20).

Several of the Turkish women in the 2002 study brought the equality model to the fore when discussing, for example, their positions as adult students in relation to how they thought the Swedes shape their lives. One woman made the following remark about her understanding of how the "Swedes" – in this case, the teachers – think of them as students:

> *The Swedes do not really understand, they think that we are like them. They only think about their own conditions, that we have every possibility to handle this by ourselves. That we cannot do. It is difficult for the teachers to understand us.*

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[8] For a discussion on the Swedish nation identified with gender 'as a success story' and the role of the state, see Melby, Ravn and Carlsson Wetterberg, 2008 (see also Forbes, Öhrn & Weiner, 2011).

[9] Gender equality has long been a key factor in Swedish education policy. Elgqvist-Salzman (1992) argues that education has historically been *a* key factor in achieving social and gender equality – even a main road to an equal society (see also Forbes, Öhrn & Weiner, 2011).

This comment clearly illustrates how identity is constructed relationally in terms of "the Other" – in this case of "the Swedes". The Turkish immigrant women argued in general that they had a clear picture of how "the Swedes" at large are living, and gave many examples when they narrated their experiences. They also said that they knew how "Swedes" thought of them as immigrant women, and that they had a sense of not being fully accepted. Some of the Turkish women's narratives were about emotional aspects in relation to the opinion they believed "Swedes" hold about them. Feelings of inferiority due to their belief of being seen as 'unintelligent' were articulated. In one way or another, the women seemed to be drained of their previous experiences and cognitive abilities (cf. Thomsson & Mohl 1998, p. 285). Emine depicted it as follows:

> *When we arrive here we become almost like children nevertheless - it doesn't matter if you have earlier knowledge of different things or so on. But when you come here and sit down and can't speak the language, then it is like having no mouth or ears - you can't listen, so you become a nobody. You sink to becoming nobody. You feel that you are worth nothing that you do not really exist. Actually one can have different kinds of knowledge, but when you can't tell this in words or retrieve this by language – then I really have no use of my own knowledge. Then you believe or you think that from their point of view they consider you as, yes, being in the dark, uneducated and reactionary or yes, not modern etc. Maybe they don't think such things about us, but it's exactly what I feel - that they think that I am good for nothing.*

When talking about "Swedes", the women usually referred to various actors in institutional contexts. SFI education belonged at that time, and still does, to an environment with a number of actors clearly anchored in a notion of welfare thinking with a top-down perspective and a strong educational optimism. SFI was/is in collaboration and interaction with other authorities such as the social service and employment office. Even if the SFI teachers in my study, for example, criticized employment office clerks for their interpretation and use of SFI certificates as sorting instruments and borders for immigrants to become "active work applicants", they shared with them an objective of improvement and an explicit deficiency perspective as a frame of reference. These were jointly structural principles for all these social institutions; functioning as borders/boundaries in the social practices. Since the course participants were/are interpreted through these discourses within a bureaucratic organization, they were – and still are – often subjected to corrective efforts and a partially fostering attitude (cf. Carlson 2013; Rosén 2013). There were/are, for example, assumptions that immigrants (especially women) are in need of education, not only in the Swedish language, but also about Swedish society, laws and regulations, and dominant norms and values. This occurred not least in the area of Social Orientation (SO), where several fundamental "Swedish" social values and ideologically charged attitudes were involved.[10]

[10] In later SFI syllabi, from 2007 and onwards, this social or civic education has been separated from the language courses. The idea is that the SFI program should be transformed into a kind of "purely language education". The municipalities still have the responsibility for providing civic education to immigrants enrolled in an integration program. This information-oriented course is called "Sweden

Taken together, the SFI participants experience a wide range of perceptions about themselves in different contexts, which can be expressed as finding themselves in "the crossfire of discourses" encountering various boundaries and "border guards" – something they constantly objected to in their subjective interpretations. Several different explanatory and critical illustrations were presented – a kind of counter-discourse, which I interpreted as a reflexive resistance. One of these discourses concerned the concept of modernity, i.e. who was considered to be modern.

