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Cultural dialogues in the good society

The case of honour killings in Sweden

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ABSTRACT Value conflicts involving gender equality are interwoven into current multicultural tensions in many European societies. They are at the core of these tensions in Sweden, in which gender equality and principles of individual human rights constitute the state profile and political identity. In this article, we focus on three cases of honor killings that became flash points for public debates on 'culture and cultures' among political parties, immigrant groups and feminists in Sweden. The media fervor surrounding honour-related violence has provided xenophobic groups with political opportunities, but at the same time, the public debate has given visibility and opened up public space for immigrant women's groups. We conclude that the notion of the 'good society' has kept at bay the recognition of overtly xenophobic parties, but it has also inhibited open dialogue across and within majority and minority cultures, which would allow for reflections upon the diversity within cultures, marked by religion, gender, class differences and generational conflicts.

KEYWORDS culturization ● ethnic relations ● gender equality ● multiculturalism ● universalism ● xenophobia

INTRODUCTION

Multicultural conflicts are very much on the agenda in many European societies. Certain issues appear as pressure points touching the nerve of national identities and the constructions of citizenship. The drama

surrounding several dramatic cases of honour killings in Sweden had this effect. These cases have been played out in the news media for months, have engaged a range of political actors, and have been debated in parliament and featured on feminist and ethnonationalist websites. They are still being discussed in feminist research publications and in the media. Swedish and immigrant women's groups organize demonstrations at the anniversary of the death of the most celebrated victim, Fadime, a Kurdish woman killed by her family for not only violating honour codes, but speaking publicly against them. Though we summarize three highly visible cases of honour killings debated in the Swedish media (Sara, Pela and Fadime), we are not concerned in this article with the practices of honour killings or their roots in patriarchal village structures. Rather, we are interested in interrogating why and how they touched a nerve in Swedish society and what cultural meanings they evoke.

Whereas gender equality is often used as a proxy for other agendas, to gain support for restrictive immigration or to promote hard integrationist policies, in Sweden, women's equality and autonomy are the core of the agenda. To understand the ways in which national identities are being mirrored and magnified through multiculturalist politics in Swedish society, one has to recognize that gender equality has become a marker of the Swedish state identity, made visible in the many public exhibits during Sweden's presidency of the Council of Ministries of the European Union (EU) (Towns, 2002). Not only the presence and visibility of feminists in government and in policy-making bureaucracies, but also the belief that Sweden has gone furthest in achieving gender equality, creating a model for other countries to emulate, imbricates the debates on cultural difference and integration (Hellgren and Hobson, forthcoming). Honour killings have not only been crucial sites for defining what is Swedish – this is often set in opposition to cultural identities constructed as not Swedish – but also for challenging and defending gender equality in Swedish society.

By their very visibility, honour killings are boundary-making arenas. They are intended to be public statements, to restore honour to a family, to shame individual women, and to deter other women from resisting cultural codes of family and community. They are also public dramas re-enacted in courts and in the media. In European societies, ethnic and cultural clashes involving gender and diversity, honour killings, are arenas for boundary making beyond the family and local community. They pose a direct challenge to legal systems that attribute blame based upon an individualized system of justice, in which cultural or religious norms are not considered a reasonable defence. They intensify and solidify positions across and within immigrant and feminist groups.

As is true in boundary making in general among recognition groups, the debates around honour killings in media and political arenas privilege

certain actors, who speak for the group. We find that the legitimated spokespersons for immigrants are the well-integrated, 'modern' immigrants who often distance themselves from their 'traditionalist' compatriots. This is especially true in cases of honour killings, which arouse xenophobic attitudes towards ethnic groups, and immigrant groups seek to counteract tendencies to generalize from the behaviour of few to the whole group.

As Appiah (1994) has noted, there can be a thin line between recognition and stigmatization of a group identity, and between the definition of such a 'group identity' and the individual group member's personal values and desires. What has been absent from the Swedish debate is an intercultural dialogue in which not only minority and majority are on equal terms, but also one in which different spokespersons among immigrant groups could express their views, which would reveal the enormous heterogeneity among them regarding gender and multiculturalism.

