

A black skull consciousness. Narratives of the new Swedish working class

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“They do not discriminate us, it is not about racism, they only want us to go.”

“ a respectable migrant is a silence migrant, one that has learn to stay calm. One that never demands anything. One that works and then takes it easy. But we in FAI we are so tired of being wimpy. We cannot and will not continue to show that we are respectable We are not that any more... We are ready to be a pain in the ass, f it is needed we will be loudly and rough...”

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INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

1. In the last parliamentary elections a rightwing racist party won several positions at the municipal level, and the Liberal party that has historically been recognized by its progressive positions increased their support through demanding language test for immigrants. Undoubtedly, the support of the Swedish racialised population to the social democrats and the left party influenced the outcome of the elections and the triumph of a red green coalition. A number of researchers have suggested that the Swedish public and political landscape has changed drastically in the last ten years. “Race”/ethnicity related issues are central not only in the debates about migration and national belonging but also in articulating political identities and political movements (de los Reyes et al 2002).

2. Similarity that is often assumed between the “Nordic welfare states” in relation to both class and gender, is highly problematic when exploring racial formations (Schierup 1988). While the number of migrants in Denmark, Finland, Island and Norway are few, regulated by the state constructed as ethnic minorities, the number of Swedish migrants (a product of both labour migration in the sixties and refugee policies in the seventies and forward) is high. This highly differentiated group shares generally a similar position within the labour

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market, experience house segregation and everyday and institutional racism within welfare institutions.

3. The aim of this article is to analyse new forms of working class organisation and struggle. Through a case study of a network of immigrant trade union activists (FAI), we explore the formation of a new actor within the Swedish trade union movement. We investigate their attempts to overcome racialised barriers within the union, based on both discursive constructions of them as the “the Other” and on institutional practices of that we conceptualise as subordinated inclusion.

4. The article is structured in five sections. In the first section we outline the theoretical and methodological frame of our research. In the second section we shortly highlight some institutional particularities of the Swedish trade union setting and relate it to the strategy of subordinated inclusion of racialised workers. The central part of the article is section three, in which we discuss the project of the FAI network and its strategy of combating racialised processes of subordination within the trade unions. We analyse interviews carried out mainly with racialised trade union activist, most of them being members of the network. In the fourth section we turn our attention to representations of immigrants through an ideology critical analysis of the TUC weekly. Finally, the conclusion sums up some of the central findings of our research that can contribute to an understanding of the Swedish racial formation.

I. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL STARTING POINTS

5. We approached the study of immigrant trade union activists through a theoretical perspective dominated by Black cultural studies and Marxist influences enhanced with feminist perspectives. While a few critical studies have been carried out in Sweden (de los Reues et al 2002; Dahstedt & Lindberg 2002) the dominant strands of research have focused on immigrants as culturalised beings characterised by passivity and difference. Being influenced by Black cultural studies and Marxism, racialisation (Miles 1993) and the racialised other have come to be central concepts running through our study. We have as a point of departure explored the strength and the limits of Marxist theorisation of racism (Sivanandan 1982). The focus on trade unions highlight the tensions of class formation in a context in which the internal division of working class is structured around gender and even more so by processes of racialisation (Virdee 2000). We want to underline these contributions to an understanding of racism in a Swedish context where Marxism has been highly stigmatised in the social science as incapable of including and theorising difference.

6. Black cultural studies have highlighted the role of culture and identity as symbolic resources in which racialised oppression is fought (Hall 1978 and Gilroy 1987). The development and growth of cultural racism (Balibar 1991) shows the applicability of using racialisation in a wider sense. Understanding processes of subordination and exclusion does also require an institutional perspective in which organisational practices may be captured

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and grasped. In our study this has been emphasized in relation to how an inclusive, reformist and bureaucratic trade union organisation respond to challenges from new groups. We are especially influenced by the study of Solomos & Back (1995), focusing on processes of racialisation within an institutional setting of political parties. Their critique against other research for avoiding empirical studies of the working of racism within institutional and organisational settings have underpinned our research project.

7. Most of the Swedish gender studies grasp the conditions of women that are conceptualised as belonging to the nation. In these studies an overemphasis on patriarchal relations as well as an under—theorisation of racism as a central principle for social organisation in Sweden may be traced. Our departure is on the feminist notion of intersectionality as developed by Black and antiracist feminists (Anthias and Yuval Davies 1992; Collins 2000). We have tried to grasp how discourses of gender and nation interact, create and shape gendered racialised identities.

8. The empirical material of this study has been produced through a number of different methods. We have followed the network during the period 1997—1999 and have conducted thirty in—depth interviews with racialised trade union activists, complemented with six focus group interviews based on regional FAI networks. This latter method was central for capturing the context of discussion and the collective voice of our informants. These methods (together with participant observation on FAI’s activities and union meetings on issues related to ethnic discrimination) have given us the possibility to challenge hegemonic discourse of silence, passivity and difference. We have also collected and analysed different types of material produced by the trade unions and FAI and analysed articles in the LO (working class TUC) weekly during the period 1995—2001, with the aim of grasping how the unions construct representations of immigrants within the movement. Secondary material has been central to grasp the organisational history of the trade union movement. It has also been vital for a widening of the context and for specific comparisons with issues of racialisation and trade unions in England/UK.

