

**THE CULTURE OF EMPLOYMENT: A STUDY OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S  
ATTITUDES ABOUT WORKING IN MALMÖ, SWEDEN**

by

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Sweden has long been recognized as an egalitarian Nordic welfare state, which promotes generous labor and citizenship rights for its residents, including women and immigrants. In cultural discourse and academic studies, high labor force participation signifies social equality for women, as well as successful integration for immigrants. This paper uses the experiences and attitudes of immigrant women in Sweden as a platform to study the links between Sweden's progressive gender norms, employment culture, and immigration policies. I examine pre-immigration and post-immigration factors that may affect women's attitudes about working after they move to Sweden. I categorize this research as a study of "cultural employment integration" to signify that it combines notions of cultural and economic immigrant integration. I designed the study to take into account the diverse cultural factors in immigrant women's lives in order to question common notions about whether and why immigrant women would like to be employed. The empirical foundation for this paper is 22 interviews I conducted with 23 immigrant women living in the "multicultural" city of Malmö, Sweden, in 2012. I asked interviewees about their family backgrounds, immigration histories, work experiences, and beliefs about familial

responsibilities, both before and after moving to Sweden. Five common trends emerged as important to women's attitudes about work: mothering, family experiences, educational experiences and attitudes, Swedish language skill, and participants' perceptions of gender norms in their home countries and in Sweden. These five facets are central to the gender equality discourse in Sweden. The discussion expands previous studies of immigration by considering the effects of gender, ethnicity, previous experiences, and citizenship on women's post-immigration attitudes. The results may be useful to consider when designing cultural and employment integration programs for immigrant women.

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## PREFACE

This thesis is dedicated to the hardworking and compassionate women in my family. To my mother, grandmothers, aunts, sister and cousins - thank you for inspiring and encouraging my curiosity.

I would like to thank the Swedish women who participated in my study. They welcomed me into their lives and challenged my hypotheses. Without their gracious involvement, this study would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank my advisor, Suzanna Crago, for her continuous support, encouragement, and advice throughout the research process. I extend thanks to Eva Albertsson for teaching me about Swedish language and culture and for giving me the confidence to travel to Skåne. I am also grateful to the examining committee – Lisa Brush, Melanie Hughes, and Nikole Hotchkiss – for reading and critiquing this thesis.

The study would have been impossible without the many women and organizations who aided me in my fieldwork. I am very grateful to Beata from Rosengård Folketshus and Muna from Somalilands Förening for their interest in this study and their help in recruiting study participants. I would also like to thank Paula and the other insightful students from Tamam Studentförening i Lund for providing invaluable translation help and introducing me to Swedish perspectives on antiracism.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Sweden has long been recognized as an egalitarian Nordic welfare state that provides generous labor and citizenship rights to all of her residents, including women and immigrants. Many human rights activists and feminist scholars praise Sweden for providing liberal welfare benefits to citizens and promoting democracy overseas. Sweden's once ethnically homogeneous population is changing quite fast, due to rapidly increasing immigration. This immigration is transforming the ethnic and, some argue, cultural face of the nation. Many of today's immigrants come to Sweden from physically and culturally distant locations such as the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. Like other European countries, Sweden must manage the cultural and economic incorporation of an increasing number of foreign-born residents. The challenges of immigrant integration could potentially undermine or bolster Sweden's international standing as a promoter of universal labor and citizenship rights. There is much at stake for immigrants in the process of integration. This is especially true for immigrant women, who occupy the intersection of gender and ethnic "otherness" in Sweden.

Sweden's reputation as a staunch promoter of women's rights makes the country a fascinating site in which to study cultural and political phenomena relating to women. The World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index, which measures national gender gaps in educational, economic, political, and health-based criteria, has ranked Sweden in the top four nations worldwide every year since 2006 (Hausmann, Tyson, Bekhouche, and Zahidi 2012). The

increasing presence of foreign-born women in Sweden raises questions of how Sweden's prominent culture of gender equality develops and spreads, and whether it reaches and affects foreign-born residents. At the same time, gender equality, as it manifests itself in beliefs and practices, is a facet by which some native Swedes differentiate themselves from immigrants. For example, a recent study of immigrant transitions to adulthood in Sweden claims,

Many, but not all, immigrants emphasize gender separation by expecting only men to be employed and women to focus on caring for their families. They normally strongly encourage and enforce male dominance and control. Sweden is thus an extreme example of the potential for clashes between immigrants and the native-born population on family-related issues" (Bernhardt, Goldscheider, Goldscheider, and Bjerén 2007, p. 7)

As I show in this thesis, the above quote is elementary and misguided. It does, however, highlight several broad themes which this thesis will question in depth. First, by using gender as a point of contrast between "immigrants and the native-born population," the quote suggests that immigrants live fundamentally different lives than native Swedes because of different gender norms. Secondly, it identifies employment as a source of difference between men and women in immigrant cultures. Thirdly, the quote labels as significant immigrant women's roles in their families, as well as families' roles in shaping women's identities and opinions.

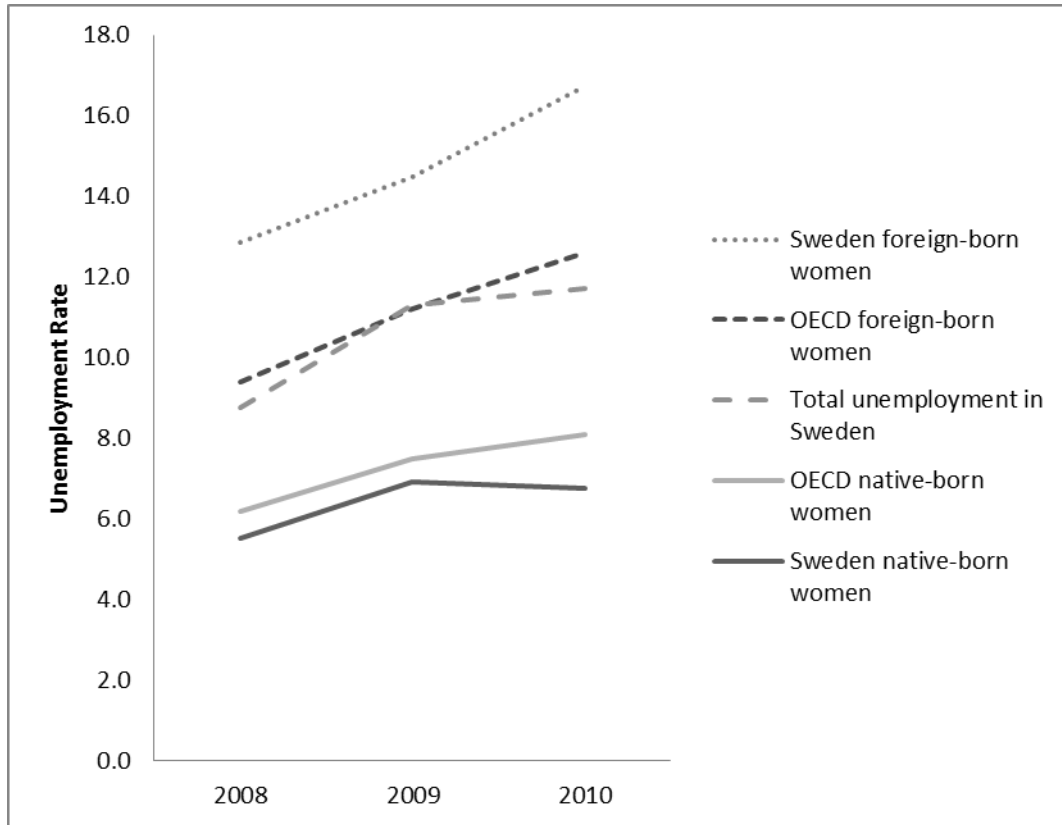
Unlike the passage, this thesis consciously avoids labeling immigrant women and their families as inherently less liberated than native Swedes. Rather than assuming that all non-Swedish cultures enforce "male dominance and control," this thesis explores the agency that immigrant women exercise in several domains of their life, including work, schooling, and parenting. The thesis seeks to answer the following questions: what are the attitudes, aspirations, and preferences of immigrant women living in Malmö, Sweden, towards employment? What are their opinions about Swedish gender roles and employment culture? The study focuses on

women living, working, and/or attending school in Rosengård, a neighborhood with a concentrated immigrant population.

The findings of this study are relevant in the context of immigrant integration – a topic of much recent political discussion in Europe. In a 2011 report for the Migration Policy Institute, Randall Hansen identified a debate about European immigrant integration: are European societies too tolerant of cultural diversity, or not tolerant enough (Hansen 2012, p. 1)? Hansen attempts to reframe this debate, stating, “The problem is not a result of culture; it is rooted in employment and income. The failure of European immigration policies has been their inability to ensure that immigrants acquire and retain work” (ibid). While Hansen argues, “employment, not culture, needs to be the basis of immigration policy in Europe,” the findings of this study suggest that employment and culture are not mutually exclusive. Rather, there is a large overlap between employment and culture, especially in the context of sustainable immigrant integration. Instead of designing integration initiatives around either culture or employment, I argue that host countries should focus on what I term *employment culture*.

I develop the concept of “employment culture” in order to explain the origin and nature of immigrant women’s relationship with the labor market. This concept builds on existing work about business culture to address issues outside of the workplace. While business culture is restricted to the workplace, employment culture includes norms, values, ideas, and practices of working discussed outside the workplace and by unemployed people. Research has shown that Sweden’s business culture includes informal communication with supervisors, relatively flexible working hours, and a large number of vacation days each year (Business 2012). I argue that Sweden’s *employment* culture incorporates the idea that women can work outside of the home and the practice of adults taking on unpaid internships (*praktiks*) in the hope that of gaining paid

employment. Some of these cultural norms are informal, meaning that they are learned and enforced socially, while others are formal, meaning that they are institutionalized through laws and company policies.



**Figure 1. Unemployment Rates by nativity in Sweden vs. all OECD countries**

Several formal aspects of Swedish employment culture promote gender equality by facilitating the presence of women in the workplace. For example, the Swedish state subsidizes childcare and requires companies to provide parents with paid leave after childbirth, both of which are meant to lessen women’s domestic responsibilities and allow them to get involved in non-family activities (Bernhardt et al. 2007). These policies contribute to Sweden’s relatively high female labor force participation rate: in 2010, 81 percent of women and 88 percent of men in the labor force were employed (Statistics Sweden 2010).

The employment gap between women and men is low, but where do foreign-born women factor into this statistic? Figure 1<sup>1</sup> shows that the unemployment rate of foreign-born Swedish women is higher than those of both native-born Swedish women and the average for foreign-born women in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Moreover, native-born Swedish women have a lower unemployment rate than the average native-born woman in OECD countries.

These statistics draw attention to the unemployment gap between foreign-born and native-born Swedish women. The range of unemployment rates, even among people who belong to the same sex category and reside in the same country, indicates that Sweden's employment culture may not be homogenous. I argue that even within the category of foreign-born Swedish women, there may be significant variation in employment rates and employment culture, which gets hidden in categories like "foreign-born women." This thesis aims to create a disaggregated, qualitative source of data about foreign-born Swedish women's work attitudes, thus resisting the statistical categorization of all immigrant women as unproductive and disinterested Swedish residents.

This work has important implications – it provides evidence against the cultural stereotype that immigrant women do not want to work. Indeed, the cultural narrative about immigrant women in Sweden, especially Muslim women, is that they are oppressed and do not want to work outside of the home (Lewin 2001). As one of my study participants explained, "Swedes feel like the immigrants do not want to work, but it's not true. [...] We just need the

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<sup>1</sup> Source: OECD



opportunity.” This woman’s recognition of the stereotype, along with her opinion that it is false, demonstrates the need for in-depth studies such as this one.

Foreign-born women in Sweden are interesting subjects of research due to their large range of nationalities, their high aggregate unemployment rates, and their ostensible unfamiliarity with Swedish gender equality norms. Still, the study of migrant women remains relatively untouched – though scholars conduct a sizable amount of research on the topic, much of it goes unnoticed by politicians. Even in the field of migration studies, the historical invisibility of female immigrants dates back several decades. In 1984, Mirjana Morokvasic published an introduction to the first special issue of the *International Migration Review* focused on women, in which she claimed that male biases in studies of migration and in policy making were rendering existing research on female migratory patterns invisible (Morokvasic 1984).

Fifteen years later, in 1999, Eleonore Kofman’s article about female “birds of passage” claimed that the field of migration studies had yet to adequately scrutinize immigrant women’s diverse experiences. Noting that most scholarly studies to that point had focused on “problematic” immigrant groups, Kofman called for research to reflect the diversification of female migration in terms of modes of entry, legal status, forms of economic and social activity, and the range of immigrant groups represented. Most recently, in 2010, Helma Lutz reevaluated the state of affairs in the migration studies field, only to find the same problem. Lutz suggested that the lack of interest in studies of migrant women’s work may be due to “its location in the private sphere and its characterisation as ‘family work’” (Lutz 2010, p. 1649). Indeed, many scholars choose to study immigrant women through a lens of family structures and relationships.