The struggle about being "modern"

Being a modern person was something that the Turkish women considered themselves to be, while at the same time they talked about the importance of preserving some traditions from Turkey when living in a new country. However, in the majority society there were often statements in the institutional contexts, in the media, in public debate as well as in research, about particular immigrant groups and "their" "premodern and traditional" societies in relation to "our" "late modern", "post-modern" society. The migration journey was generally described in various contexts as moving in one direction only, from "darkness towards the light" – a view that has been widely criticized from early on in international research (cf. Kandiyoti 2002; Mohanty 1991; Parati 1997). In my data this more or less dichotomous approach did not appear; instead there was a great deal of variation in the accounts. The Turkish women's narratives told us rather about a contradictory and ambivalent relationship with continuous changes and displacements. The fact that the migration journey seemed not to be a matter of a "homogeneous" modernization process was borne out by Nilgün's statement that in Turkey she left a "modern" and "outgoing" family to end up in something very different in Sweden:

> *When I came to Sweden I did not have too much knowledge about the country, I only knew a little. And I was quite young when they sent me – here (= in Sweden) they did not allow me to attend school, to tell you the truth. Actually, I cannot tell you who did not allow me, but I think that it should have been my husband's duty to inform me. He had grown up in this country and he knows everything, what kinds of options there are, what you can make the most of, what you can profit from. He should have told me that 'it is important for you to learn the language and that you can attend school and so on.' The rest of the family didn't either. In a way this family was not as modern – one can say that they held the opinion that one should be at home and working at domestic work and getting children and one should take care of the children etc. On the other side, my own family, even though I come from a village, my family was much more modern – they were more outgoing, more liberated in their manners, so there was a difference between these two families.*

for the newly arrived – The world, the welfare state, everyday life" (Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet, 2010). Sometimes these courses are given by SFI organizations.

The dichotomy, the conceptual pair of "the traditional" and "the modern", is thus dissolved when it comes to an empirical reality.[11] However, in the Swedish context there is an ongoing sociocultural practice in which representations, several (postcolonial) binaries, are re/produced, by portraying immigrants, especially immigrant women, in contrast to the "Swedes" (cf. Carlson 2002, 2006; see also Kemuma, 2000). Also the understanding of the gender-equality norm, already discussed, is an example of a dichotomizing division in which the "ethnically Swedish woman" appears as a kind of epitome of the liberated modern woman. There seems to be a recurrent hierarchy of dichotomies, which the course participants in my study referred to in their narratives.

Intersections of gender and nation – hierarchically ordering dichotomies

As mentioned earlier, immigrants, both men and women, in the Swedish context are discursively constructed as a collective opposed to the imagined modern and gender-equal Swedish national community. But for "the immigrant woman" there is an even more special position. Some researchers maintain that the image of "the immigrant woman" in a historical perspective has been utilized as a counter image and model of "the Other", when it comes to the construction of a new Swedish female identity (e.g. de los Reyes 1998; Eduards, 2007; Knocke 1986, 2011; Rosén, 2013, see also Carlson 2007). When the "ethnically Swedish woman" appears as a kind of epitome of "the liberated modern woman" on an equal footing with men, "the immigrant woman" is plugged into a discourse about being "subordinated", "passive", "traditional", "ignorant", etc. The category of woman in the Swedish context is divided into different categories of women related to various values. This way of reasoning can be linked to the intra-categorical approach where McCall (2005) in using the concept intra-category problematizes the meaning and boundaries of the categories themselves. In a broader sense, this specific understanding of gender equality intersects with positions of national belonging and ethnicity (cf. Eduards 2007; Yuval-Davis 1997).

These kinds of discourses creating hierarchical boundaries between "the Swedes" and "the Others", also give legitimacy to the SFI practices that include the mandate to educate the less "competent" ones, the course participants. In what has been discussed so far it can be said that "the immigrant woman" is quite visible and talked about, however seldom on her own terms. But there are also areas, discussions in Swedish society, where "the immigrant woman" is sometimes instead more or less invisible. One such area is the labour market where immigrant women are seldom given voice or agency. Research dealing with labour issues has drawn attention to this (e.g. Leiniö, 1988; Knocke 1986; Neergaard 2006). Also SFI is involved in these kinds of discussions. Taken together, SFI has since its inception in the 1960s been assigned a multifaceted role in Swedish society. In addition to being regarded as an essential part of the

[11] This is consistent with Kandiyoti when she argues that utilising the blunt tools of modernisation theory "results in attempts to fit myriad complex and contradictory cultural phenomena into the conceptual straitjacket of 'tradition' and 'modernity'" (2002: 2).

labour market policy, SFI is also expected to contribute to achieving the national targets for education and integration. This issue also involves conceptions of "the immigrant woman" in relation to work and education (Carlson 2007, 2013). However, if the women were significantly visible in some aspects in the previous discourses, they are instead the more invisible in this context.