Honour killings are also windows of opportunities for xenophobic actors and political parties who have recently increased their presence in the Swedish polity. Mainstream political parties have used honour killings as part of their race/ethnic card to increase votes. Discourses and policies on immigrants in Sweden are, however, ambiguous and there appears to be no general trend but various, divergent currents. Unlike some of its Scandinavian neighbours, including Denmark and Norway, where xenophobic parties emerged as dominant parties in the 1990s and restrictive policies followed, during the same period a discourse on ethnic discrimination emerged in Sweden, resulting in creation of new laws and administrative bodies that have been enabling for immigrant and ethnic minority groups. Sweden has the most open refugee asylum policy in Europe and the least restrictive citizenship criteria. The core of the matter is, however, not access to *formal* rights, but a de facto division between citizens where those labelled as immigrants are systematically treated as secondary – something that is particularly clear in studies on practices in the labour market. Several recent studies show that ethnic discrimination and hidden 'everyday racism' are widespread phenomena in Swedish society (e.g. Burns et al., 2007; Carson and Burns, 2006).

In other respects, the Swedish case is illustrative of the kinds of cultural struggles that are now being waged in political arenas of many European countries in which gender equality has become a funnel for articulating cultural difference. Nevertheless, the way these conflicts are played out is contextually bound, governed by immigration histories, citizenship frames, and gender equality norms and values. The first part of this article sets out the political and policy context in Sweden. In the second part of the article, we turn to the cases of honour-related violence and how they have been anchored in other discourses and agendas and engaged different actors – political parties, feminists, ethnic organizations and anti-racist groups, and most recently immigrant women's groups. In the conclusion, we reflect upon

winds of change, both the political presence and agendas of xenophobic ethnonationalist parties in political debates and the emergent immigrant women's networks and shelters. The latter, though less visible in national political debates, play a key role in protecting and empowering young women in their communities.

SWEDISH FRAMES OF INCLUSION AND CITIZENSHIP IN A PERIOD OF TRANSITION

The Swedish model of equality and inclusion organized around principles of universalism, equality and solidarity left little political space for claims other than those based on class inequalities (Carson and Burns, 2006; Hobson et al., 2007). The feminist movement posed the first frontal challenge to the construction of universalism that shaded out women's identities and interests. Recognition of women's politics is now observable in the sheer numbers of women in parliament, and their political presence is felt in public debate (Hobson, 2003). In contrast, there has been little receptiveness to the recognition of ethnic diversity. Immigrants lack both a political presence and voice in Swedish politics. Persons with immigrant backgrounds are scattered throughout the mainstream parties, though not in numbers reflecting the ethnic diversity of contemporary Sweden. Furthermore, they do not speak as representatives for immigrant communities, but as members of parties.[1]

In academic and policy communities inside and outside of Sweden, a false stereotype of Sweden as a homogenous country persists, despite the fact that every fifth Swede today has an immigrant background.[2] A major shift in Swedish immigration politics occurred in 1975, as the policy officially changed from the earlier assimilationist focus to a 'multicultural' approach, reflecting a general recognition of the fact that Sweden had permanently turned into an immigration country. In practice, however, this was largely limited to home language education for immigrants. In the early 1990s, we see another policy shift toward an explicit integration framework, away from the emphasis on home language and encouragement of cultural ties with one's country of origin. Immigrant organizations were expected to prioritize integration, interpreted as participation of their members in the majority society with special emphasis on the labour market, not function as closed cultural communities. In fact, immigration policies were renamed as integration policies (Aytar, 1999), and the integration aim became a requirement for state funding of immigrant organizations. Despite this aim, there has been little attempt to include immigrant groups in the making of integration policies; policies were made *for*, not *with*, immigrants (Södergran, 2000).