Gendered studies of migration often conceptualize women as family members - mothers, wives, and daughters. This trend associates women with the private sphere, unlike male

migrants, who are often associated with the public spheres of work and politics. In addition to separating men from women, the distinction between the masculinized public and feminized private spheres also distorts conceptualizations of women, workers, and working women. Many official statistics account only for paid work in the formal economy, and as a result much of women's labor to go unaccounted for (Elias 2011, p. 403). This is because many women engage in informal work, such as running a business from home or out of a roadside stall. In addition, household tasks such as parenting and housework are not often considered "work." The practice of separating paid work from unpaid family work generates the figures of male breadwinner and female homemaker, which create "cultural guidelines about careers, families, and gender" (Moen and Roehling 2005, 5). For these reasons, it is difficult to conceptualize what actually is and is not work, especially when the worker is a woman.

Some scholars argue that the presence of a feminized private sphere has more drastic impacts, much beyond the conceptualization of women as breadwinners or homemakers. Gedalof states that the "notion of the citizen as a public individual negotiating civil society relies on its conceptual association with, and opposition to, a feminized private sphere in which the work of kinship, affect and particularized ties of allegiance and belonging is sited" (2007, p. 91). Here, Gedalof stipulates that the feminized private sphere hinders women's and minorities' access to narratives of national belonging. When citizenship and national belonging are at stake, the feminization of the private sphere doubly affects immigrant women.

For this study, I collected data through 22 semi-structured qualitative interviews with immigrant women living in Malmö, Sweden. I focused on women living in neighborhood of Rosengård, well-known for its high population of immigrants and its high unemployment rates. Using nonrandom sampling in public places such as libraries and schools, I solicited 23 women

who immigrated from Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. The large majority of the respondents practiced Islam or identified as former Muslims. Most respondents were married women with children, and all but three of the women were unemployed when I interviewed them. During the interview process, I allowed respondents to elaborate on subjects as they wished, giving them more control of the interview process and of their eventual representation in this thesis.

I conducted a content analysis of my interviews, using both deductive and inductive methods. I used an intersectional approach, meaning that the multiplicity of the interviewees' identities informed the entire research process. Rather than utilizing gender as the framework through which to study migration, the approach that I used incorporates gender as one of several characteristics that makes my sample noteworthy.

The results of this study show that among immigrant women associated with Rosengård, there are a variety of attitudes about working and a variety of possible explanations for why this may be. In this way, immigrant women, who are often regarded as a monolithic group, prove themselves to be heterogeneous. In many ways, these women are more similar to Swedish women than quantitative employment data suggests; in other ways, immigrant women are more critical of Swedish culture and gender norms than integration policies and administrators may expect.

In the following sections, I will present a review of the relevant literature about gender, migration, and the Swedish context. Then, I will describe the methodology that I used to investigate my research question, including sampling methods and analytical methods. I also provide a thorough recount of the data collection process. Following the methods section, I present my findings about how motherhood, education, language skill, family experiences, and

perceptions of Swedish gender norms affect immigrant women's attitudes about working. Finally, I will explain the cultural components of my findings, and I will place these results in the context of cultural employment integration.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 IMMIGRATION IN A SWEDISH CONTEXT

#### 2.1.1 A brief history of post-WWII immigration to Sweden

Sweden's immigration history has been uneven, and the number of new immigrants who arrived in 2009-2012 is very high relative to previous years (see Figure 2)<sup>2</sup>.

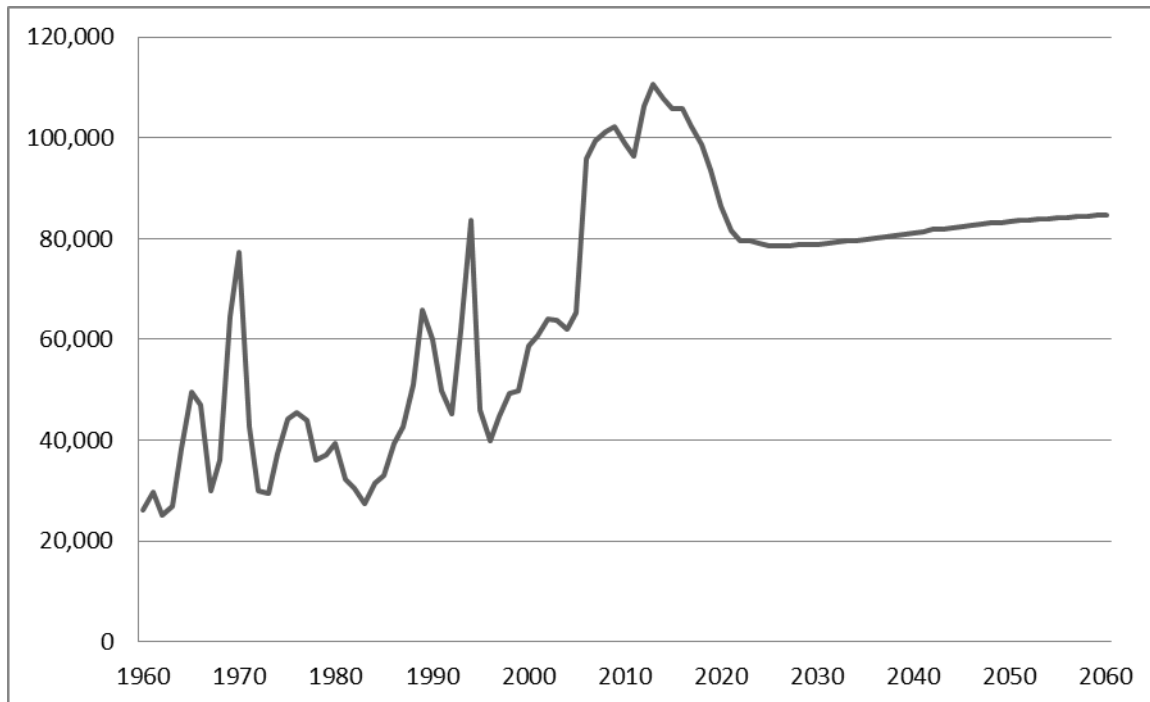


Figure 2. Immigration to Sweden 1960-2011 and forecast 2011-2060

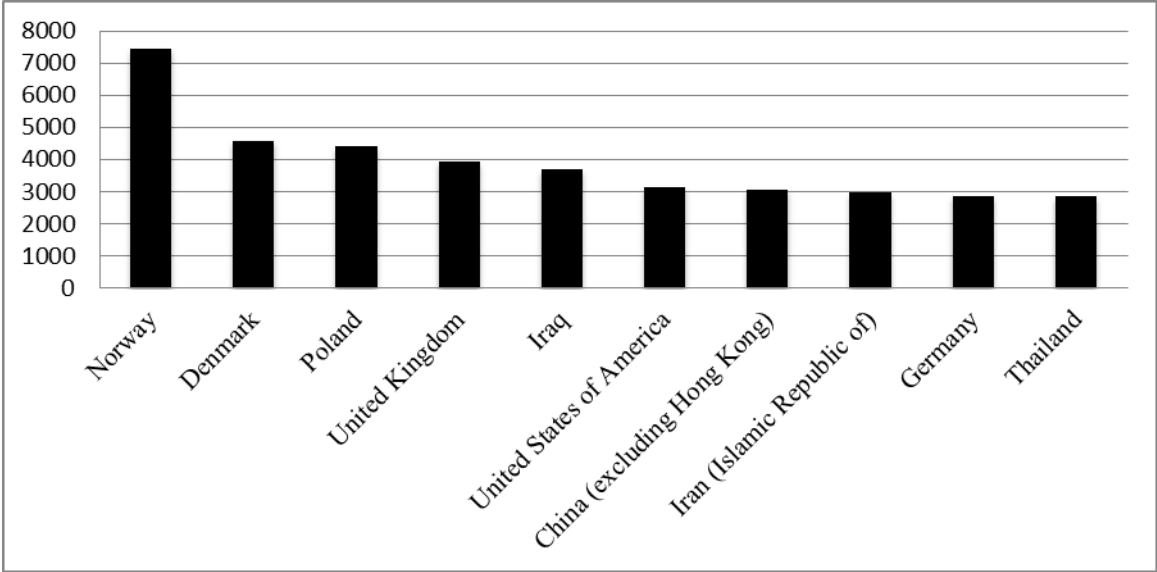
<sup>2</sup> Source: Statistics Sweden (2012)

The Swedish Statistics Bureau projects that immigration will greatly decrease in the coming decades, due to a slowdown in family reunion migration as well as demographic changes in EU countries of origin (Population, 2012). If this projection holds true, then in 2060, immigrants who arrived in during the current decade will constitute a large percentage of Sweden's population in the future. This means that the immigrants who are currently arriving in Sweden may control a large stake in cultural and political processes in the near future. In this section, I will briefly discuss the history of Swedish immigration.

Many scholars divide Sweden's immigration history into three phases. The first phase began shortly after World War II, when Sweden admitted a high number of labor immigrants from other Nordic countries, as well as refugees from Central Europe (Borkert, Bosswick, Heckmann, and Lucken-Klassen 2007). The second phase began in the late 1960's, when a rise in unemployment led to a decreased demand for labor immigrants (Bevelander 2011, 23). The Swedish government cut back on immigration other than that from neighboring Nordic countries and from non-European refugees. During this period, Sweden emphasized integration policy, which was summarized by the slogan "*jämlikhet, valfrihet och samverkan,*" (equality, freedom of choice and cooperation) (van Heelsum 2009).

Phase three began in the mid 1990's, and as it is ongoing, it defines the context of this study. In 1995, the Swedish government "officially recognized the multicultural character of Sweden's society" (Borkert et al. 2007, p. 31). This recognition reflects a dramatic shift in the national origin of Swedish immigrants. Today's immigrants come from physically and culturally

distant locations, such as the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. As Figure 3<sup>3</sup> shows, four of the top ten countries from which immigrants moved in 2011 are located in Asia and the Middle East.

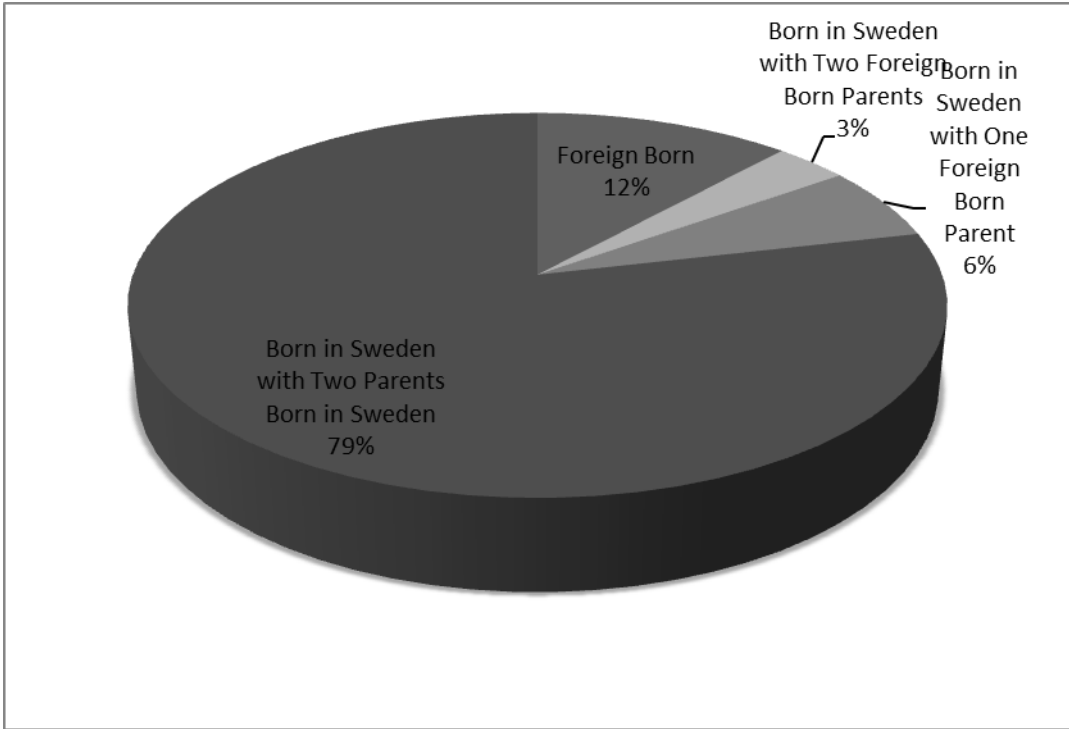


**Figure 3. Immigrant countries of origin in descending order, 2011**

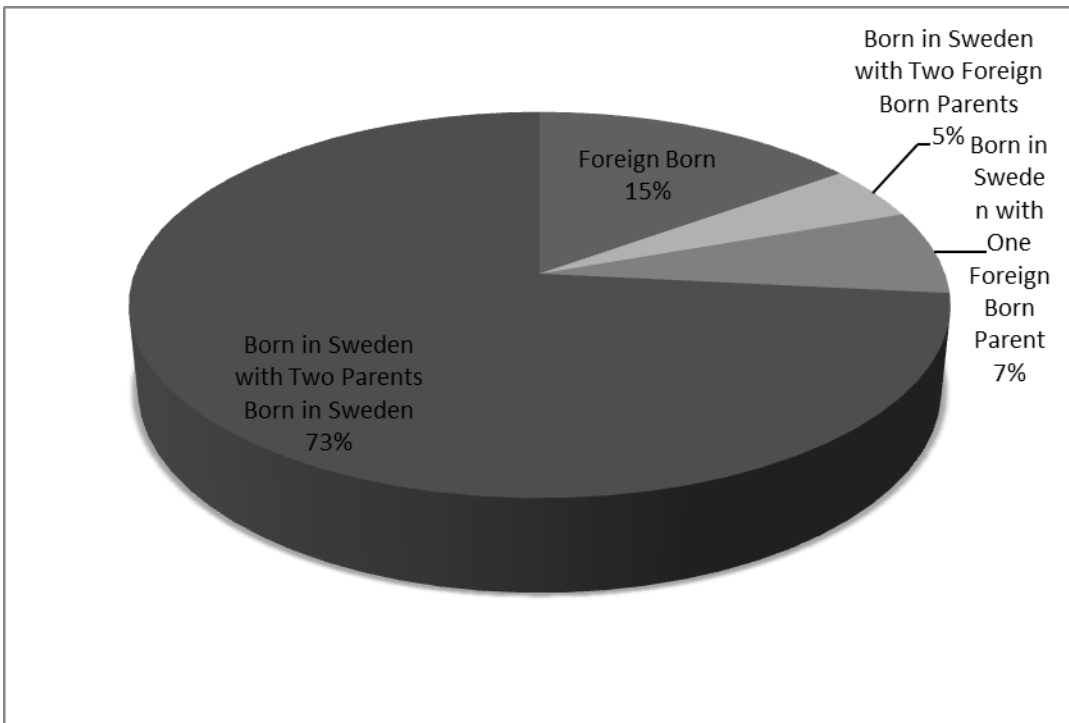
The diversification of immigrant origin countries is accompanied by an increase in the number of immigrants relative to Sweden’s population. Figures 4<sup>4</sup> and 5<sup>5</sup> show that foreign-born citizens and those with foreign-born parents constitute an increasing proportion of the Swedish population