9. We want to provide an understanding of the dynamics of the interaction between researcher and informants. We are perceived as racialised (Anders as Swedish black and Diana as latina) and these perceptions, strongly shapes the ways racialised and “Swedish” union activists speak with us about racism. Following Philomena Essed (1991) we will suggest that our informants possess a group specific knowledge about the phenomena of racism that until the present has been peripheral to social science.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE SWEDISH UNIONS

10. Since 1932 the governments of Sweden have been dominated by social democrats¹ with the exception for 1976—82 and 1991—1994. The social democratic party is one of the

¹ At times in coalitions, during WWII with all parties except the communists and thereafter some periods with the farmers party.

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pillars of the Swedish labour movement, the other being the trade unions organised around the working class trade union confederation, LO (Therborn 1984). The general importance of Swedish trade unions in understanding processes of racialisation may in part been explained by emphasising that the LO is in fact the largest organisation of immigrants. More than a fifth of LO's member have an immigrant background defined as either foreign born (13%) or children of at least one foreign born parent (8%) (Kjellberg 2001).

11. Prior to expanding on the role of LO in racialisation and their strategy of subordinated inclusion, we will shortly highlight some of the major traits of LO. The first feature that we want to illuminate is the high degree of unionisation that plays an important role in LO's self image, an image challenged by our informants.

a) You know why they are so strong because they never used them. They are .. how I can explain this to you well when I was a child by parents bought the first living –room we where the first family in the neighbourhood that had such a room , we never used it but we learned that we were better than all others because we had that room.. that is the same thing with the Swedish unions.. have you seen the European unions with the anti globalisation demonstrations, have you seen when their people lost their jobs? If something is never used ,it is pretty and it is big but it is like my mothers living room.

12. Together with Denmark and Finland, Sweden ranks in the top. This fact should not automatically be converted into evidence of the strength of LO, since more exceptionally in an international perspective, is the degree of unionisation of white—collar workers (TCO) and professionals (SACO) and the organisational strength of the employers (Svensk Näringsliv) (Åmark 1998).

13. In the history of LO there are a number of organisational conflicts that indirectly affect the development of strategies towards immigrant workers. The first serious political conflict within LO arose in the aftermath of the 1909 general strike that was lost. Radical groups based on syndicalism forged a new trade union called SAC. It is still alive but has never amounted to much of a challenge.² A more serious challenge of reformism within LO and the linkages to the social democratic party was the strength of communist trade union activist within the trade union movement. Especially during the fifties they were marginalized by a concerted effort from within the unions and with help of the social democratic party. The major conflicts thereafter have focused on the challenge by public employees to improve their relative positions within the labour market vis—à—vis industrial workers. In LO, this was also a gender conflict between the predominantly female union of municipality workers and the male bastion of LO, the metal workers union. The final conflict has been named “the war of roses” indicating the strains between the social democratic party and LO during the 80s and 90s, that threatened their alliance. Reasons for this development was to be found in a social democratic party more defensive

² The first trade unionist killed by Nazis was an activist of SAC.

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in its reformist ambitions and more influenced by neo—liberal strains and in the 90s ideas from “New Labour” of UK.

14. Sweden has been seen as an example of multiculturalism (together with UK and Canada), providing rights and possibilities for immigrants and for pursuing a “generous” refugee policy (Castles & Miller 1993). This has in many ways prevented the emergence of an ethnic split labour market (Bonacich 1972). It has however not prevented the emergence of a racialised labour market in which the unions strategy of subordinated inclusion has dominated.

15. Compared to the situation in UK/England there has rarely been any organised explicit racism within the Swedish trade union movement. Three of the reasons that may explain this low level of articulated racism is the short, failed colonial project, the strong biological racism in Sweden of the 1920s that went into hiding following the defeat of the Nazis in 1945; and the organised subordination of immigrants within the labour market that for many years “restricted” them from competing with “Swedes”. As we shall see below, this has not prevented processes of racialisation and non—organised forms of racism. Furthermore, and in contrast with emerging antiracist trends in UK/England that spread to the labour movements (Phizacklea & Miles 1992; Wrench 1989), the Swedish trade unions have generally (and still continue) to view the subordination of immigrants (racialised groups) as a problem of integration and rarely as an effect of racism.

III. IMMIGRANT TRADE UNION ACTIVIST – THE FAI NETWORK

“The unions are as the sun. We have the unions in our blood. .. it is warm. Many of us have been active in agitation, organisation, demonstrations, strikes , we have experienced police repression, prisons and exiles. But also happiness, solidarity and human value. FAI believes in the sun. We believe in the sun even when it does not shine . Today the sun does not shine. The union does not either shine for us migrants. We do not want to take over the organisation we want to participate.”

16. The nexus, forging the field of this study, is the network “Immigrant trade union activists” (in Swedish, and in the text abbreviated FAI). FAI was formed in March 1997. All members in the three major trade union confederations LO (the working class TUC), TCO (the TUC of professional employees) and SACO (the TUC of academic professionals) may join regional networks of FAI, although the activists are dominated by racialised members of LO.³

17. The quote above is from a long interview with one of FAI’s founders. Most FAI activists have come to Sweden as political refugees in the late seventies. There are great

³ The syndicalist trade union confederation SAC was not included in correspondence with the still hostile relations between LO and SAC following their split in 1910. This tensions was clearly expressed in the founding conference of FAI in which a LO “ombudsman” stated that if SAC was included LO would withdraw its support of FAI.