The welfare state and the power of definitions

Clearly the expectations and functions ascribed to the SFI program have a tangible connection to a broader societal context of changing economic conditions and changes in immigration policies, education and the labour market (cf. Lindberg & Sandwall, 2007). Steering documents and pedagogical texts as well as study materials and textbooks interact with these fluctuations and promote various values, norms and ways of thinking (e.g. Carlson 2007, 2013; Rosén, 2013; Rosén & Bagga-Gupta, 2013). The values and images conveyed to SFI participants in, for example, the textbooks during different periods, sometimes almost in a spirit of fostering, deal largely with becoming "good workers", "clients" and "students" – and not least, "good democratic citizens" in a "Swedish" sense (cf. Carlson 2002).[12] An analysis of the texts in the study materials shows that they very seldom discuss the social and political conditions in "real life" – in this respect the texts are very much without contexts beyond the educational situation (e.g. Carlson 2007; 2013). If you go to the policy documents for SFI, analyses show slightly different discursive representations of the immigrant, related more to economics, politics, the labour market and prevailing ideological dominance (e.g. Carlson 2013; see also Rosén & Bagga-Gupta, 2013). As regards the category of immigrant women in these documents, there are many conceptions of the "necessary steps" that should be taken – also within the educational settings. Striking in the analysis is the fact that an active independent woman who participates in professional life is absent. Repeatedly emphasized in the public documents and reports is a problematic situation for immigrant women and the need for state intervention. Above all, an immigrant worker is presented as a man.

Male immigrant workers and female absence

The target group of SFI at its inception in 1965 was workers, particularly manual workers (Inrikesdepartementet, 1971; Skolöverstyrelsen, 1971). Laws and regulations were emphasized and a Swedish language program was directed at those already employed. Women were not counted in this group, but were placed into a group of non-employed immigrants whose participation in language courses was deemed problematic. The women were described as "working at home" and bound to their homes because of their burden of child care combined with "a patriarchal view on women" attributed to "certain immigrant groups" (Inrikesdepartementet 1971 p. 91). Culturally value-laden perceptions emerge in

[12] For a discussion and analysis of textbooks over time, see Carlson 2007 and 2013.

these texts. Immigrant women were to be "rescued" from a presumed isolation, and this could be done by, for example, study circles combining language courses with textile courses or with courses in cooking (Inrikesdepartementet 1971; Skolöverstyrelsen 1979; Skr 1979/1980 p. 168). This view is dominant until the early 1980s. However, statistics show a different picture for the same period; two reports show that immigrant women often worked more hours than Swedish women and had their own income (Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet, 1981). These hard-working women – an essential part of the workforce that Sweden needed mainly for industrial jobs – are surprisingly not visible in policy documents or in public debate. The migrant worker is constructed entirely as a man – the category becomes "unigendered" (e.g. Knocke 1986; Leiniö 1988). So, when discussing migrant workers these discussions largely take place without relation to immigrant women workers. The intra-categorical approach mentioned earlier could indeed be useful in thinking of / problematizing or disturbing the category "migrant worker". The category could then be related to both gender and ethnicity and even class. Overall, this discussion has to do with the labour market, where both the female and male immigrant worker are assigned different positions.

A segregated labour market – culture as explanation

Both immigrant men and immigrant women were thus working in industry – often with heavy jobs. Until the beginning of the 1970s the labour market in Sweden was characterized by what can almost be described as a permanent workforce shortage. For the trade union movement, married women emerged as a big workforce reserve, while employers argued in favour of labour immigration. Women living in Sweden came to be employed in the public services, while immigrants (both men and women) came to be imported for industry. For immigrants, this division in the workplace meant that it was difficult to make a career in some areas. Some researchers describe this situation as a systematic "inclusive subordination" – meaning that you have work even though it is limited (cf. Neergaard 2006; Schierup, Paulsson & Ålund 1994). Instead of seeing these working conditions in discriminatory terms – especially for the immigrant women marginalized both as women and as immigrants in the labour market and the workplace – very often "culture" was used as an explanation. Various problems were perceived as clashes between cultures or norms and values between the immigrant and the Swedish society.[13] Culture is above all something that "the Other" has – the "Swede" is beyond tradition and depicted as modern and rational (Carlson 2002; 2011).