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Statistics Sweden  
<sup>4</sup> Source: Statistics Sweden (2011)  
<sup>5</sup> Source: Statistics Sweden (2011)



**Figure 4. Population composition, 2002**



**Figure 5. Population composition, 2011**



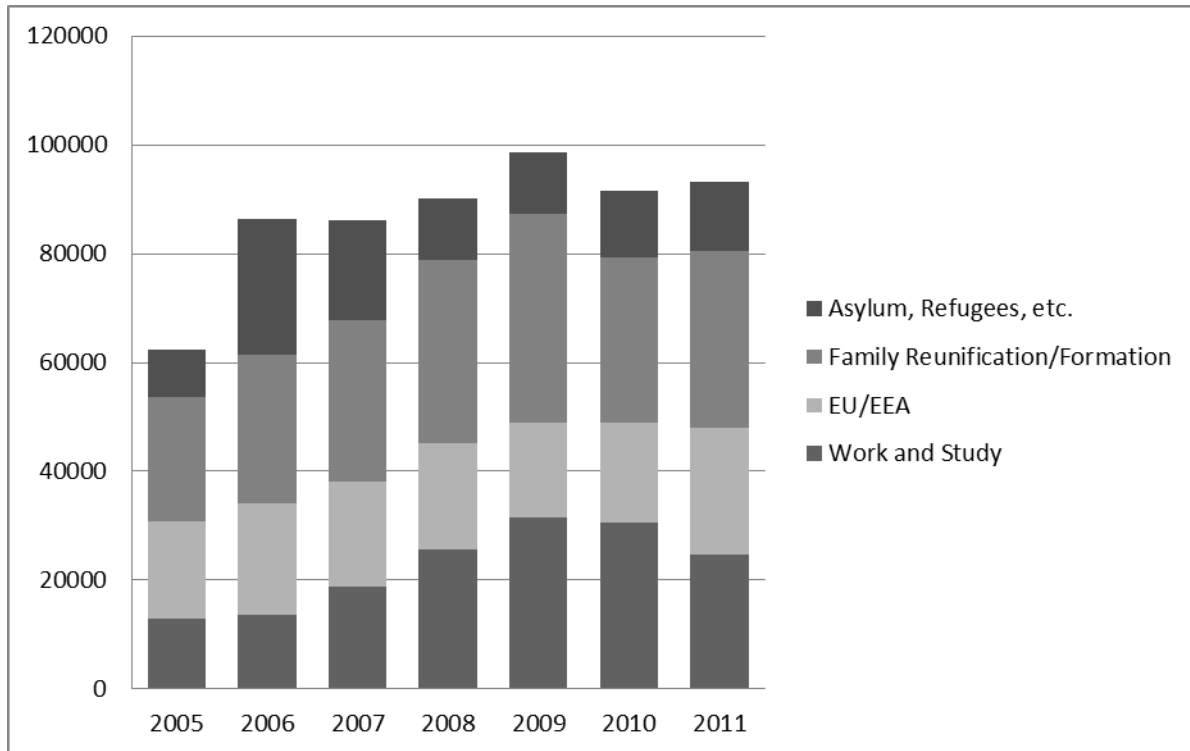
### 2.1.2 Arriving at Sweden's reputation as a liberal host country

Sweden has earned a reputation as socially liberal European country and a welcoming host country. One factor contributing to this reputation is that Sweden accepts a relatively high number of refugees and asylum-seekers, relative to its small national population (Edin, LaLonde and Åslund 2000). Adding to its liberal immigration reputation, Sweden has granted exceptions and policy expansions based on country of origin; from 2003-2007, Sweden relaxed the criteria by which it would grant Iraqis asylum. “While most countries require that refugees prove that their lives are in extreme peril, [an Iraqi fleeing to Sweden] needed only to demonstrate that he or she was fleeing central or southern Iraq to receive asylum” (Eger 2010, p. 205). International organizations recognize and praise Sweden's generous policies. The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) has ranked Sweden as number one out of 33 countries since 2007, noting that Swedish residents “are legally entitled to be free from discrimination, live with their family and secure in [*sic*] their residence and citizenship” (MIPEX 2013).

Though it may be considered a relatively liberal host country, Sweden differentiates between immigrants via the rates at which it offers entrance. Figure 6<sup>6</sup> shows that the majority of residence permits that Sweden has granted in recent years have been for family reunion reasons.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: Migration and Asylum 2005 – June 2012, *Migrationsverket*



**Figure 6. Number of residence permits granted in Sweden, by type**

This aligns with the continental trend; family reunion has defined European immigration for at least two decades (Stalker 2002). The trend of family reunion has been controversial for several reasons. First, it has raised public debates of how immigrant families, especially Muslim families, can integrate into European culture (Kraler and Bonizzoni 2009). In addition, family reunion policies, unlike the labor migration policies that preceded them, have encouraged labor migrants to stay in Sweden for long periods of time. For those who do stay in Sweden, several policies encourage them to integrate. In the following sections, I will discuss policies designed to promote employment and Swedish language learning.

### **2.1.2.1 Swedish policies promoting employment integration**

Sweden offers a unique environment for immigrants to integrate, based on cultural and political incentives to enter the labor market. When immigrants arrive in Sweden, they have access to a number of educational resources. Some of these resources, like the municipal adult education system (*Komvux*), public institutes of higher education, and private, government-subsidized adult schools, are available to all Swedish residents (Abraha 2007).

Sweden's also provides immigrant-specific access to education, sometimes in combination with integration schemes. In a 2009 integration reform, the Swedish Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*) took responsibility for providing immigrants with a personalized introduction plan, complete with an "introduction guide" – a person whose job it is to help immigrants navigate the many options available to them (Ministry 2009). These options include Sfi as well as other forms of adult education; Sfi classes, civic orientation classes, and employment preparation activities are mandatory but not free of charge. In addition to the introduction guide, some immigrants have access to a supplementary coach to help them find a job or begin an educational program (*ibid*). The presence of these guides and coaches could indicate the Swedish government's willingness to help immigrants integrate, or recognition of how difficult it is to enter the Swedish job market, or some combination of both.

Another Swedish integration policy, applicable only to refugees and asylum-seekers, is the "introduction benefit" (*etableringsersättning*). This is a payment from the federal government to individual new arrivals, and, like the Sfi bonus, it is not affected by the presence of another benefit-recipient in the household. The introduction benefit is intended to "[encourage] new arrivals to both work and take part in introduction activities" and "increase the potential for gender equality" (Ministry 2009). Sweden's Ministry of Integration and Gender

Equality thus combines its two responsibilities by creating “incentives for both spouses in a family to take part in [Sfi], civic orientation and other employment preparation activities.” As such the introduction benefit is extremely relevant to this study of female attitudes about work.

### **2.1.2.2 Swedish policies and the climate of language learning**

To facilitate labor integration and reduce wage gaps between immigrants and natives, many European integration policies aim to improve immigrants’ linguistic proficiency. In Sweden, language courses (*svenska för invandrare*, or *Sfi*) are mandatory for new arrivals. Local governments reward immigrants for taking and passing language courses with the Sfi bonus. Municipalities grant higher rewards for passing more difficult Swedish classes, and the bonuses are tax-free (Skolverket). According to The Swedish National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*), “the aim is for those [...] who have just arrived in Sweden to learn Swedish more quickly, so it will be easier for [them] to get a job” (ibid). The Sfi bonus is available for men and women, regardless of the presence of another bonus-recipient in the house. Because this benefit serves as a type of income for women, I hypothesize that it could affect women’s incentives to work and their attitudes about working.

In Sweden, immigrants’ Swedish proficiency, or lack thereof, is a topic of social tension. Many scholars have noted a new type of “immigrant Swedish” which is arising in urban areas. In both academic and popular discourse, this is called *Rinkebysvenska* or *Rosengårdsvenska*, derived from the names of urban neighborhoods with high immigrant populations (Stroud 2004). Some popular discourse uses *blattesvenska*, a more derogatory term derived from *blatte*, meaning “immigrant,” with racial and low-class connotations (Milani 2010) This term gained notoriety in 2006, when the national newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* published a controversial op-ed

article by well-known feminist academic Ebba Witt-Brattström. Witt-Brattström contended that by increasing the funding of bilingual education, “the government is signaling to our new Swedes that it will suffice if they learn just about enough blattesvenska for them to be able to put up a stall and sell bananas in Rosengård” (Milani 2010, p. 117, from Dagens Nyheter 2006). This remark sparked a debate in the Swedish media and spawned several academic articles about language requirements for immigrants. Another political, academic, and social debate in Sweden revolves around the lack of a language requirement on the Swedish citizenship (New 2012). This is because, despite the mandatory Sfi classes, Swedish language proficiency is not required to gain citizenship (Migrationsverket 2013). Controversy over citizenship requirements and rights tends to be centered around geographic areas with high immigrant populations, such as the Swedish city of Malmö.

### **2.1.3 Immigrants and Industry in Malmö**

Malmö is the third largest city in Sweden, with by about 280,000 residents of 171 nationalities (20<sup>th</sup> century). The city lies on the southern border of Sweden and is connected to Copenhagen, Denmark by the Öresund Bridge. The proximity to Copenhagen is just one reason why Skåne, the province containing Malmö, is home to Sweden’s highest concentration of foreign-born residents (Eger 2010, p. 205). The number and variety of immigrant residents, along with the city’s industrial history, makes Malmö a fascinating location to study.

Malmö developed as an industrial city in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sweden’s engineering, shipbuilding, textiles, and food production industries were centered in Malmö. However, by the 1960’s, these industries were already beginning to decline, and the recessions of the 1990’s hit

the city hard. Malmö lost about 20% of its jobs, at the same time becoming home to an increasing number of refugees and other immigrants (van Heelsum 2009). Malmö currently calls itself “a city of transition,” its strongest sectors being logistics, retail and wholesale trade, and construction and real estate (ibid). While the economy grows, the city is still dealing with the lasting social impacts of economic decline and the influx in immigration – namely, housing segregation. According to a Eurofound study, “[t]oday, Malmö may be described as ethnically and socioeconomically segregated, with middle class neighborhoods in the west and working class neighborhoods in the south and east” (Borkert et al. 2007). Malmö’s City Council recognizes the housing segregation, and has identified it as a “serious impediment to long-term sustainable growth” (ibid). Though the city is invested in combatting ethnic residential segregation, Malmö city council claims that it is proud of its ethnic diversity.

Within Sweden, Malmö is well-known as an immigrant city. To institutionalize this image, the official city website claims that “immigration has made Malmö a multicultural centre. The city has many inhabitants whom have contributed to Malmö’s international character” (Malmö). Malmö’s ethnically diverse reputation is backed by statistics – 40 percent of Malmö residents have at least one foreign-born parent (Richburg 2004). As of 2007, Malmö’s foreign national groups ranked according to size were: Yugoslavia, Poland, Iraq, Denmark, Lebanon, Hungary, Finland, Rumania, Chile, Germany and Somalia (Broomé, Dahlstedt, and Schölin 2007, p. 21). Many of Malmö’s foreign-born residents, despite the industrial nature of the city, are unemployed. In fact, with only 48 percent of its foreign-born population employed, Malmö lags far behind other Swedish municipalities (Immigrant). Much of Malmö’s discourse about immigration, employment, and integration centers around a neighborhood called Rosengård.