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variations in nationality, religion, ethnic, gender and sexual identity among the group we have studied. What they have in common is that most activists within FAI have long experiences of union/political work before migration and have been working in the Swedish unions. They have successfully linked with the first generation of labour migration that is organised within the unions and support their demands. Some of them (specially those with Finnish background) have organised within FAI. The group we studied is strongly identified with the modernist project that the unions represent, and they did not discover ideas about “equality and justice” after their arrival to Sweden. For these activists (and for the people they are trying to represent) unions are “natural places” to be in.

18. FAI is a network mainly of racialised trade union activist that work within the established trade unions, aiming on the one hand to organise immigrants and on the other hand to strengthen the representation and impact of immigrant members within the union. Furthermore FAI aims to influence the general agenda discussing ethnic segregation/integration and racism/antiracism. However, there is also an idea within FAI, as expressed in some of the interviews of renewing and strengthening the trade unions that have lost much of their momentum. The quote below expands on this position.

“Many people both Swedish and immigrants want to leave the unions...it is clear that they do not want to pay when they feel that the unions do nothing. They say: 300 or 400 crowns for what? And I tell them: if we do not pay to the unions we will spend the money anyway, the union is the only strength we have .. without unions then it is patrons power.”

19. The quote also demonstrates an awareness of the problems facing the trade union movement. Members, both “Swedes” and immigrants are increasingly sceptical of joining the unions and of the functioning of unions (Kjellberg 2001). A challenge that the members of FAI react against, demanding organisational development that increases the dynamics of the unions at the cost of the institutional bureaucratic structure.

IV. WHO ARE THEY? ARE THEY AGAINST US AND WHAT DO THEY WANT?

20. According to our informants three questions were posed to FAI when it began to be national visible through media. The first one was who are they, the second are they against us and the third what do they want? We have tried to answer these questions in a dialogue with our informants. Below follows an illustration of how informants present themselves: *“I’ve always been part of the working class movement. I come from a Chilean family. Both my mother and my father were union activists. I have a brother that disappeared in Argentina, a sister in Canada and well here I am in Sweden*

“I was fifteen when I began to work politically in Teheran. It was during the Shahens time... well I have been an union activists all my life”

21. The following quote illustrates how informants themselves explain the need and background to FAI.

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It began with the fact that we had difficulties in understanding why the unions did not do anything for migrants

Often they organise in the unions because it is some kind of insurance. You pay your fee and you know that they are there if you need them .. but there are very few, very few that come to the meetings, and why should they come? There is no point in going there. Nobody listens. You go there and the only thing you can do is to listen and nod. And then it is finished. Wrapped and ready.

22. These two quotes illustrate different themes but also different ways of identifying and naming the problem. The first quote describes the facts. Swedish unions do not prioritise migrants and their needs. This informant expects that an organisation that claims to represent all the organised workers is sensible to the demands of an increasing group of members: racialised workers. The quote highlights the tension between unions universalistic ideology and unions excluding practices. For this informant FAI's agenda is simple, to demand that the unions do what they say they do. While the first quote criticises the unions because of their inability to represent a big part of their members, the second quote shifts the focus from what the unions should or should not do, to the argument that in order to provide what migrants demands, unions must become more inclusive and democratic.

23. The group that we have interviewed has not been recruited by the unions. They have active approached unions and according to our informants they have stayed within the organisation , despite the unions inability to create an arena for what they conceptualise as the new Swedish working class. When we asked why so few migrants engaged (actively) in the unions, a common sense truth within Swedish unions, our informants answered that there is a paradox within union rhetoric, on the one side they always complain about the problem of organising migrants, on the other side when migrants organise themselves and try to actively influence and participate in the unions, several mechanism develop to stop and block their presence.

“I do not know what they are afraid of ... First it is not only migrants that they do not want to accept, it is also women and specially young people. I think that the Swedish unions have developed into .. how can I explain... well as a government that does not want to share the power with others. There are a lot of traditions in the unions they sit their until its time for their pensions...But that was not the idea in Sweden from the beginning. You can learn if you read history that it was not so. They did not create the unions so that these bureaucrats would stay until they die and do nothing. This is how it functions now. To be an elective representative, this democracy it is bad for the unions... Meetings where ten persons vote for thirty..., ten are in the meeting and they have the right to vote for thirty...And this wish to compromise with the employers. That is why many of my friends (not only migrants) loose interest... I have also read about this Swedish politics, the treaty of Saltsjöbaden, it has become a rule now, but it does not function today, we have to fight, we cannot always accept. There are so many rules you cannot go on strike during negotiations, if you strike

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through a decision of your local organisation then it is called wild cat strike... well so many rules, all these rules, people get tired you can never do anything here..

24. There are a lot of important clues in this reflection. She means that the problem with the unions is not only the discrimination of migrants, but that the discrimination of migrants is part of a larger problem relating to the position of new groups. She further asserts that the form of representative democracy as practiced today within the unions seriously limits the strength of the union.