Beginning in the late 1980s and increasing in the 1990s, the pace of immigration intensified and the patterns of immigration shifted from largely southern European workers filling a shortage of labour to non-European asylum seekers. As the type of immigrants and their reasons for migrating changed during the 1980s, and the influx of refugees with markedly 'different' cultural backgrounds increased, political and public resistance to immigration became stronger. Swedish politicians began to question why Sweden had a more generous refugee policy than other countries, and whether it was reasonable to take on a much heavier burden than other European countries in a period of economic crisis in the early 1990s. Within this context, the newly formed populist anti-immigrant New Democracy party suddenly entered the parliament with 6.7 percent of the votes in 1991. New Democracy was not re-elected, but their mantle was taken up by the Liberal Party, who refused to allow anti-immigrant New Democracy to be part of the Conservative Coalition bloc after the 1991 election, but in 2002 turned their party's rhetoric toward the prevailing anti-immigrant winds that New democracy had manoeuvred so well to reach parliamentary representation (Carson and Burns, 2006).

Extremist ethnonationalist parties and movements largely remained on the margins of political life. However, in 2006, one such party, the Sweden Democrats, gained mandates in 144 of Sweden's 290 local governments, although they only received 2.9 percent of the national vote, shy of the 4 percent needed for representation. In most communalities, other parties have refused to collaborate with them (Expo, 2007). Though comparably few Swedish voters would support an overt ethnonationalist party with racist messages, hidden racism and xenophobia in Swedish society could be expressed in votes for legitimate parties, some of which have adopted a harder integrationist position (Carson and Burns, 2006)

Alongside the political discourses exploiting xenophobic anxieties around immigrants and their lack of integration in Swedish society, there arose new discourses addressing the extent of ethnic discrimination and social exclusion, reflecting both the emergence of EU anti-discrimination directives and national laws to implement them in the late 1990s, as well as the rise of new organizations mobilizing against discrimination and racism (Carson, 2005).[3] Yet, ethnic discrimination remains a highly controversial issue in which no political consensus appears in sight.

Retreat from 'multiculturalism'?

Reflecting upon the starting point of this special issue of *Ethnicities*, it is misleading to speak of a retreat from multiculturalism in the Swedish context, as special rights for ethnic minorities generally have been non-existent. For the most part, multiculturalism in the Swedish context has been a bounded multiculturalism (Hobson et al., 2007), seen in polices for

language training and support for immigrant/cultural associations. There has been no policy debate on headscarves, viewed as an expression of individual religious freedom, although women wearing headscarves in Sweden can be discriminated against in the labour market (Integrationsverket, 2005). Not minority rights, but integration has been the mainframe in Swedish politics. It has been understood and embedded within the Swedish construction of universalism, rooted in principles of solidarity and inclusion, so that anti-discrimination in the labour market has become the ground for interpreting and remedying the exclusion of immigrants (Carson and Burns, 2006).

Over the last few years, one could claim that the space for special rights has increased, particularly in relation to a school reform process that has allowed all kinds of independent schools, or so called 'free schools'. The result is that now religious free schools are permitted. However, Muslim schools, in particular, have still been highly contested, most directly by the Minister of Integration and Equality, Nyamko Sabuni. She has profiled herself as an uncompromising integrationist, opposed to any special treatment of minorities, maintaining that multicultural rights often pose a threat to women's rights (Sabuni, 2006).

THREE CASES OF HONOUR KILLINGS

One of the foremost experts on honour killings in Sweden, Mehrdad Darvishpour, uses the term 'honour culture' to refer to the surveillance of women's sexuality and the duty of men in a family to defend the family's honour.[4] He sees honour killings as the extreme and violent expression of men's assumed collective right to control women (Darvishpour, 2005). We place honour killings within the broader rubric of honour-related violence (HRV) that includes phenomena such as as forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), and not only men, but also women in families and communities can enforce these codes and practices.

There had been murders that might have been characterized as honour killings before Sara, Pela and Fadime, but not until the 1990s did these three prominent cases bring the notion of honour killings into Swedish discourse. All three cases involved Kurdish families and daughters whose families believed that they were no longer following familial authority and chastity codes; that they had rejected their homeland culture and embraced Swedish norms of gender, sexuality and individualization. In all three cases, the media played a key role in naming and framing the issues surrounding honour killings.