#### 2.1.4 The immigrant-dense community of Rosengård

This study focuses on immigrants living and/or working in one neighborhood in Malmö where unemployment rates are particularly high – Rosengård. Rosengård is currently one of the most well-known “immigrant” neighborhoods in Malmö. Sweden’s other large cities, Stockholm and Gothenburg, have similar neighborhoods (Rinkeby and Bergsjön, respectively), but Malmö’s Rosengård has received more media attention than its counterparts in recent years. Newspaper articles and websites problematize the area as criminal and segregated (Another, 2012). Media characterizations of Rosengård include “the roughest ghetto in Scandinavia,” (Sweden’s ‘Immigrants,’ 2012) and “one of Malmö’s poorest areas” (Zlatan, 2012), while others highlight the non-Swedish languages they see and hear in Rosengård.

The director of Rosengård’s public housing corporation (*Malmö Kommunala Bostadsföretag*, MKB) describes popular perceptions of the neighborhood:

Rosengård is not like Stockholm’s suburbs. It is a district in Malmö. It is but a 10 minute bike ride from the downtown area. It is exactly 1.2 km from Möllevångstorget [a commercial area near the city center], meaning nothing. It is not like the suburbs of Stockholm or Göteborg, lying by some hilly range to which the subway or commuter train takes you. Here it is in the middle of Malmö, but nothing is happening. Life is subdued. You don’t have places to meet, no shops, nothing. [...] People are home a lot and it does not work with the old separation deal. Moreover, many come here from cultures where you lead an intensive urban life, everything is integrated, and then this structure doesn’t work. [...] Nothing encouraging has been seen and the media has publicized the “problem child” view, so that it is the usual picture for people without knowledge of the neighborhood. You see yourself when you walk through this area. It is green and cool, but no journalist writes about that. No one comes here to write about blooming cherry trees and children playing in playgrounds. What is written about is the fires and riots (from Myberg 2012, p. 40).

In addition to the fires, riots, and violence which have dominated characterizations of Rosengård, many studies identify the neighborhood as ethnically and linguistically diverse. Table 1<sup>7</sup> shows the most common nationalities of Rosengård's residents.

**Table 1. Residents of Rosengård with foreign background, by country of origin**

	Born abroad	Born in Sweden, both parents born abroad	Total with foreign background
Iraq	2775	902	3667
Yugoslavia	2409	1802	4221
Bosnia & Herzegovina	1331	290	1621
Lebanon	1324	1534	2858
Poland	520	120	640
TOTAL	13106	5740	18846
% of district's population	60%	26%	86%

Rosengård's diverse immigrant population is much higher Malmö's city-wide statistics. In Malmö, 40% of residents have at least one foreign-born parent, while in Rosengård this number is 60% (Bevelander 2011). The visibility of immigrants' presence is one reason why Rosengård has been the center of Swedish debate about immigrant resettlement and community rehabilitation. Another reason is the high unemployment and alienation from Swedish culture.

Controversy over Rosengård's demographics is intertwined with several decades of Swedish immigration and housing policies. Several scholars have blamed family reunification policies for creating and maintaining cultural divisions between native and foreign-born Swedes

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<sup>7</sup> Source: translated from City of Malmö, Rosengård fact sheet, 2008



and for fostering immigrant residential segregation (Bernhardt et al. 2007). However, residential segregation cannot be blamed entirely on immigration policies, because it is rooted in a different state policy. In the 1960's, the Swedish government subsidized the construction of approximately one million new homes in the infamous "Million Housing Program" (*Miljonprogrammet*). The purpose of this housing policy was to lower the housing queue and improve the quality of current housing (Abramsson, Borgegård, and Fransson 2002). Often, the new buildings were located in urban peripheries, as they were modeled after small Swedish suburbs. For their first decades of existence, native Swedes inhabited these homes.

As the buildings became older through the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, they became outdated, and economic prosperity allowed the original residents to purchase homes closer to city centers. These newly vacant buildings, with their inexpensive rent, answered the new housing demand of incoming immigrants. Many remnants of the Million Housing Program are now characterized by high immigrant populations, and are thus "symbols of foreignness" (Bernhardt et al. 2007). Popular media and academic literature criticize neighborhoods with high immigrant concentrations, such as Rosengård, stating that "too close a connection with other immigrants, whether residentially or occupationally, can limit integration into the larger society and access to its opportunities" (ibid, p. 12). The above study goes as far as calling neighborhoods like Rosengård a "Swede sparse housing area." Whether or not the neighborhood is lacking in "Swedes," it provides a rich and dynamic environment for this study.

## **2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this section, I discuss the theories that inform this study. First, I discuss the categorization of immigrants that prevails in both political and academic literature about migration. I explain the implications of such categorization to female immigrants' lives and to this study. Then, I discuss the general understanding of women and families in the immigration process. This includes a brief explanation of the importance of the family unit in post-migration decisions, as well as an overview of the particularities of Swedish politics and culture as they relate to women and families.

### **2.2.1 The reductionist categorization of immigrants**

This study involves participants who would commonly be associated with different immigration categories. Indeed, a clear understanding of migratory processes and experiences must resist merely identifying all foreign-born persons as "immigrants." However, some practices of breaking the category of "immigrant" into smaller parts can be equally harmful. Scholars and politicians have created categories through which to identify the different immigrants and determine which immigrants are most worthy of entry, citizenship rights, and welfare provisions. These classifications are divisive and politically charged. In this study, I choose not to differentiate between migration categories, as to avoid making assumptions about participants'

previous experiences. In this section, I will discuss the three most politically charged immigration categories – labor immigration, irregular immigration, and family reunion migration.

Labor immigrants are those who migrate in search of employment, including long-term contract workers and seasonal and short-term workers. While labor migrants flow through regulated, legal channels, irregular migrants flow through unregulated channels. Irregular immigrants are those who flee to another country to escape persecution or danger. This category contains refugees, who have secured a visa before entry to the country, as well as asylum-seekers, who have entered the country and await an asylum decision. The third category, family reunion migration, includes two subcategories. Family reunification refers to the practice of spouses, children, and parents migrating to join their family member(s), while under family formation, residents (who may belong to one of the afore-mentioned categories) bring an international marriage partner into the country to join them (Kofman 1999). These three categories, while helpful in conceptualizing the diverse range of push factors behind migration, can be problematic because each category brings with it a set of assumptions that appear to be mutually exclusive. This suggests that, for example, labor immigrants must be more interested in employment than are irregular immigrants or family reunion immigrants. Such assumptions cloud understandings of immigrants' diverse motivations, as well as their potential for contributing to host countries' cultures and economies.

Many studies contrast irregular migrants with labor migrants, implying that these two types of immigrants have different motivations for moving (push factors), and in turn they have different economic outcomes (Bernhardt et al. 2007). For example, a recent study of immigrant integration in Sweden commences with the explanation that economic migrants are “self-

selected' to succeed in the Swedish labor market, whereas the same is not necessarily the case for the political migrants" (Edin et al. 2000, p. 167). The implication that different push factors necessarily generate different economic outcomes for immigrants can discourage the authors and administrators of integration programs from providing adequate support to certain types of immigrants. Family reunion is less often discussed in conjunction with the first two categories, although it is the dominant type of migration in the European Union (Stalker 2002).

The trend within international migration studies has been to consider labor migration as a predominantly male phase, followed by the predominantly female phase of family reunion migration (Kofman 1999). This classification associates men with the supposedly more economically productive labor migration and women with the supposedly less economically productive family reunion migration (Boswell and Geddes 2011). It also marks female migrants as dependents – followers of their male family members – which may contribute to the relative lack of research around female migration compared to that around male migration (Kofman 1999). Moreover, the gendered categorization reduces the heterogeneity of female immigrants' diverse experiences into one trope: the woman who migrates to reunify with her family and then resumes disinterest in economically productive activities. While it is true that the majority of female migration in the EU is for family reunification purposes, it is not necessarily true that female immigrants are useless or harmful to host countries' economies. One aim of this study is to determine whether female immigrants have heterogeneous attitudes toward labor market participation.

## **2.2.2 Women, families, and policy in the immigration process**

Several of the female immigrants in this study cited family reunion or the desire to start a family as the reason they immigrated to Sweden. Because my interviewees attributed such significance to their husbands, children, and relatives, a study of these women's decisions about both migration and working should carefully analyze the role of family. Indeed, "a better understanding of 'the family' as a migration unit and of gendered processes linked to understandings of the family can enhance our understanding both of migration and of political and social processes associated with it" (Boswell and Geddes 2011, p. 103). Many scholars regard female migration as the migration of dependents, rather than a contribution to a future workforce. However, recent studies indicate a shift towards the perspective that "increased family migration does not indicate the demise of labor migration, but its transformation" (Kofman 1999, p. 287). In fact, one recent study found that among Iranian immigrants in Sweden, women have more progressive attitudes about working than men, and thus they experience greater success in the labor market and faster cultural integration (Lewin 2001).

In the particular case of Swedish immigration, the family unit is doubly significant. Swedish policies aimed at promoting immigrant integration often work through family structures. This is because Sweden marks families as an important source of social values and targets them as key actors in the integration process. According to one study of Swedish immigrant integration, "[s]mall family size and gender equality are normative in Swedish life. Gender equality implies opportunities for women to have smaller families, and to obtain higher levels of education, to work, and thus to become more independent of husbands, fathers, and brothers" (Bernhardt et al. 2007, p. 10). In the following sections, I will discuss Swedish cultural norms about women and family, as well as Swedish policies that operate through the family unit.

### **2.2.2.1 Swedish discourse and policies around motherhood**

Motherhood is an important factor in studies of women and work, as the presence of children tends to transform women's desire and, in some cases, freedom, to work. In 2011, the employment impact of parenthood (that is, the effect of having a child on one's employment status) was significant in most countries in the EU, including Sweden (European Commission 2011).

That being said, what it means to be a woman, a mother, a student, and/or a working adult may be different in Sweden than in other countries. From a social constructivism standpoint, the study of motherhood is intrinsically connected to the study of womanhood, and thus qualitative studies concerning women subjects should account for experiences of motherhood (Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001, p. 423). The construction of Swedish motherhood is quite unique, due to the dominance of gender equality discourse in Sweden's social and political climate. As Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson word it, "[t]he discourse about mothers as employed women is highly significant within the general Swedish discourse of equality. Every mother in Sweden has to consider herself as a mother in relation to ideas about gender equality, employment, and gender similarities in her everyday mothering" (p. 409). Swedish gender equality, as it manifests itself in both policy and cultural discourse, encourages mothers to find sources of happiness outside as well as inside of the home. The general understanding of a modern, independent Swedish mother is one who maintains interests and employment outside of the family, even after having children.

Although there is a wealth of literature on Swedish constructions of motherhood, little if any of it considers the experiences of non-native, non-white Swedish mothers, much less

explores reasons for similarities or differences. One right-wing political sentiment is that immigrant women in Sweden have culturally backwards ideas about motherhood, which lead them to over-use welfare benefits so that they can remain unemployed and have many children. However, Andersson and Scott find that, “[c]ontrary to popular belief, foreign-born women have a strongly reduced propensity to become a mother when they are dependent on social assistance benefits. By contrast, there is no decrease at all in first-birth fertility among Swedish-born welfare recipients” (Andersson and Scott 2005, p. 21). This is one way that immigrants behave in an unexpectedly un-Swedish way at the intersections of motherhood, welfare, and employment. Thus the study of motherhood can inform studies of both Swedish womanhood and cultural employment integration initiatives.

The literature shows that women living in Sweden have access to financial and social incentives to continue working, even while mothering children. However, I hypothesize that women who have not been raised by Swedish mothers, or who do not have access to Swedish notions of motherhood, may wish to experience motherhood in a way that Swedish culture and policies discourage. A variety of cultural and economic reasons may cause immigrant women to respond differently to policies designed to encourage working before, during, or after having a child. For example, ideologies about mothers’ and wives’ responsibilities inside and outside the home, the desire to act similarly to or differently than Swedish women, or the necessity to earn money to send home as remittances may factor into immigrant mothers’ decisions to participate in or refrain from working.

### **2.2.2.2 Swedish policies promoting employment during motherhood**

Mothers living in Sweden have access to extensive maternity leave and affordable public childcare relative to mothers in other countries. Perhaps Sweden's most oft-cited childcare provision is its generous parental leave policy. After a child is born, officially registered parents may miss work to care for the child for up to 480 days, while still earning income ("Parental benefit" 2012). Although this policy is designed to be shared between both parents in the case of a two-parent household, mothers generally take the majority of child care responsibilities. In 2008, mothers took 78 percent of all child care leave days (Wells and Sarkadi 2012, from Haas and Chronholm 2008). In addition to after-birth compensation, a pregnancy benefit (*graviditetspenning*) allows mothers with physically strenuous or high-risk jobs to take time off work during pregnancy, providing a compensation of close to 80 percent of her income ("Pregnancy benefit" 2012). These policies, which make it possible for women to work while mothering young children, are available to all residents of Sweden. They contribute to a cultural climate in which employment during motherhood is valued.



### **3.0 DESCRIPTION OF METHODS AND ANALYSIS**

#### **3.1 SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

The data in this thesis derives from interviews that I conducted with 23 women in Malmö, Sweden from May to July 2012. I collected data in the Rosengård neighborhood of Malmö; I did not, however, limit my sample to women living in that neighborhood. The sample consists of women who lived, worked, and/or went to school in Rosengård. A detailed description of the development of the sample is available in Appendix B.