25. Feminist philosopher Holloway Sparks (1997) suggests that the notion of courage must be re—appropriated from an individualistic and masculine discourse in order to describe forms of resistance where people choose to keep going, confronted with obstacle and danger. We want to depart from her analysis because many of our informants assert that many racialised workers do not organise because they are afraid of the consequences, to challenge racism within Swedish union demands a strong commitment.

“you know everything looks so nice here and most people really believe that in Sweden you can say what you want but that is not the case... ask the communists that were crushed in the unions. People are afraid here. They know that nobody is going to say a word but that you are going to come to work and find that you have been moved to another section, or that nobody votes for you anymore or whatever ...

26. We also want to illuminate Sparks rereading of Rose Parks because it is relevant for how we think about FAI. Sparks asserts that the action of Rose Parks is often told as the action of an individual, tired women reacting “naturally” against injustice. The historical records, show however that Rose Parks was a very known activists and that her figure was important to the movement because her position (church active, married etc) decreased whites strategies of pathologising or ridiculing resistance. FAI is in a sense as Rosa Parks. Many racialised actors have struggled to put the issue of racism within the unions before FAI. FAI’s strength (but also limits) is that the network is developing strategies within the frame of working class respectability (Skeggs 1997), so central to Swedish unions.

27. There is in our informants a strong identification with the Swedish working class unions. This identification is sometimes related to maintaining boundaries against more class privileged groups within their trans—national communities.

28. “I am a real “black skull”, a worker...I am against the Rainbow party in Malmö. It is true that we all suffer from racism but many of those that are organised in the Rainbow party scream against racism but do not like workers...For many of them the most terrible thing that have happened to them is that they are treated as svartskallar as everybody else and that they have to work with their hands for the first time in their lives.. no I am against any form of migrant coalition.

29. Our informants show important tensions in the way they think about forms of organisation related to ethnicity (Virdee and Grint 1994). They often assert that they see FAI as an organisation that hopefully will not be needed in the future. There are also

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tensions and disagreement within FAI about how long the network should “push” the unions.

“We should organise ourselves. There are serious problems but we should not break the unions. I do not believe (as others do) that we have the right to divide the working class movement. That is why FAI is needed only for some years in order to give strength to migrant position within the unions. We do not want a separate organisation. If the Swedish unions did their work, if they stopped working only for Swedes, I do not believe we would need FAI”

30. Another important tension within FAI is the aim of the organisation. While most activists that we have met shared a common understanding of issues of racism and discrimination within unions there are different projects in relation to how the issues should be tackled. Some informants struggle for what we could conceptualise as a de—racialisation of social relations, their focus is on anti—racism. The other group suggests that ethnic and cultural belonging should be respected. These different positions (antiracist and multicultural) are not expressed as separated and systematically structured arguments and many informants incorporate the two discourses in often creative ways. It is however important to reflect about this tension, taking into account that the Swedish union and the Swedish welfare state has more easily incorporated issues of regulated multiculturalism than issues of racism (Ålund & Schierup 1991).

31. Despite these differences FAI’s collectivity is created through several common standpoints. The first one is variations in the meaning of the word Swedish. Informants often speak about “our mates at work “ or our co—workers that voted for us, or plainly our members... without naming them as “Swedish”. Swedishness links directly, in their language, to positions of power and never to people in their surroundings. There is within FAI a conscious effort to re—appropriate the word “svartskalle” (black skull):

We are all svartskallar ... it does not matter where we come from... what we have in common is that we understand each other, we have the same experience, the same bloody work, the same control when we go shopping, the same problem with the children... many say that we are not but I say as it is we are all svartskallar.

32. Our informants define themselves as “svartskallar”, an insult that has become a symbol for belonging and struggle. Through all our interviews the informants use the word “black skull” in order to name the new form of panethnicity that has developed in Sweden. They can assert for example “they got afraid, we were many svartskallar in the room” or “the first thing everybody does but never recognises before is to check how many of us how many svartskallar are in the meeting... before we did that in silence, now we ask how many svartskallar.”

33. But the informants also use the notion of “black skull” as a class boundary that shows their knowledge about class stratification within ethnic communities a knowledge that Swedish union elected representatives often lack: “She is not a real “black skull”, married to a Swede and with that job, she cannot represent us.” And in a parallel move Swedish or

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Nordic (“white”) workers may be included: “no problem with him, he is a real “black skull”...” FAI is not the only organisation that uses the word “black skull”. This word is gaining positions within the public arena, in part because second generation uses it continually in oppositional ways. We would like to suggest that ““black skull”” grasps and names an emerging Swedish racialised working class identity.

V. NATIONAL BELONGING AND WORKING CLASS UNIONS.

“you can collect mushrooms all life long, get a degree in mushroom gathering and they will continue to say that you do not know because you are not from here.”

34. In the Swedish context, boundaries between racialised workers and the Swedish unions are created through discourses of exclusive nationhood. With Paul Gilroy’s own words: “Statements about the nation are invariably statements about race” (1987).