Regarding changing perceptions, education is often viewed as a remedy. The SFI program is/has been central in this context. During the 1980s together with unemployment starting to rise and a decline in employment rates for immigrants, a focus on various values within SFI became even more apparent. Specific values should be taught to the course participants (Carlson 2002, 2013; Rosén, 2013).

[13] Also research on working life has been criticized for neglecting economic causes and using cultural explanations – for a critical discussion, see e.g. Neergaard, 2006.

Conflicts in matters of culture, values and norms are also addressed in the 1994 curriculum for SFI (SKOLFS 1994). Critical research emphasizes that the difficult situation in the labour market that emerged in the 1980s was exacerbated in the 1990s, and more and more immigrants (both men and women) ended up in unemployment (e.g. Knocke 1991; Schierup & Paulsson, 1994). For immigrant workers, the situation during this period can be described as "exclusive subordination" (e.g. Neergaard 2006; Ålund 1991). In this period critical discussion pays attention to how the concept of culture is used anew in order to explain all sorts of conditions related to the job market, economic fluctuations and even discrimination (e.g. Ålund 1991).

Immigrant women and problem ideologies – the power of definitions

As regards immigrant women, the sociologist Aleksandra Ålund is one of the researchers who noticed early on how "culture", "cultural background" was used as an explanation instead of discussing how the hardships of many of these women were to be understood in terms of their class and gender position in Swedish society: "… 'culture' has become an idiom for social ranking structure along the segregationist lines of gender and ethnicity" (Åund 1991 p. 47). She has also drawn attention to how a wall of problem-centered ideologies has been raised in Sweden in relation to immigrant women. She has argued that if there is too strong a focus on obstacles there is also a risk that women could develop a negative self-image (e.g. Ålund 1988). This picture over time of the immigrant woman associated with negative qualities instead of opportunities has proved difficult to change in policy and debate, even if women themselves, as well as recent research, have shown resistance, and with regard to resources. The participants in the SFI courses whom I met in my 2002 study clearly referred to images they had heard about themselves and that they found hard to accept. A more recent study of these language courses shows similar results (Rosén 2013; see also Sandwall 2013).

If the discourse of immigrant women in the early period of the SFI was about "rescuing the immigrant women", it later became a matter of "educating to changing values", and more recently a dominant discourse is about "motivating immigrants – both women and men – to work" (e.g. Carlson 2013, Rosén, 2013). With today's focus in Sweden on "the work line" ("work orientation"), SFI increasingly has come to be seen as a labour market tool – even more so than before. There has also been a general shift from immigrant policy to integration policy and toward emphasizing employability and self-sustainability (Prop. 1997/98 p. 16). For SFI in 2010 a national bonus program and various other interventions were established to achieve the goal of getting more people into work. This bonus has, however, been removed in 2014. Within SFI there are seldom problematizing texts in the educational settings related to, for example, the labour market and integration issues. Textbooks interact instead quite uncritically with dominant values, norms and ways of thinking in the community (Carlson 2011, 2013).

As regards "the immigrant woman", she is still discussed as problematic in policy texts and debate. Among other things, there has been a discussion about the argument that too many immigrant women stop participating in SFI due to

pregnancy or maternity leave. However, the statistics show the contrary, that it is only a small fraction of enrolled women, 5 percent, that discontinue the program because of childbirth. Regarding men and women and dropping out or temporary leave from SFI classes, statistics show that 56% of the men and 43% of the women took a break or dropped out (Statskontoret 2009 p. 33; see also Lindberg & Sandwall 2007; Sandwall 2013).