I designed my study population to represent the intersection of women, immigrants, and Swedish residents involved with the community of Rosengård. The sample covers a diverse demographic range in terms of respondents' ages, reasons for migrating, nationalities, and linguistic backgrounds. Though I did not ask respondents to label their migration category, based on the information they provided I understand that the sample is a mixture of refugees, asylum seekers, labor migrants, and family reunion migrants who followed their husbands to Sweden.

The participants ranged in age from 22 to 58 years old, with the median age being 44.5 years old. The majority of the participants were born in the Middle East, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia and Central Europe. 18 of the women were married at the time of our talk, two were divorced, one had never been married, and two reported being simple unmarried. Most women had children – only four had no children and were not currently pregnant. In terms of

religion, 19 women identified as practicing Muslims, two as former Muslims who no longer practice, and two as Christians. Many, but not all of the participants had been taken Sfi classes and could speak some Swedish. Several participants were fluent in Swedish and/or English. Table 2 provides more detailed demographic information about the sample.

**Table 2. Characteristics of Sample Population**

<b>Psuedonym</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b># of Years in Sweden</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b># of Children</b>
Fatima	Lebanon	Muslim	43	21	Married	3
Imani	Palestine/Lebanon	Muslim	28	9	Married	3
Anna	Macedonia	Muslim	31	21	Married	2
Laila	Palestine/Lebanon	Muslim	26	6	Married	2
Farah	Afghanistan	Muslim	26	6.5	Married	2
Isra	Jordan	Ex-Muslim	36	9	Married	3
Mina	Jordan	Muslim	26	6	Married	2
Dilipa	Sri Lanka	Christian	54	16	Married	4
Salma	Palestine/Syria	Muslim	32	3	Married	2
Aleah	Lebanon	Muslim	41	24	Married	4
Nasim	Afghanistan	Muslim	25	8	Married	2
Ayan	Somalia	Muslim	30	4	Unmarried	0
Maryan	Somalia	Muslim	31	19	Unmarried	2
Amal	Somalia	Muslim	58	17	Married	6
Warsan	Somalia	Muslim	30	5	Married	0
Ghazal	Iraq	Muslim	32	5.5	Married	2
Kalila	Afghanistan	Muslim	25	4	Married	0
Zahara	Afghanistan	Muslim	44	11	Divorced	2
Fahmo	Somalia	Muslim	22	1	Married	0
Tusmo	Somalia	Muslim	24	7	Unmarried	pregnant
Oni	Nigeria	Christian	34	1	Married	4
Sara	Tunisia	Ex-Muslim	58	N/A	Divorced	2
Mako	Somalia	Muslim	46	25	yes	4

### 3.2 SAMPLING STRATEGIES

I selected my participants through nonrandom sampling. My goals were to capture a diverse range of ages and countries of origin and achieve an adequate sample size. To account for the heterogeneity of immigrant women's experiences, I modeled the study off of the following advice: "the ideal analysis of immigrant economic integration should take into account both geographical and ethnic variations, as well as the reason for settlement in Sweden" (Bevelander 2011). I wanted to interact with as many immigrant experiences as possible to avoid making undo generalizations.

As I entered the field, I looked for public spaces where immigrant women would likely meet, and organizations that might work with them. I advertised for the study by hanging flyers in public places, though none of the respondents contacted me after seeing a flyer. Some respondents are women whom I approached in person in a public place, while others are women that I met through community workers, teachers, and school administrators. Though it is difficult to calculate an exact response rate, I would approximate that about 75 percent of women whom I asked to participate in an interview responded positively. A detailed summary of the sampling process is available in Appendix B.

I conducted data collection over approximately three months, with about four field visits per week. The most interviews I conducted at one time were on days when I visited the schools, as schools offered the most concentrated populations of potential participants. Towards the middle of July, interviews became extremely rare because schools had finished for the summer, and many residents were travelling. In addition, Ramadan had begun and many Muslim residents had begun to stay home during the day.

### 3.3 INTERVIEWING STRATEGIES

Six of the 23 participants consented to an audio recording, and for the rest, I took extensive notes. Interviews lasted an average of 30-35 minutes, with the shortest lasting only ten minutes and the longest lasting close to one hour. Prior to each interview, I informed participants about the content and purpose of the interview, and all women consented to the study. The topics I covered in the interviews were: the immigration process, general/demographics, family life, involvement in the labor force in participants' home countries, involvement in the labor force in Sweden, and personal opinions about gender roles and responsibilities. The interview guide is available in Appendix A.

I designed the interview guide before travelling to Sweden; thus, questions in the interview guide reflect my early understanding of female migration and my hypotheses. I included questions about migration experiences, education, age, perceptions of Rosengård, and religion, because I thought all of these might be relevant to participants' attitudes about working. I also asked about the amount of time participants had lived in Sweden, which I intended to be a measure of exposure to Swedish gender norms. Questions about family life were intended to gauge participants' economic necessity for working and the amount of free time they had to potentially have a job. Personal opinion questions were the most open-ended – here I hoped that participants would reveal share their opinions about working and provide a self-analysis of where these opinions originated. In designing the interview guide, a strong consideration was to include all aspect of participants' lives that they may feel is important to their self-identities. I avoided restricting interviews to marriage, religion, or language skill, because I did not want participants to think that I was stereotyping them.

The main interview strategy was to avoid dominating interviews, so that women could exercise some agency in their responses. To this end, I referred loosely to the interview questions, allowing respondents to skip questions that they did not want to answer, and asking follow-up questions about subjects that they seemed interested in. I also allowed women to take measures so that they would be comfortable, such as choosing the location of the interview, allowing their children to be present, and in one case allowing two women to participate in an interview together. When it was appropriate, I reassured participants that their answers were interesting and their English or Swedish language skill was impressive. At the end of each interview, I asked participants if they would like to add anything else. In these ways, I tried to create a comfortable environment and to avoid exerting more control that was necessary during the interview process.

### **3.4 ANALYTICAL METHODS**

After transcribing the interviews for which I had audio files, I conducted a content analysis of the data. First, I read all transcriptions and interview notes, searching for themes that participants elaborated on more extensively than others, and themes that multiple participants agreed upon. I coded the interviews by hand. At this point, several topics came to inform my analysis. The first trends to emerge from the data were motherhood, language skill, and education. I then conducted a brief literature search about these topics, returning to the data several times to check for similarities and discrepancies. After analyzing these three themes, I began the coding process again. This time, I looked for topics which participants had varying or contradictory responses. This yielded the themes of family experiences and perceptions of Swedish gender norms.

When considering and writing my findings, I tried to keep the following advice in mind:

One strategy does not preclude other meanings, intentions and strategies. For example, marriage can be the means of gaining independence and participating in a different type of society, even when the change may occur within a seemingly traditional framework (Bensalah, 1994; Kofman, 1997a; Tribalat, 1995). Nor does marriage rule out the desire to work or study in the society of immigration. So, too, may a menial job be the means of achieving a degree of economic independence and betterment. (Kofman 1999, p. 287)

For this reason, I conceptualize women's attitudes about different topics only within the frame of their interview. I refer to outside literature rarely – only in the case that information about Swedish policies may inform interview content. Several respondents helpfully reminded me that it was not possible to generalize about all women in Sweden, all immigrants, or all women in their home countries, and thus I avoid making gratuitous connections between respondents. Respondents rarely offered the same answer for the same question, for which I am grateful, because the diversity of data encouraged an attentive analysis. The resulting findings are complex rather than straightforward, as readers will find in the next section.

## **4.0 RESULTS**

My interviews with women showed a large variation in experiences and opinions, revealing differences among themselves and differences from native-born Swedes. Several cultural realms affected the sample's attitudes about work. In their responses, many women identified and contested the dominant cultural narrative of what it means to be an "immigrant woman" in Sweden. In the following section, I will describe the trends I found among my interviewees. The findings are divided into women's thoughts about and experiences with: motherhood, education, Swedish language, their families, and gender roles/norms. In each of these categories, I find a range of results, rather than one singular story or worldview.

### **4.1 MOTHERHOOD AND EMPLOYMENT**

One attitude was unanimous among the 23 women in my sample: when asked whether they would like to have a job, all of the women said yes, including mothers and pregnant women. That is to say, none of the interviewees in my sample expressed a desire to be full-time stay-at-home mothers – at least not verbatim. This finding replicates the result that Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson found in their 2001 qualitative study of native Swedish mothers, in which every mother expressed a desire to work either part-time or full-time outside the home (Elvin-Nowak

and Thomsson 2001, p. 421). However, the existence of this common answer among my sample does not reveal much about why the women wanted to work or how strong this desire was. In fact, there was a great deal of variation in what the women seemed to mean when they said they would like to have a job. Much of this variation can be explained by their attitudes about mothering.

Women in my sample offered a diverse range of sentiments about motherhood and working. I asked each interviewee if she had children, and if she said yes, I followed up by asking the number and ages of the children. After I brought up the subject of children, 14 of the women brought up their mothering experiences at a later point in their interview, of their own accord. This struck me as significant. I believe that because so many women mentioned their motherhood experiences during an interview about work attitudes, motherhood experiences play a large role in these women's attitudes about working.

Of the women who spoke extensively about mothering, there were two major sets of opinions. One group of women believed that being a mother should limit a woman's work life. These women were willing, yet reluctant, to work. The second group of women believed that the presence of children is either a neutral or positive force in a woman's decision to work; they were much more eager to work. For the remainder of this section, I will focus on these two groups of women.

Among the first set of women, many interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the necessity of work made it difficult for them to spend time with their children. Rather than feeling enthusiastic about the structural support that would allow them to work while taking care of their children, these women articulated frustration and discontent about leaving their children at home or in daycare in order to work. These women felt that working was financially



necessary for women living in Sweden, although they wished this were not the case. Even among this first subset, women expressed several different reasons for being reluctant yet willing to work.

Salma<sup>8</sup>, a Palestinian woman who lived most of her life in Syria, articulated this sentiment well when she said, “Here, if you do not work or go to school, you cannot make money. So you have to. My children have been in kindergarten since I have been there, and there is not enough time for me to sit with my children. [...] That is a problem for me.” Salma is currently attending school so that she can get a job working in a laboratory, similar to the job she had in Syria. Even though she likes to study and believes it is her responsibility to contribute to the household income, she is unhappy with the idea of working because she thinks her children, aged seven and three years old, are still too young. Salma explained a practical reason why children’s age should determine when a mother works:

I think mothers who have children must stay at home until the children grow up, and then they can work. I think when the children are 7 or 8 years the mother can go to work. When they are 8 years, children can eat, dress themselves, speak, and understand. Before that it is impossible for children to be by themselves.

Salma was far from the only woman to mention children’s age as an important factor in her attitude about working. However, even among women who agreed that mothers of young children should stay home from work, there were variations in reasons why. Dilipa, an articulate Sri Lankan woman whose children are now adults, provided a more emotional explanation for why mothers of young children may wish to abstain from work:

It’s like this: When your children become adults and can take care of themselves, you are alone. I am thinking, I must do something. That’s the reason why I came back to school. At first it was I take care of my family. I must do what they need.

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<sup>8</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

I must be in the home all the time. Being a mom is about taking care of your children and the house; it's a very good job.

In Fatima's case, the succession of her children to adulthood signified a need for her to change her employment status. When her children were young, she felt it necessary to stay home and take care of them, but once they grew older, she felt it necessary to return to school. These three interviewees represent the group of women in my sample who wanted to work, but were reluctant to do so. Mothers in this group clearly stated that they would feel more comfortable working when their children were older. They also shared a number of non-work related characteristics. All three considered their religion very important to them, and they also all got married and had children before the age of 25. Another commonality is that all women mentioned missing the closeness of family life in their home countries. This factor may point to a general sense of unease about living in Sweden.

Conversely, a second group of mothers found the thought of working in Sweden to be empowering. Zahara, a single Afghani mother of two young children, explained that her children were actually an incentive for her to work. She named the reasons why she wanted to work – “first of all, for the power and to earn money to take care of myself and my children. And second, to be a role model for my children. If I don't get a job, maybe they won't want to get a job either.” Though Zahara's desire to empower herself was not the norm among my sample, she was not the only mother who was eager to work. Isra, a mother from Jordan, felt that employment would offer her a chance to be financially self-sufficient. She explained,

“Here in Sweden it is so easy for women to study and stand up [for themselves], unlike women in Jordan. In Jordan, women just think about the kids and home, not about herself. Now I think about my husband and children, but I also think about myself. I want to have money for myself, and for my family also.”

Zahara and Isra, the most vocally pro-work yet unemployed women in my sample, had several

factors in common. First, they both came from Middle Eastern countries (Afghanistan and Jordan, respectively), and had lived in Sweden for over five years at the time of the interview. Both women were highly critical of Islam, specifically naming the religion as the major source of gender inequality in their home countries. Finally, both women stated that they did not miss anything about their home countries because everything in Sweden was better. It seems that the mothers who felt liberated and empowered by Sweden's culture of relative gender equality (that is, relative to their home countries), were much more receptive to ideas of working during motherhood.