35. The hegemonic form of nationalism developed in Sweden may be named as welfare nationalism, the institutions of the welfare state as a proof of national superiority creating boundaries between us and them. The unions constructed as a “Swedish” organisation is the most systematic form of resistance to the mobilisation of racialised workers. Despite the increasing number of racialised groups organised within them, the LO continues to speak about Swedish unions and immigrants. One of our informants explains this in the following words:

“I am so tired... we have been working in the unions for more than twenty years... more than 40% are migrants. We have always supported the union. Some of us are very active and they continue to speak about Swedish unions and immigrants. One wonders what must happen so that they understand that we (pointing to a meeting with a group racialised workers) are the Swedish unions”

36. Another way to create boundaries between them and us is to relate to “Swedish history”. Historical knowledge it has been argued in the Swedish public debate is important for a democratic society. But what is conceptualised as historic knowledge is a selective construction that is reshaped and negotiated in the present (Connerton 1989). Working class history is constructed as a national epos that excludes the historical experiences of political struggle and conflict of radical Swedish workers. This strategy is connected to the silencing of migrant workers contribution to Swedish working class struggle that was, as our informants often pointed out, important during the seventies. Working class and union history is also talked about in ways that reproduce the connections between place, culture and the national territory and reinforces the assumptions of natural bonds (blood ties) between workers that are conceptualised as belonging to the nation and Swedish working class history. Racialised groups are created both as a—historical and without the ability to “know” about Swedish working class history. Many of our informants suggest that Swedish union activists represent themselves as with a born right to and owning Swedish history. *“They do not only say our organisation they say also our history.”*

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“When they do not like what I say then they often claim that I do not know I do not understand Swedish history. But that is not true. I have read a lot and I have gone to courses. Do you know what I say to them when they say like that? I tell them that their union leaders lie about their history”

37. Swedishness (or lack of it) is created within the unions as a central way of creating boundaries between us and them, boundaries that are impossible to transcend for the group that is racialised. Central to our argument (and relevant to our informants intervention) is that radical challenges within the Swedish union are constructed by the unions as “un—Swedish”. Our informants often return to the issue of how their criticism is interpreted within the unions. Their argument is that the criticism by racialised activists expressed against the unions, is often understood as a criticism to the Swedish nation:

Its amazing... you are not going to believe me you are going to think that I am exaggerating.. but I live in this country, I came when I was nineteen , I've lived all my life here.. and they say all the time that they want us to participate and when I do participate and say what I think.. well, then they tell me that I am too critical, that I do not have any patience... and they begin to defend Sweden, but if a Swede says the same things and there are a lot of Swedish comrades that say so.. then they accept the proposal...

38. Our informants make a connection between organisational forms and union exclusion. Some researchers, often more through statements than based on empirical studies, have suggested that immigrants lack of interest for unions can be explained by the fact that they experience a “cultural clash” between the ways unions function in Sweden and their experiences with unions before migration. We disagree. Our material shows that racialised union activists manage as well as Swedish activists the rules of the game. A simple overview of union activism will show that most Swedish (as well as migrant) workers never participate in union meetings and experiencing bureaucratic procedures as difficult is not related to workers ethnicity. The Swedish unions are highly centralised and bureaucratised organisation and as such have develop expert practices that exclude most people of being active in decision making (Åmark 1998). FAI's criticism aims to connect these rules to forms of exclusion. While Swedish unions leader win by a centralised and bureaucratised procedure this new groups power increases with more collective and participative forms of decision making.

“it is so difficult all that language and you know once I stood up and said. Comrades I do not understand .. after the meeting a lot of people congratulated me (not only immigrants) the Swedish do not understand either, one thinks that one is the only one that does not understand... but the only difference is that they have learned not to show it. “

39. Some of our informants expressed a notion of failure, feeling that they speak to much and that they are unable to be effective and to be concrete. Others suggest that it is not the formal meeting rules where the problem lies but that Swedish unions leaders use this language in order to decide what has been decided before the meeting. Or as one of our informants puts it:

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I understand people that do not want to go.. they have decided everything before, and you are not allowed to speak and when you speak it is always out of context or it is not the point that should be discussed or they say you are right but must come with something concrete...

40. Talk in order to create alternative worldviews is central to subordinated groups. FAI's members talk a lot about racism and discrimination, often their aim is mainly to talk, to put the issue within the agenda .

“we have to speak. There is a point in speaking. They say we are not effective. It is true if we are there they cannot go home after two hours with all decided. It is difficult to provide what they want ... like Macdonald food you know ready to eat .. that is not the kind of thing we can provide... the issue of racism is huge and a way of killing all forms of resistance and struggle is to say as they do, well get concrete tell us what you want so we can continue”

41. The question often posed to them, is if they are against or for particular propositions. This shows the way resistance is regulated by demanding easy operationalised models for things that are according to our informants not even named. Maud Eduards (2002) analyses of Swedish politics is relevant here. The researcher suggests that within the established representative democracy there is a continuous process of reformulation of the forms of politics that are conceptualised as irrelevant or threatening. She suggests that both politicians and experts have clear boundaries between what is normal and abnormal and try to evade that new issues emerge because they often create tensions and get well organised routines out of balance. They often, according to the author, translate issues of power to issues of ability and knowledge. These practices create serious conflicts with groups that want to discuss in terms of power.

42. Most informants claim that while they are often asked to support the unions, they are rarely asked to participate. There are clear boundaries between support, membership and participation on equal terms. Our informants assert that when union officials are asked to explain the lack of migrants within higher positions, they suggest that either migrants are not interested or lack the ability, but that they do not experience this as a problem because their interests are represented by the union:

and then I said, if it does not matter , if you can represent us , why not try the other way so that we can represent you.. some laughed but others did not.