Recent SFI research points out that various recurrent debates continue to reproduce postcolonial images of traditional immigrant women bound by (patriarchal) culture and in need of emancipation through control and intervention by the Swedish state (e.g. Rosén 2013; Sandwall 2013). This is also consistent with my own research over time. It is thus a long-term phenomenon that research from various sources has shown – and not something new as others may argue (e.g. Towns 2002). It appears that the immigrant and especially "the immigrant woman" – despite discursive shifts and societal changes – in the context of SFI and other community activities is an eternal object to be changed over and over again (cf. Carlson 2011).

Concluding discussion

In this article the troubled positions, borders and boundaries of "the immigrant woman" have been scrutinized – mainly through SFI, Swedish language programs for immigrants. SFI has been discussed as a central educational institution embedded in an ideological context in interaction with surrounding institutions and society at large. SFI is influenced by and interacts with shifting economic conditions and changes in immigration policy, education and labour issues. Gendered, culturalized and ethnified – but not classed – discourses have been discerned during SFI's entire story since the 1960s. In general, SFI, the teaching of Swedish language to immigrants, can be seen as an arena in which the construction of who is an immigrant and who is a Swede is being played out – together with fostering attitudes (cf. Carlson 2013; Rosén 2013). In particular, the gender-equality discourse has been in accordance with Swedish norms: an ethnocentric discourse that positions both men and women who migrate to Sweden as more tradition-bound and less gender-equal than men and women born in Sweden. Whereas the perception of the traditional and culturally bound immigrant woman is emphasized so strongly in discourses, other issues such as discrimination are hardly ever addressed (cf. Pred, 2000).

Researchers within the gender and education area have pointed out that over time gender equality "remains a strong symbolic signifier of what it means to be Swedish" (Forbes, Öhrn & Weiner 2011, p. 769). The Swedish nation has been identified with gender issues as a 'success story' – there is even discerned a meta-narrative of gender equality related to "Swedishness" in history textbooks (Danielsson Malmros 2012). Forbes, Öhrn and Weiner suggest when comparing with, for example, Scotland: "for Sweden, achievement of gender equality has been used like its support for politically progressive causes overseas, as a form of cultural or symbolic marker to indicate the advanced state of Swedish society, in particular its progressivism, tolerance and humanity" (2011 p. 771). This marker works across borders and within Sweden in encounters with immigrants. The

gender equality imagined as exclusively Swedish results in silencing and excluding the voices/agency of immigrants, both men and women, as well as reproducing them as "the Others".

Regarding the category of the immigrant woman, neither research nor debate has sufficiently problematized the category. Stereotypical notions continue to flourish. A critical deconstruction has not taken place over time to any significant degree. Likewise, an intra-categorical approach has been rare – an approach which implies that the meaning and boundaries of the categories themselves will be problematized. Ålund early on has raised "the need for a general analytic shift from ethnocentric or stereotyped culturalist interpretations of subordination towards a more comprehensive recognition" (1991, p. 49). This shift is still awaited. Similarly the importance of structural analysis of materiality in the working life has also been pointed out – the discursive power must be connected to a social practice, which I have tried to show in my discussion (cf. Neergaard, 2006). When it comes to critically reviewing the SFI from a language-policy as well as a socio-political perspective, the critical voices also come from linguists (e.g. Hyltenstam & Milani 2012; Milani 2007). As I stated at the beginning of this article, my discussion takes place in a multi-disciplinary field – a field of research that relates to cultural, migration, ethnicity and gender studies. Even if the field is multi-disciplinary, collaboration is not always interdisciplinary – sometimes boundaries prevail between various disciplines.

This article began with a question "Are you going to write as we think or as you think?" Since I never really followed up the question when it was asked, I do not really know what the woman was referring to. As mentioned, I have, however, interpreted the question as being about representational power and as a kind of critical remark. This question seems to be still relevant. Throughout this article I have tried to continue the discussion; the text can be seen as a critical reflection on the production of knowledge that researchers as well as various actors are involved in. This can also be seen as an ethical issue. When talking about ethical issues we often emphasize the so-called informed consent that we as researchers have to follow. However, this consent is usually related to the research process but not the final product – something that some researchers have criticized (e.g. Mauthner, Birch, Jessop & Miller 2008). When all is said and done, the researcher has a very particular position as being responsible for, and also the "owner" of, the text and interpretations – yet another ethical issue.

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