Participants had diverse experience with and opinions about motherhood, which can be divided into two groups. The first group of mothers considers the presence of young children to be a barrier to working, despite the structural support that would allow them to put their children in state-subsidized daycare while they worked. The second group of mothers felt that Sweden's culture of working motherhood was quite empowering. These women tended to have positive attitudes towards other aspects of Swedish gender norms, and to be less religious. These two sets of attitudes imply that not all immigrant women appreciate Sweden's work-promoting policies, and that some would in fact choose to stay home if they could.

## **4.2 FAMILY EXPERIENCES**

Relationships with adult family members and previous family experiences can affect women's desires to work in several ways. The presence of a working adult in the family may ease another family member's burden of working, or it may pave a path for family members follow them into

the labor market. Spousal, filial, and other familial relationships may differ in their effects on women. In this section, I will discuss my findings about immigrant women's non-maternal familial relationships and experiences on their attitudes to work.

The first trend that emerged from my interviews was that among married interviewees, arrangements for balancing household and external labor with their spouses had complicated effects on women's desires and abilities to work outside the home. Women offered a variety of responses under this theme, especially when I asked them whether they believed women could both work and fulfill their duties in the home. Ayan, a Somali woman who is actively involved in the immigrant community in Rosengård, explained the importance of using appropriate terminology when discussing work inside and outside of the home. She said that interpretations of women working depend on "how we say "work" because even in the household, mothers who stay home still work, even though it is not credited as work. I think there is a lack of appreciation for that [...] but I think outside work is also good for the individuals' social network and also social esteem." Ayan's advice on acknowledging the importance of work inside the home will be useful when considering the following cases.

Fatima, a Lebanese family reunion immigrant, described a change in her household responsibilities after moving to Sweden. Fatima attributed this change to material circumstances and an improved access to resources, rather than to changes in family dynamics, which she implied had not changed after immigration. She explained that in Sweden, "you have electricity to make it easier to clean and shop, and also water, which I had to buy from the market [in Lebanon]." Fatima was not unhappy with her current responsibilities in the home – rather, she found her lifestyle less stressful in Sweden than it had been in Lebanon: "here, you have everything. The lifestyle is very relaxing here in Sweden. [...] You have relaxation in yourself

and in your home.” The relative relaxation that Fatima experienced in Sweden may be one reason why she had never had a job at the time of the interview. Another reason might be the fact that her husband had steady employment as a taxi driver, in conjunction with her opinion that “it’s the man who must [earn money for the family].” Fatima explained that her (Islamic) religious views dictated that “the money of my husband is mine, not just his. But my money is not his.” Fatima’s relationship with her husband appears to be an effective and consensual application of the homemaker/breadwinner dynamic, and one that operates through religion.

Unlike Fatima, Isra is an ex-Muslim woman, and she is highly critical of Islam’s effects on women’s freedom. When asked why she believed both spouses should be responsible for earning money in the family, Isra said “because families are made of man and woman. Man and woman must work together. If I have money, I cannot save this money just for me. I must share this money with my husband and my family.” Isra did not agree with Fatima’s statement that a woman’s money belongs to her alone, while a man must provide for the family.

Like Fatima and Isra, Mina discussed material needs in conjunction with the division of labor in her household. Mina said that she wanted to have a job because it was expensive to live in Sweden, and it is not easy for the husband alone to provide for the family. When asked “if it were not so expensive here, would it be okay for just the man to work?” Mina answered “yes, the man working outside and the woman working at home. I have girls, I have my home, I have things to do.” Mina would be willing to work in order to make money, but felt no need to challenge the division of labor in her household for any reason other than money.

Imani noted that she wanted to work to help her husband provide for their children, because her husband “can’t do it alone.” Although Imani stated that “I had this opinion since I was a kid,” she also believed she was different from other immigrant women in this regard – that

she inherently believed in gender equality, while other immigrant women learned it after moving to Sweden. Imani said,

A lot of [immigrant] women don't like to study and work because they have an idea that the woman should stay at home and the man should work and get everything. [...] but here they cannot allow that, the men cannot do it alone; [their wives] have to help them, that's why they change. [...] For me, my husband was already working, so nobody made me work. He said if you want to work or go to school, do whatever you want."

Here, Imani uses her husband's employment status and liberal attitude to differentiate herself from other immigrant woman. Imani thus highlights the freedom of her choice to work while also de-naturalizing it. Perhaps the desire to separate herself from other immigrant women motivates Imani to seek employment. Her statement underscores the heterogeneity of immigrant women's attitudes, as well as the complex dynamics among them.

My sample formed a wide spectrum of attitudes about spousal responsibilities and dynamics. Perhaps at the most extreme end was Zahara, the woman whose maternal attitudes and desire to empower her daughters I analyzed in the previous section. Here, she explains how her relationship with her husband changed after moving to Sweden: "I divorced because my husband did not want to have daughters; he only wanted to have sons. I thought maybe he could change his mind when he came to Sweden, because there is no difference between boys and girls [here]. But that didn't happen." Isra's relationship with her ex-husband, and her decision to divorce him, are implicitly tied to her work attitudes. Zahara expresses here that her daughters motivated her to divorce her husband; she explained previously that her daughters motivate her to search for a job and act as a role model to her them. Thus, Zahara's daughters can be seen as the link between her relationship with her ex-husband and her work attitudes.

Just as several interviewees' relationships with their husbands impacted their work attitudes, others expressed that relationships and observations of their mothers influenced their

employment behaviors. According to Laila, a Palestinian woman, the two attitudes might even be related. She explained, “I think [spouses] must help each other. [I don’t think that I feel that way] because I’m living in Europe. In Lebanon, my mother was working all her life, so I think it’s normal for women to work. They must help each other.” Here, Laila combines her attitude about helping her husband earn household income with the example that she observed from her mother.

Like Laila, Ayan also grew up with a working mother, and she shared Laila’s pro-work attitudes. Ayan’s mother “was always working. She was an entrepreneur and bringing imports from all parts of the world.” However, Ayan remembers being raised by her aunt, who chose to stay home rather than seek external employment. Having both a working and a non-working woman in her family seems to have given Ayan a nuanced understanding of women’s paid and unpaid work activities. She stated that “in the context of my mom working and my mom’s sister not working, [my mom’s sister] was still working because she was taking care of us. So it depends how we look at it, who’s working and who’s not working. She could have worked if she wanted to but she was taking care of us.”

At the same time, Ayan does not believe that she would be content to be unemployed. When I asked her whether she would work even if it were not economically necessary, she responded, “if I was a billionaire, I would still want to do something. I don’t think anyone wants to stay home [...] even if I had some money I would still work, even if I was volunteering.” Ayan makes some contradictions when she advocates for an expansion of the definition of “work” yet does not believe that anyone wants to stay at home. This discrepancy may be due to the fact that she made the first statement while speaking about family, but she made the second statement while speaking about herself. Perhaps Ayan speaks in a more open-minded manner

when talking in a familial context as a sign of respect for her family members' career choices. Ayan is able to hold two views simultaneously; thus her family relationships influence but do not define her.

Dilipa's is the second story which demonstrates that the employment status of female relatives and community members does not always determine a woman's attitudes about working. Dilipa made clear that the women in her family do not work, and that both her mother and her daughter in Sri Lanka stay at home. Still, 54 year old Dilipa has worked continuously since she was 17 in order to send money to her children in Sri Lanka. In her case, the economic activity of her husband, which she did not specify, required her to leave her home country in order to find employment to support her family. Dilipa's story is an important reminder that in some circumstances, financial and familial necessities can override cultural norms and desires.

The stories of these interviewees paint a complicated picture about family influences on work attitudes. While the division of labor and the presence of a working woman in the house can affect women's desires and abilities to work, they are rarely a deciding factor. Moreover, some women are aware of the stereotypes that immigrants have rigid family dynamics, and they actively dissociate themselves from this stereotype. Finally, in certain cases, women disobey strong cultural values due to economic necessity.

### **4.3 EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND ATTITUDES**

Among my sample, levels of education varied greatly, but attitudes about and reception to the Swedish education system were quite uniform. Respondents appreciated the opportunity to go to



school in Sweden, unless it was to replace a degree they had earned in their home country. Respondents also equated school with work in their answers to interview questions. These trends suggest that schooling plays an important role in immigrant women's lives in Sweden.

One attitude related to education and working predominated in my interviews: many women articulated that going to school felt like having a job to them. For some, this was because of the time commitment. When I asked women whether they felt they had enough time to have a job and fulfill all their duties at home, almost all women responded positively. When I asked them to elaborate upon why they believed a woman could balance their time between work and home, many interviewees explained that they knew it was possible, because already had experience with balancing their time between school and home:

For example, school is like a job. You come here from 8:00 to 3:00, it's the same as work.

"Yes, she can. I am now studying here at school, but if I work it will be the same. I will finish at 3. I can help myself now, so there is no difference if I work.

These women equated school with work based on the time commitment. Because they already knew how to manage their time at home while devoting a large amount of time to school, they felt ready to have a job. Using language that is common among studies of women's work and the home/work divide, Laila said, "I'm spending all my time in school, from 8:00 to 3:00. So six hours out of my home, and he spends seven or eight hours out of the home. We come home and he helps me a lot. We do the work together. And I like the man who helps." Laila, though she was technically unemployed, compared herself to her working husband because they spend similar amounts of time outside of the home.

Other women, like Imani, equated school with work in the sense that going to school was a necessary step to get a job. Imani, a 28 year old Palestinian woman, valued education because she thought it would lead to a job. After she got married when she was 20, Imani joined her

husband in Sweden and they had three children. She continued to work towards her Bachelor's degree in the United Arab Emirates after she got married, stating, "I was completing my studies, there was no time for work." Because she lost the documentation proving that she had made progress towards her degree, she had to continue her education in Sweden. Still Imani made clear that working would be the appropriate payoff for going to school when she said, "I want to finish my studies and I want to work. I don't want to study for all of my life." Imani was less appreciative of school, and she did not consider it proof that she could manage the time commitment of a job. Rather, Imani considered school necessary because it would lead to a job.

Less universal was these women's belief that going to school is like a job because schooling provided income. Some of the interviewees received income in exchange for attending school, presumably in the form of an Sfi bonus. When asked who the main breadwinner in their family is ("Who is the main money-earner in your family?"), four women noted that they contribute to the household income with their education compensation:

My husband works. I get money from the state for studying, so I also add some.

My husband works full-time, and I also take money from...you know, if you study here in Sweden you can take money here in Sweden. So he is the main one, but I help a little.

The fact that these women mention Sfi bonuses when asked about income is quite telling. It suggests that they consider school a source of income, like a job. This does not necessarily mean that they are not interested in finding a different type of job or that they consider going to school as satisfying as a job. However, it does mean that the women consider their Sfi bonus, that they earn by going to school, a significant enough contribution to the family income that they should mention it.

One woman, Ayan from Somalia, labeled education as her primary reason for moving to Sweden. She elaborated, “I wanted to study for free. Plus I already had family here, my aunt and my sister. And my mother lives in Denmark.” Ayan did not clarify the mechanism that offered her free education, nor did she identify her formal immigration status. However, if free education was a pull factor for Ayan, then perhaps it was for some of my other interviewees, as well.

For women like Ayan and Zahara, school was important in their migratory decisions and in their sense of self. Zahara explained that she worked as a seamstress and sewing instructor in Afghanistan. When asked if she enjoyed the job, Zahara replied,

No, if I could have chosen I would not have done that. It was not my dream job, but I had no education. This was a job that a woman could do with no education. Men could do what they wanted since they could go to school, but women had few choices. I didn't really think about what I wanted to do in Afghanistan.

Here, Zahara notes the importance of education in giving job opportunities to women and allowing women to do what they want. This point was extremely important for Zahara, who went on to say, “I didn't go to school, but my dream is that my children should go to school.” For Zahara, the ability to go to school was symbolic because it signified her freedom of choice.

While most women spoke about going to school as a means for getting a job, Isra said that school provided her with the benefits of language and access to new friends: She said, “when I went to school, I had new friends from other countries – like Yugoslavia, not just other Arabic countries. I have a new culture, new language, everything new. It makes me happy.” Isra's statement about the social benefits of schooling reminds us that school is important in women's lives for reasons other than its association with work.

School played a number of roles in respondents' lives, and almost all women talked about school in their interview, in at least one capacity. First, some women mentioned that the act of going to school each day felt like work in the sense that it required them to manage their time and their household responsibilities. For some women, school was analogous to work in that it provided income. Women who were required to go to school to earn degrees that would replace the degrees they earned before immigrating were less appreciative of Sweden's education system than others. In some cases, the opportunity to go to school symbolized a freedom that they did not have before moving to Sweden, and for some school was a chance to make new friends that they might not meet elsewhere. In conclusion, school was very important in respondents' lives, both for reasons related to work and for other reasons.

#### **4.4 SWEDISH LANGUAGE SKILL**

Every woman I interviewed spoke a language other than Swedish or English; several women could speak, read, and write three or more languages. Regardless of their Swedish fluency level, many interviewees were unconfident about their Swedish language skill. In addition, a number of women noted the importance of learning the Swedish language in order to feel at home in Sweden. Still others mentioned that being surrounded by non-Swedish speakers made them feel comfortable. In this section, I will describe the interviewees' attitudes about the Swedish language and discuss possible explanations.