43. Our material shows that racialised activists have developed strategies in order to define what kind of inclusion they are really struggling for. They often return to the risk of being included under conditions that reinforce the unions power over FAI. This quote illustrates the dilemma:

a) —well and then they choose an immigrant to take care of the flowers

b) —to take care of the flowers?

α) —yes. One immigrant to make coffee, take care of the flowers and let them in peace.

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44. The issue of taking care of the flowers is a successful ethnographic description of the Swedish unions efforts to depoliticise union meetings by creating a home—like environment. But the expression take care of the flowers grasps the paradox that while many racialised activists want to work in the unions, the members that are supported and get elected are those that,

“ do not want to work, you get some free hours and then they do not do anything more than change the water of our flowers... and we, those of us that want to organise, we have to meet after work...

45. Our material shows that an important shift has occurred in the position of racialised activists within the unions. From a position where the struggle focuses on inclusion towards a struggle for forms of inclusion that racialised groups control.

46. It is however important not to explain all forms of exclusion through racialised practices. Racialised activists in our material were also excluded because they challenged the historically social democratic hegemony.

It took me some years to understand that the unions were social democratic, to be forced to be a social democratic to be allowed to organise one union .. it is how would I put it: it is exotic...

I have spoken with many of them.. even if I am not from Sweden I live here and my children and grandchildren are born here. And then they say you are not a social democrat and I answer well I have been a worker all my life...

47. We have in this study focused on how FAI’s activist speak and reflect about experiences of exclusions in terms of ethnic discrimination and how they understand the processes that makes racism a marginal issue for the union. Central to their analysis is the focus on the unions power to define what racism is and who is authorized to define an action as racist. The point our informants want to make here is that because racism is defined in narrow terms as political articulated forms of right wing extremist organisation, issues of everyday and institutional racism are outside the agenda. We will illustrate these points through one narrative:

It is always like this... First out there.. revolution, catastrophe... murder... and then at home.. even if they have closed the factories , even if the union does not move one finger to defend the workers... believe me you are going to breath... There is Nazism in Germany, and racism in the US , war in the Balkans, England is destroyed after Thatcher, Spain and Italy are terrible places, you know Catholicism and women’s oppression.. (laugh) believe me you get very thankful that you leave here, and you know you learn to close your mouth::

48. Representations of the unions as “rational” and “responsible” have taken a leading role in the epos that construct the nation not only as stable, consensus based and homogenous but also as the best country in the world. We would like to suggest that what is constitutive for Swedishness is a construction of the other as embodying chaos and conflict.

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VI. GENDER, “RACE”/ETHNICITY AND CLASS.

49. We have in the above texts illuminated the shared experience and dreams of both women and men as racialised activists within the unions. We will now try to focus our analysis in understanding how discourses of “women” and “men” create and shape the practices of racialised activists within the organisation.

50. Racialised men in general and racialised activists in particular are stigmatised in Sweden through discourses on gender equality as a specific Swedish cultural attribute that racialised groups lack (de los Reyes et al 2002). Moreover it is often asserted that racialised men embody dangerous and traditional forms of patriarchy. One central theme in our work is how migrant men resist these forms of stigmatisation:

“without speaking one only word, because they wanted, they needed labour, I went directly to the factory, nobody spoke about , nobody said culture do not function together, you are from a Muslim country...I began to work beside a Swedish young woman, we did not hurt each other, I did not rape her.

I was so hurt. We had been to an union meeting and I felt so good, and I felt that things were getting better , well that I was one of the group... but we took the subway together and there was only a seat available besides a black guy and my comrades no one of them took that place.. you know a black guy , nothing special it could be your husband or my little brother .. and then I felt I always remain for them the black guy that they are so afraid of.

51. Women activists were very cautious about criticising racialised activists men. This can be explained both because FAI is in a sense a new organisation and patriarchal structures have not been institutionalised yet but also because in a context of rising racism that criminalize racialised men it is very difficult for them to criticise migrant men outside the hegemonic racist discourse.

“I knew that you were going to ask me .. one should go around with a paper where it stands: I am married with one of them and he does not abuse me .. they are not any angels either but we know where we have them

52. you should write that they are neither better nor worse than any other. Of course they can be tiresome but they do not try to hide what they think , you know smile and smile, polite polite and then no women in positions of decisions...

53. The Swedish unions carry with them different forms of masculinity that are in a hierarchical relation to each other and construct a system of relations between different groups of men. On the one side the hegemonic definition of masculinity as the Swedish, modern , gender equality aware man in opposition to many union leaders with working class background. On the other side Swedish working class is constructed (because of its belonging to the nation) against the masculinity of racialised groups.

54. While it could be argued that many of our informants are women, working class and racialised the ways they name their experience of subordination and how they articulate it through specific identities and political consciousness varies substantially. Migrant women

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face other challenges; they must open a space between a discourse of gender equality (owned by Swedish women) and a discourse of multiculturalism/ethnic discrimination (the platform of migrant men) (Hull 1982)

They think they own it, they think they have invented this thing about gender equality. When I said I was interested in these questions they asked me if I did not want to work with integration...