Women's attitudes about language learning and about their own linguistic proficiency are important in the context of ethnic residential segregation and visible integration into Swedish

society. As I noted previously, political and academic discourses often problematize immigrants' practices of speaking non-Swedish languages or speaking Swedish with a foreign accent. Integration initiatives often treat Swedish language skill as an essential characteristic for national belonging; I find that interviewees have complicated relationships with the Swedish language.

Many participants were hesitant to say that they speak Swedish or English, even as they spoke to me in Swedish and/or English. When I asked women which languages they spoke, read, and wrote, many would list several languages but omit English and Swedish, until I reminded them. Then, they would laugh and admit that they knew a little bit. This happened 12 times, both with me alone and in the presence of a translator. Women who made remarks like this did not have very much in common – this statement was not an indicator of their actual language skill, their level of education, the number of years they had spent in Sweden, or their desires to have a job.

I believe there could be several reasons for this pattern. First, perhaps these women feel intimidated by what they believe are high standards of Swedish and English fluency in Sweden – perhaps they feel that these languages are not accessible to them, and they do not consider themselves fluent. A second possible reason may be that these women are surrounded by messages about how immigrants do not speak proper Swedish. Perhaps they have internalized these messages, so that they believe they do not speak good Swedish. Even Karl, the founder and principal of a school for adults which primarily serves immigrants, echoed this sentiment. Karl was frustrated that the students at his school never improved their Swedish, because it was easier for them to all speak to each other in Arabic. Imani, a Palestinian woman, agreed that living in Malmö was “like living in an Arab area.”

My final hypothesis for why women would neglect to list English and Swedish as languages they speak is perhaps more revealing of the interview process. Perhaps the presence of me (fluent in English) or my translators (fluent in English and Swedish) caused these women to omit English and Swedish from their response. This could be out of modesty – so as not to appear as if their linguistic ability matched ours – or out of intimidation – perhaps compared to our linguistic abilities, they felt theirs did not compare.

The topic of language frequently came up when I asked respondents how they felt about Roesngård. Laila described Rosengård as a multinational community, where the Swedish language is a tool to a diverse mix of people:

I didn't meet anyone from others before, but I met here women and men from Iraq, from Pakistan, from Romania, from Kenya, from all over the world. It's a mix, you can say, and they and they all speak Swedish. You feel like it's okay, you are talking with a person who is not like me, but you feel like it's okay, he is like me or she is like me.

Laila felt comfortable with her Swedish language skills, and she was glad that they allowed her to meet people of other nationalities.

Unlike Laila, most respondents who discussed language in conjunction with Rosengård stated that it was the one area where Swedish was *not* necessary to communicate with others. Isra said, “I like it here. I have a lot of friends from my home country. At first when I came to Sweden I could not speak [Swedish] very well. It was easy for me to connect with other people here.” Like Isra, Tusmo's favorite thing about living in Roesngård was that she did not feel out of place linguistically. She said “I just like it because there are so many immigrants and it's better for me to contact people here [because] I don't speak Swedish, so it's good to be around other Somali people here.” For these women, Rosengård's multilingual character was comforting and welcoming.

Swedish integration plans often focus on the acquisition of Swedish language skill. My interviews with immigrant women suggest that, regardless of women's conversational fluency and participation in Swedish language classes, they are often cautious to claim that they speak Swedish. This may indicate a sense of non-belonging. Correspondingly, many respondents felt comfortable about the fact that they did not have to speak Swedish in Rosengård, and that they could meet people speaking other languages there instead. These findings suggest that Swedish language skill, and more importantly Swedish language confidence, is difficult for immigrants to acquire and provokes some anxiety. This could be one explanation why residents do not speak Swedish while in Rosengård.

#### **4.5 PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER NORMS IN SWEDEN AND HOME COUNTRY**

Immigrant women have unique perspectives on gender norms in Sweden, because they have at least one country to use as a point of comparison. Before the interview phase of the study, I hypothesized that interviewees' perceptions of gender norm differences between their home country and Sweden would influence their opinions about Sweden and about working. For example, if an interviewee noted a strong difference between women's rights or responsibilities in the two countries, this awareness may be a sign that she had thought about the difference before the interview, and that she may have an opinion about it. Strong opinions about women's rights and responsibilities may transfer to their opinions about women working. In this section, I describe the trends in interviewees' perceptions of the rights and roles of women in Sweden versus their home country. Most data in this section derives from answers to these questions:

Do you think that women in Sweden have a different role in society in Sweden than women in in your home country?

Do you think it's better for women in Sweden, or in your home country?

The vast majority of interviewees expressed the notion that women in Sweden experienced more freedom or had better lives than women in their home countries. These women appeared grateful and admiring of Sweden's gender norms. However, there were some women who stated that the question was too difficult or that the differences were too complex to describe. In addition, some women answered that life was better for women in their home countries, for various reasons. My hypothesis proved untrue – the statements that women made about women's rights in their home countries versus Sweden did not positively correlate with their attitudes about working.

Aleah, a Lebanese woman who had lived in Sweden for almost half of her 41 years, eloquently described differences in women's rights. She said, "when I was in Lebanon, most of the women sat at home and stayed with the children. But here, the women work and help their husbands more. The women here have more self-confidence because they can exercise their rights more fully." Aleah's response describes the attitude that philanthropic integration initiatives expect immigrant women in Swedish to have – an uncomplicated gratitude for liberal Swedish gender norms. Not all interviewees fit neatly into this paradigm, however.

Some women seemed reluctant to say that they felt freer in Sweden than they did in their home countries. When I asked Laila whether she thought life for women was better in Sweden or in Lebanon, she answered for all members of her family, including her husband. Laila said, "I think it's better to live in Sweden, for the children and for me as a woman. I think my husband gets more freedom here in Sweden. If I talk about the culture and the tradition, we are free here. I like to live here." It is unclear whether Laila did not understand the question, purposefully evaded the question, or felt that her other family members' freedom was relevant to her answer.



However, given Laila's English fluency (she later translated for me during several interviews) and her enthusiasm for answering most other interview questions in full, these explanations are unlikely. Laila's circumvention of the interview question marks a discomfort in making direct comparisons between women in Lebanon and Sweden.

Perhaps Laila's reluctance to make definitive claims about women stems from the complicated position that immigrant women face in Sweden. Ayan explains:

the mistake that most Swedish institutions make is they assume that the moment they see a Somali woman wearing a headscarf, she is oppressed, not knowing that perhaps she's the head of the household, which in most cases Somali women are. And there tends to be a generalization of all immigrant women and how their view of the world is.

Here, Ayan reveals the stereotypical image which immigrant women in Sweden must negotiate in their everyday encounters. She then elaborates on the realities of women's struggles in different countries, clarifying her opinion that women in Sweden are not necessarily better off than women in Somalia. Ayan says, "in other parts of the world, women have more obstacles than women in this part of the world, but then again there are women in this society that are struggling with other kinds of struggles that perhaps are not relevant in other parts of the world." By evoking transnational feminism, Ayan adds depth to what she believes is a shallow view of immigrant women in Sweden.

Other women felt that women were better off in their home countries than in Sweden, for several reasons. One reason was family support in home countries. Dilipa felt that the closeness of family life in Sri Lanka and Lebanon the countries where she lived before immigrating, made life better for women in those countries than in Sweden. Her reasoning was that,

in Sri Lanka everyone visits the relatives every week. It's like that in Lebanon too – very close families. It's not like that here, it's different. Here everyone is friendly but not too close. [...] I like my country; there is a different system and we have a poor economy. But [despite the poor economy,] I think it is better for women to live in Sri Lanka.

After explaining that women don't often work in Sri Lanka and that the economy is poor, Dilipa still stated that she would prefer to live there to benefit from the close family life. Amal, a 57 year old Somali woman, agreed with Dilipa. She said, "here in Sweden, the women take care of everything, but in Somalia they get support in the home so they don't have to do so much. In Somalia someone in the family could help, or you can pay someone to help." Amal refers to familial and economic networks in Somalia which relieve the burden of women's household responsibilities. Though the Swedish state provides similar benefits in the form of subsidized childcare, perhaps Amal is not aware of them or does not feel that they compare to the resources available to women in Somalia.

Kalila from Afghanistan listed a third reason why some female immigrants prefer the standard of life in their home countries. She felt that some women in Afghanistan had more choice about working, and whereas economic conditions force women in Sweden to work. Kalila stated,

It was better in Afghanistan for women. If you want to make money, you make money and if you want to stay at home, you can stay at home. But women mostly choose to stay at home. I don't know. There are some women who themselves want to stay at home and that is okay, [...] and a few who cannot work because their husband or family does not want them to. It is not the same for all women in Afghanistan. But it is also good in Sweden, because one can choose to study and work, and it is safer here. But I think it is bad that both adults really have to work just to have enough money.

Kalila felt a strong negative sentiment about women's economic pressures to work in Sweden. In fact, her attitudes were strong enough that although she felt women were safer in Sweden, and

their husbands and families could not prevent them from working as they could in Afghanistan, life for women was still better overall in Afghanistan. Kalila's statement introduces a class element to this analysis – it is not true that all two-adult households in Sweden are required to be composed of two working adults “just to have enough money.” Kalila's answer shows that sometimes, income-related motivations can affect women's ideologies about gender roles and responsibilities.

These women's diverse perceptions of gender norms and women's roles in Sweden challenge a simplistic view of what is good and what is bad for women. However, women's ideas about what is best for women did not necessarily affect their attitudes about work. Despite their differences in opinions about women's life in Sweden versus their home countries, all of the women quoted in this section were employed or seeking employment. That is to say, their differences in perceptions of women's rights and responsibilities in Sweden did not translate to different attitudes about work. I will discuss the implications of this and other findings in the next section.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study of immigrant women's attitudes about work in Malmö, Sweden reveals several cultural elements that interact with women's attitudes about working. Through qualitative interviews with 23 women of various national backgrounds, five significant themes emerged: motherhood, family influences, education, language skill, and perceptions of gender norms in Sweden and home countries. Each of these cultural themes presented itself in complex ways, and each interacted with interviewees' attitudes about working in different ways. In addition, none of the trends were unanimous among interviewees, but rather interviewees held diverse and sometimes opposing opinions about similar topics.

Granting women a large degree of agency in expressing their desires and experiences generated a rich and heterogeneous data source. Several women's interviews challenged trends in understanding "the immigrant woman experience," and eventually the collection as a whole negates the idea that such a phenomenon exists. There was as much variation among women who came from the same country or region, and who spoke the same language, as there was among women of different national backgrounds. This result suggests the need for individualized understandings of immigrant women and the experiences and motivations that they bring to the workforce.

This study faced some limitations, especially in terms of sampling. Due to the linguistic diversity of the target population, it was difficult to communicate with all of the interviewees in

their preferred language, which may have led to communication errors. One potential sampling bias is that since all data was collected in public places, it may be missing the perspective of women engaged in formal or informal labor in the household, as well as employed women who were working in non-public places at the time of data collection. Thirdly, due to my informal connections and short-term of relationship with the participants, they may not have felt comfortable expressing challenging opinions and emotions in front of me. In particular, I did not ask women detailed questions about their immigration histories, because I felt these questions might have made women nervous. I also avoided questions about personal and family incomes, for the same reason.

This study has several implications. In terms of integration policy, this study suggests that understanding cultural factors are essential to motivating women to engage in the labor force. Because immigrants bring with them their own notions of what it means to be economically successful, they may not easily absorb the employment culture of their host country. Host countries should consider cultural factors as the starting point of employment integration in order to minimize the discrepancy between their employment culture and immigrants' preferences. Questions such as why an immigrant might want to work or not work, what types of jobs would be the most attractive to an immigrant, and how immigration experiences affect attitudes about work, all fall within the category of *cultural employment integration*. In order to successfully incorporate immigrants into the labor force, a host country must consider these questions.

In addition to political implications, the study contributes several findings about the nature of immigrant women in Malmö. First, the study shows that this population is far from homogeneous. In fact, there were few similarities that extended across my entire sample, other

than the fact that none of the women were born in Sweden and none spoke Swedish as a first language. Secondly, the study shows that this population has complex and, at times, critical views of their host country. Not all women consider Sweden's gender norms to be empowering. In fact, several women find the necessity to work to be oppressive. Finally, the findings support the idea that some immigrant women can and want to participate in the labor market.

A second cultural implication of the study derives from participants' interpretation of a dominant cultural narrative that categorizes immigrant women as passive and oppressed. Several participants were aware of this cultural stereotype and they used the rejection of this stereotype to frame their answers about themselves and about immigrant women as a group. This trend was particularly common in the findings about family experiences and perceptions of gender norms. Participants actively distanced themselves from notions that immigrant women's family members encourage them to stay at home and from notions that the gender structures in their home countries were oppressive. The fact that women identified several aspects of this cultural narrative and provided evidence against it shows that the stereotype has a large influence on this population. Community members who work with immigrant women and policies intended to affect them should be sensitive to the presence of this stereotype and its effects on immigrant women's identity formation.

Future studies should extend these findings among a similar population, as well as test their relevance among other populations. Researchers with access to information about interviewees' income could incorporate class status and economic necessities into this analysis. This type of study would likely be relevant given the women's employment statuses and their engagement with the Swedish welfare system. In addition, future studies could restrict their samples based on what type of work respondents are interested in, allowing a market sector analysis. One sector of

interest in the study of gendered labor migration is the care sector. Lutz notes that, “while debates on women’s emancipation and gender equality are on the agenda of most European states, they seem to be detached from discourses on transnational care migration. On the level of practices, however, it is obvious that the latter helps to resolve conflicts about gendered task redistribution and it supports the perpetuation of traditional gender orders in receiving societies” (Lutz 2010, p. 1655). A study similar to this thesis, but restricted to women interested in or involved in care work, could have important implications for migrant women. Finally, future studies should investigate the impact of immigrant women’s gender norms on the host country, rather than limiting the analysis to Swedish influences on immigrant women. As the presence of immigrant women increases, researchers should study how these processes occur in both directions.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

#### The immigration process

Where are you from?

Can you tell me about your journey to Sweden?

Did you move at the same time as your family, or before, or after?

How long did the trip from your home country to Sweden last?

Did you live in any other countries between your home country and Sweden?

How long have you lived in Sweden?

Have you lived anywhere other than Rosengård?

Do you like Rosengård? Do you know any other ppl with your nationality in Rosengård?

#### General Information

Which languages can you speak?

Which of these can you read and write?

Do you follow any religion?

[If yes,]



Which religion?

Do you consider your religion very important to you?

Do you pray at home, or in a church/temple/mosque?

How often do you pray?

[If no,]

Did you used to?

[If yes]

Where did you live when you stopped?

How many years did you attend school?

Was this in your home country, or in Sweden, or both?

How old are you?

## Family life

Are you married?

If yes,

What country did you get married in?

How old were you when you married?

Do you have children?

[If yes],

How many?

How old are they?

Are any of them old enough to work? Do they work?

How old were you when you had your first child?

Who is the main money-earner in your family?

Has it always been like that?

[If participant is not the primary earner]

What does he/she do?

Is that the same job he/she had in your home country?

Do you do any of the shopping for your family?

[If yes]

What type of shopping do you do (groceries, furniture, etc.)?

Do you ever buy something without telling anyone in your family first?

Do you like shopping?

### Involvement in the Labor Force, home country

In your home country, did you work?

[If yes]

Did you enjoy it?

[If no]

Did you want to work?

What would have been your ideal job in your home country?

Do any of the women in your family (mothers, sisters, aunts, cousins) work?

[If yes]

What type of work do they do?

Where do they live?

## Involvement in the Labor Force, Sweden

Do you have a job right now?

[If yes]

Can you tell me about your experience working in Sweden?

What kind of work do you do?

How many hours per week do you work?

Do you like your job? What do you like/not like about it?

How did you find this job?

Have you ever been promoted?

Have you ever had any other jobs in Sweden?

If you did not have to work to make enough money for your family, would you work?

If you were to move back to your home country now, would you want to work there?

[If no]

Do you want to work?

[If yes]

Why?

Has this changed since you've been in Sweden?

What would be your ideal job in Sweden?

## Personal opinions

Who do you think should be responsible for earning money in the family?

Why do you feel that way?

Has this changed since you've been in Sweden?

Do you think that a woman can both work and fulfill all her duties at home?

Why do you feel that way?

Has this changed since you've been in Sweden?

Do you think that women in Sweden have a different role in society in Sweden than women in in your home country?

[If yes, prompt as necessary to make sure these get covered]

What do you think about women's roles in Sweden?

Do you think it's better in Sweden, or your home country

for women?

for families?

for people in general/for society?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

#### **B.1 MY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE RESEARCH TOPIC**

My own family has a complicated immigration history, which undoubtedly influenced this project. I am an Indian woman, a British citizen by birth, and a second generation American. I am also the child of immigrants born in England and Kenya, who are themselves the children of immigrants born in India. Given this history, questions of identity, national inclusion, and citizenship have been of personal significance to me for years, and this personal interest has recently taken on many overlapping academic forms.

My fascination with Swedish culture and politics began in a high school European History class, after I was assigned a project to debate the pros and cons of Swedish democratic socialism. I learned that many political ideologies that Americans consider radical, such as those concerning gender and environmental sustainability, are in fact moderate in the Swedish political arena. When I discovered that the University of Pittsburgh offered Swedish language classes, I knew I couldn't pass up the opportunity to learn Swedish. At the same time, news stories about violence against minorities in Sweden gained my attention, and I realized that not everything about Sweden was as idealistic as I had thought. On the contrary, Swedish demographics are

changing rapidly as irregular immigration increases, and what it means to be Swedish is changing as well. I found these processes fascinating, and I set out to study them however I could.

## **B.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

Originally, my interviews were targeted at refugee women, a group I found most compelling to study due to the fact that they did not choose to immigrate. I thought this would affect their attitudes about working, since unlike labor migrants, refugees do not make a decision to migrate based on job prospects. However, after a few weeks in the field, my sample population changed because I had no way of identifying refugees specifically. I had planned on merely asking potential study participants if they were refugees, but after several discussions with Swedish friends and failed attempts at generating community members' interest in my study, I learned that it is not culturally appropriate to ask about immigration status in Sweden. The direct Swedish translation of refugee is "*flykting*," but this phrase seems to have a non-neutral, if not derogatory, connotation. It certainly was not appropriate for soliciting study participants, as a friend from an antiracism student organization told me after I passed out explanatory flyers featuring the word "*flykting*" in bold black letters.

Restricting the sample to refugees also would not work for practical reasons; with no formal ties to immigration officials, I would have no way of singling out female refugee participants. Unlike in the United States, in Sweden refugees are not labeled through their association with a refugee resettlement agency. Further, refugees who settle in Sweden as refugees are often bring their family members to join them later. The family reunion migrants

may be just as interesting to study, and for the same reasons, yet they would get lost in a study restricted to refugees.

Another change that I had to make during the data collection process was widening the study area from Rosengård to Malmö. Rosengård was my study area of choice, for reasons discussed in the literature review section. However, sampling only in Rosengård was not yielding the amount of results that I wanted. As it turns out, many of the organizations I wanted to work with were almost entirely closed for the summer, including schools and agencies that work with immigrants. The Swedes take their summer holidays seriously. In addition, there are few public meeting spots in the Rosengård, and most were shops, where data collection would be obtrusive. Towards the end of the data collection period, the few public meeting spots became very sparse as the majority of Rosengård residents travelled for the summer and/or celebrated Ramadan.

I also learned that Rosengård was not as closed a community as I had thought – many women who lived or went to school there worked elsewhere, and vice versa. During the course of my research, Swedish students, community members, party-goers, and people interested in my study asked me why I had chosen to conduct the study in Rosengård. They seemed less than satisfied with my response that “I’ve heard about it in the news in America.” Many people advised me to avoid concentrating on the stigmatized area and adding undue publicity. They added that there were other parts of Malmö with just as many immigrant residents, which were as worthy of my attention, even though they had received less media attention. In the end, broadening my study area did not strongly affect my findings, because most women I spoke with had some association with Rosengård anyway.

### B.3 DETAILS ABOUT THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

The first step I took in data collection was I emailing community organizations that work in Rosengård. I told them about my project, and requested meetings. The first woman who responded, Lidia, informed a great deal of my selection by introducing me to other women in the community and suggesting sites where I could find participants.

Lidia suggested I try the school across the street from her workplace. This was a “*Folkhögskola*” or “people’s high school” where adults can take remedial courses and Swedish language courses. In the immigrant-dense area, many students attending the folkhögskola were immigrants who either had not completed their education in their home country, whose diplomas were lost, or whose international diplomas did not meet the Swedish educational or vocational standards. Schools were effective research sites for cluster sampling. Teachers were often willing to let me make a brief presentation to their class, allowing me to reach a much larger audience than I could by any other means. In addition, students at these schools often had free time for an interview between classes or after school, and they felt comfortable in the familiar school environment. A teacher at the school near Lidia’s workplace invited me to return for a cultural celebration the following week, and there I was able to interview more students.

After the success in recruiting participants at the first folkhögskola, I began conducting interviewing students at a second school that was closer to the center of Rosengård. This second folkhögskola was part of a small indoor shopping area, giving me several local and chain business and a community library. The library catered to the local immigrant community with its large international book section and its frequent language cafés. Similarly, the shopping center was a hub for local immigrants because of its money wiring services, Halal grocery stores,



falafel stands, and clothing stores carrying headscarves and modest women's clothing. I hung flyers in these areas, and I returned many times to approach women who looked as if they might have some free time. For the most part, I approached women who were either alone, with one female friend, or with children. About 75 percent of the time, the woman would agree to speak with me in a quiet part of the library or in a café. When women declined, they politely said it was because they did not have time or were under 18 years old.

There were two women whom I did not have to approach in order to interview them. In one case, a librarian saw the flyer in the library and asked her friend, whom she knew would be interested, to meet me for an interview. In another case, I asked the manager of a hair salon whether I could hang a flyer in his store, but he misunderstood and told me I could go inside and interview the woman who worked there. The woman, Ghazal from Iraq, was interested, so I interviewed her while she provided beauty treatments to customers.

Other than the woman working at the hair salon, I interviewed only two women who were working at the time. Ayan worked at a Somali community center, and she was well-versed in migration studies. After I interviewed her, she agreed to inform other women about my study and to let me conduct interviews there. Another woman, Mako, spoke to me between customers at her African beauty product supply store. These women exposed me to the types of jobs available to immigrant women in Rosengård.

#### **B.4 NEGOTIATING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER**

Due to the participants' varied immigration backgrounds, the participants spoke a wide range of languages, with the average participant speaking three languages. My own language skills

limited me to conducting interviews in English, sometimes clarifying a word or phrase in Swedish. I was surprised at how many immigrant women in Sweden spoke English – younger women from the Middle East and Somalia were especially likely to be fluent. I conducted about half of the interviews primarily in English. My language constraints may have affected my sample by attracting women from English-speaking countries and/or women with enough education to have learned English in school in their home countries. However, I was able to partially circumvent this bias after the first three interviews, when I began using translators.

The importance of effective and unbiased translators became clear when a Jordanian interviewee named Isra requested that her male friend translate for her. Though Isra spoke enough English to carry out an interview, I allowed her friend to be present in the room to ensure that she was comfortable. However, Isra's friend did not seem to trust my intentions, and suspected that I was racist. When I asked Isra how old she was when she got married, her friend interjected "13," with a sarcastic laugh. When Isra told me that her husband is the breadwinner in her household, her friend again interjected, "but he doesn't care about your money, about your income. This is what she wants to know. He doesn't have control of her money, I know her. She has her money and he has his money." This led to some discomfort, and luckily the man left the room soon after, saying "I don't think you need me here." This incident reminded me how important it was to maintain a safe and comfortable environment during interviews.

After Isra's interview, I became more selective with my translators. I used two translators, both of whom volunteered their skills after I told them about the study. The first was an Arabic-English translator, Laila who was a former study participant. After I interviewed Laila, she expressed interest in helping me further the study for two reasons: she believed it was an important topic for women to talk about, and she wanted to practice her translation skills. With

Laila's help, I reached two women I would not have reached otherwise. For the remaining interviews, I used a female Swedish-English interpreter, Janne. Janne was a friend I met through an antiracism organization who wanted to learn more about Rosengård. All of the women I interviewed in Laila's and Janne's presence seemed comfortable.

In one interview with Janne, two Somali women requested to be interviewed together, saying that they were uncomfortable with speaking alone. One spoke Somali, the other translated from Somali to Swedish, and Janne translated from Swedish to English. Needless to say, this interview suffered from a case of "lost-in-translation," and at times I was unsure to whom to attribute answers. Still, allowing the two women to be interviewed together exposed community dynamics and brought more participants into the study.

Another noteworthy incident exposed to the complexities of working with immigrant populations and the dangers of imperfect communication. One of Lidia's friends, who worked at a shelter for asylum-seekers, had allowed me to visit the shelter and interview the women who lived there. She told me that she had explained the nature of the study to the residents who lived there, and that I was free to knock on residents' doors and interview any women who were willing to talk with me. When I went to interview Oni, a Nigerian woman with small children, she appeared scared and distrustful. She repeatedly asked me if I was an immigration officer, and though I assured her that I was not and that we could stop the interview at any time, she insisted on completing the interview, remaining visibly uncomfortable the entire time. This experience encouraged me to reflect upon the power relative power that I exerted as an interviewer and to consciously improve my interviewing techniques.

Another, less tense, miscommunication was that some respondents originally thought they were taking part in a job interview. This is an understandable mistake, since I advertised it

as “an interview about working.” Two or three women appeared excited at the beginning of the interview, confused as I asked them personal questions, and then slightly annoyed when I explained to them that this was purely an academic study. These communications were perhaps inevitable given the nature of the study.

My sample may have been much larger if I had access to Somali-English, Persian-English, and Serbo-Croat-English translators. With the exception of the two Somali women noted above and the two women for whom Laila translated, I was unable to interview any women who did not speak either English or Swedish. This may explain top-heavy spread of the amount of time spent in Sweden. That is to say, women who had lived in Sweden longer may have been more confident about their language skills and thus more confident to speak with me. All being said, given the constraints, I believe that my sample represents Malmö’s linguistic diversity quite well.

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