55. They confront also –according to our informants— forms of racialised sexism and racist representations of migrant women that in the Swedish context are connected to victimisation.

a) They loved me in the beginning, they got an migrant women and on top of everything Muslim.. they where so happy... but when I began to criticise them .. when I demanded to have a study circle about racism then I was not really the one they wanted... they explained that what I wanted was not what a migrant women wanted...

b) I was invisible during the entire meeting... nobody asked me anything about FAI. No one spoke to me... But in the evening after they had drunk enough, then they came to me and wanted to dance salsa.

56. Gender relations are relevant to understand how alliances and solidarity are constructed in relation to different groups (Cockburn 1998). Racialised men often speak about Swedish women's struggle in the unions, and they are present in their narratives as examples and role models. This is not the case for migrant women.

57. The boundaries that we perceive in our interviews between Swedish and racialised women are often structural in terms. These two groups of women work in different parts of the labour market (Knocke 1986). But they are also related to the hierarchical position “Swedish” women maintain vis—à—vis migrant women within welfare institutions as social workers, teachers and nurses.

c) A very common argument among union leaders and (researchers) is that racialised women lack knowledge about the unions. This is based on an implicit comparison with Swedish women; assumptions supported more by banal nationalism (Billig 1995) than on research of Swedes actual knowledge about unions. However we want to explore the dynamics of the construction of this knowledge

58. *“ They come and complain to me that women do not speak to them but go direct to our supervisor. About things they should discuss with the union... they want as they always say... they want me to inform them... they think that women are ignorant.. but in this workplace the union and the management are the same. And the only thing that these women do when they ask supervisor is to show how things are in Sweden*

59. *what I do is tell them this is how things are done in Sweden. .. What I want to say to you is that all these that they do not have knowledge... they have a lot of knowledge... they know that the unions collaborate with the employers and that they together decide...*

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60. Central to the idea of the Swedish nation as modern and rational is that the goals and the practices of gender equality has nearly been incorporated into Swedish culture. Actually feminist research studies show that both women and men tend to believe that there organisations are gender equal. This representation is not only central to Swedish relation to the world but is constitutive in the white majority relationship to the racialised population. One of the most relevant boundaries between us and them is the discursive creation of migrants as incapable of accepting and adapting to what is presented as specific Swedish gender equality values. In the Swedish context to speak of cultural differences is to speak of the differences between what is assumed and represented as a rational, secularised, women friendly culture that those that are assumed as belonging to the nation embody and a traditional, religious and women oppressing culture (s) that those that are racialised “import” to Sweden. One central theme in our work is how migrant men resist this stigmatisation:

VII. REPRESENTATION

61. To complement and contrast our interviews with immigrant trade unions activist we studied the representations of immigrants through an ideology critical analysis of the TUC weekly. From all articles we selected those that contained the word immigrants (or derivations of it) between 1995 and 2001. These articles were analysed with three central questions; how are immigrants constructed; in what settings are immigrants referenced; and who are given voices in the articles dealing with immigrants.

62. — We are creating a society where it is no longer about the immigrants receiving the worst jobs, but rather that they don't even get these jobs. We in the labour movement cannot see this happen... If we are to succeed we need the help of the unions, he emphasize

63. — All should be organised within the unions and covered by collective agreements. If any group is left outside there is risk that they take jobs below the salaries of the collective agreements, says Bertil Jonsson (chairman of the TUC). LO and the other trade union organisations – centrally or locally – have awoken late.

64. — It is only to admit that this is the case. We haven't devoted sufficient attention to immigrant and tendencies of segregation. We haven't in time noticed the alarming tendencies towards discrimination of immigrants within the working life, says Jan Edling, immigrant responsible at LO” (LO—tidningen 951201)

65. This quote from the beginning of the period analysed, highlight the three research questions that we focused on in studying the TUC weekly. The first paragraph, quoting Leif Blomberg, at that time the minister in charge of immigrant politics and earlier chairman of the Swedish metalworkers' union, emphasize as we see it the view of the labour movement on immigrants as a reserve army of labour for the worst jobs. This view comes clearly to the front when the problem is seen as the alarming unemployment as compared to the natural situation of immigrant workers being employed in the worst jobs. In many of the

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comments from trade union officials immigrants are implicitly perceived as by nature lacking the human capital of “Swedes”. This results in positioning immigrants as a natural labour reserve of unskilled workers.

66. The second part of the quote, by the chairman of the TUC, calls attention to the threat that unemployed immigrant workers pose to the unions and “Swedish” union members. This threat, that the unions haven’t dealt with until now should be combated by the trade unions through stressing the benefits of union membership. The remarks are central for the construction of “we” and “them” and underscores the idea of viewing immigrants as obviously subordinate within the labour market – racialisation – but at the same time the need to prevent an increasing gap between the position of “Swedish” and immigrant workers with the fear of lowering wages and worsening labour conditions.

67. In the quote above, the final paragraph highlight self—criticism from the LO leadership. As such it tends to be symptomatic for a number of articles stressing self—criticism in the form of what we didn’t do and recognition about alarming tendencies. At the same time these articles demonstrate an unwillingness to go from alarming tendencies to statements of actual racism within union ranks, work places or the labour market. Furthermore, there are rarely discussions of what to do about the tendencies of racism. There is a reluctance to see these aspects as structural and institutional effects. Instead, the general solution advanced is discussions, education and working with attitudes. However, if one approaches the solutions presented more thoroughly, there often seems to be a shift away from issues of discrimination and racism towards issues of improving the skills of the immigrants – that is returning to the idea that the central problems is the human capital deficiencies of the immigrants (especially in the Swedish language) and not the racialised means of subordination and exclusion. Another aspect in the representation of immigrants is to transform the issues to class issues – what Gillborn (1995) would call illegitimate de—racialisation. In many ways, the understanding of the trade union leaders in the LO weekly, highlight the issue of exclusion of immigrants and the earlier ignorance of the problems by the trade unions. Thereafter the arguments fall back into issues of deficiencies in the immigrants themselves and a general defence of traditional trade union issues based on a class perspective.

68. The third core question in our analysis of the trade union newspaper focused on the voices that were allowed to talk about the situation of immigrants and how to change them. As the initial quote demonstrated, the dominant voices are “Swedish” trade union leaders and social democratic politicians. Furthermore, experts/researchers and welfare state officials also voice the information we are presented in the newspaper. There are rarely room for immigrants or immigrant trade union activists to voice their opinions and analysis in these issues. This is of course partially an effect of a racialised labour market and a trade union organisation in which there are few with immigrant backgrounds in the positions that are allowed to talk. Instead, when immigrants get through, it is generally in subordinated and restricted forms. They are often used for autobiographic data or ethnographic

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descriptions of themselves and “their” culture. Voices of immigrants are also used to criticize other immigrants, often as too passive. Immigrant voices are also used to hail labour market projects or trade union projects, catering for immigrants. They are however not allowed to say anything general or to be reflective.

VIII. SOME CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

69. Alexandra Ålund and Carl—Ulrik Schierup (1991) suggested in their book *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism* that process of migrant organisation in the Swedish context should be understood through the specific forms that the Swedish welfare state developed to both recognise and institutionalise migrants demands through ethnic separated and culturally based migrants organisations. The network of racialised activists we have studied (FAI) is an illustration of the changes that have occurred the last ten years, mirrored in the increasing organisation of racialised activists demanding equal participation and representation that transcend immigrant organisations. A change that can be grasped in their new organisational forms within the unions and in the emerging forms of pan—ethnic consciousness expressed in the appropriation of the word “black skull” as a positive self—identification.

70. Our study shows that working class racialised groups embody a specific form of consciousness and that this consciousness differs from the one embodied in the working class that is constructed as belonging to the nation. However, the priorities of the pan—ethnic collectively are not always consider first priority for all racialised activists and many of our informants emphasis their loyalty to the unions as their first and strongest identification. One and the same informant can discuss ethnic discrimination and need to collective strategies at the same time that she can position herself as belonging to other collectivities (such as her working place, her union, her women’s group). Political identification that in our material range from social democrats to greens and the parliamentarian and extra parliamentarian left also are an important organising principle. Our study shows that it is impossible to explain and understand actions through deterministic assumptions on connections between structural positions and specific categories. To put it clearly there is no direct connection between racialised groups in the unions and a “black skull” consciousness. However even if the forms of consciousness are heterogeneous, and contextual, the identification with the Swedish pan—ethnic collectivity is growing among racialised workers in Sweden.

71. The Swedish unions with its social democratic hegemony have had a central role in promoting a welfare nationalism where discourses of belonging and boundaries against the other are constructed through a narrative of national pride based on the homogenous, well organised and conflict—solving Swedish working class where the institutions of the welfare state are seen as a prove of self achievement. In the last ten years –in the context of increasing visible forms of racist organisations— discourses of national pride emphasis

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gender equality as a central national symbol. Our material shows that FAI's struggle within the unions to change forms of subordinated inclusion to forms of equal participation are often resisted through discourses of national belonging.

72. Central to the idea of the Swedish nation as modern and rational is that the goals of gender equality has nearly been incorporated into Swedish culture. Actually feminist research studies show that both women and men tend to believe that organisations in the country are gender equal. One of the most relevant boundaries between us and them in the unions are the discursive creation of migrants as incapable of accepting and adapting to what is presented as specific Swedish gender equality values. In the Swedish context to speak of cultural differences is to speak of the differences between a rational, secularised, women friendly culture threaten by traditional, religious and women oppressing culture (s) that those that are racialised "import" to Sweden. One central issue in our work is how racialised women (and men) resist these forms of gendered racism forging strategies within the unions.

73. We would suggest that FAI's demands transcend the discourse of "integration" that has been hegemonic within the unions, by focusing on issues of ethnic discrimination and institutional and everyday racism. They have also challenged union's representations of migrant workers as passive and ignorant and a problem for the unions. FAI demands new responses from the unions by claiming that a model that is based on collaboration with employers does not protect the interest of an increasing number of union members: racialised workers. Our material shows that a not so little of the resistance towards FAI cannot in any reductionistic way relate to ethnic discrimination. We would like to suggest that there is an increased evidence that LO wants to include racialised groups if they themselves are able to exclude those sectors within FAI that link the criticism of racism to a criticism of the unions as such and demand not only anti discrimination policies but also a more radical union.

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