In the first case of the triad of honour killings, a journalist challenged the police and prosecutors for their inability or unwillingness to confront the

evidence of the case. Sara was murdered by her young brother and cousin (15 and 16 years old) and both confessed to the crime, claiming that it was an accident as they had just intended to scare their sister and by mistake pulled the belt around her neck a little too tight. As is common in these cases, in which juveniles are involved, both received a light sentence.[5]

Two years later, the murder of another Kurdish daughter, Pela, was recognized by the courts, media and the public as an honour killing. In this case, Pela was lured to Iraq where the murder was carried out by four men, her father and her three uncles. Two of the uncles shot her in cold blood. The case was then tried in a local court in Dahouk in a Kurdish part of Iraq, where her father publicly took the blame; he was sentenced to five months in jail on parole. The two uncles who were Swedish citizens returned to Sweden where they were then tried in a Swedish court for murder, on the basis that the murder was planned in Sweden. Whereas it is extremely difficult for other family members to break ranks in honour killings because of fear of reprisals, in this case, Pela's younger sister became the key witness who testified that her uncles had killed Pela and not their father. Both uncles were given lifetime sentences in jail. This was a groundbreaking case, as it traversed Swedish borders and jurisdictions. It also highlighted the distance between gendered norms and legal practices in the immigrants' country of origin and those practised in Sweden. The case strengthened an already existing view of immigrant families as bearers of culture, no matter how long the family had lived in Sweden. This notion was amplified in the murder of Fadime, whose family had been living in Sweden for over 20 years.

In the case of Fadime, the facts of the case were not contested. Fadime's father had committed the murder and admitted to it.[6] Not only her refusal to marry the man chosen for her, but the very public nature of her defiance, intensified the sense of public shame that her father expressed in the court case. She had brought charges of threatening behaviour against her father and brother in 1998. During that trial, she acknowledged the humiliation that she had brought upon her family through airing the family's situation in public.

In Swedish society, as well as other Nordic countries, she became the icon of resistance to patriarchal cultures, a martyr who died speaking out against violence against women who sought an independent life outside familial boundaries and controls. The media played a key role in creating these images, and in framing the cultural conflicts that she came to embody. Throughout the pages of the mainstream media, Fadime's case was debated, encompassing broader questions of culture and difference. In the media, culture was used as an explanation for acts of violence against women; it was the vessel that carried all that was not Swedish; the characteristics of groups who did not share Swedish values of children's autonomy and individuality. It defined culture in terms of communities who failed to adapt to

Swedish norms around gender equality and women's lack of dependence on fathers and husbands.

Runsten (2006, citing Grip) in her analysis of the media handling of honour killings, contrasts the coverage of murders committed by Swedish men described as 'family tragedies' or criminal acts of one individual, to Fadime's murder and honour killings that implicate the entire Kurdish community. As one TV news reporter concluded after the trial: 'So finally it was Fadime's father who held the gun, although many more can be said to have been there with him last night; relatives, neighbours and thousand year old patriarchal traditions' (Runsten, 2006: 23).

IMMIGRANT ORGANIZATIONS RESPOND

In the context of multiculturalism and honour killings, it is important to understand the role of immigrant organizations. In Sweden, they were formed on the basis of nationality or ethnicity, and emerged during the 1970s (Emami, 2003: 44–8). Initially, they functioned mainly as sociocultural communities. In the 1980s, they began to represent the interests of ethnic groups; however, some scholars have argued that their organization along ethnic lines and their public funding had the effect of both culturalizing and depoliticizing them (Borevi, 2004; Schierup, 1991). That they were organized from above and dependent upon governmental funding has inhibited them from taking a critical stance against the government.

Two specific points should be made in relation to the response of immigrants to the cultural dialogues that emerged after Fadime's death. First, this was not a broad-ranged intercultural exchange, as it mainly involved Kurdish organizations speaking for the Kurdish families to Swedish politicians and media. Second, it is important to note that Fadime's parents were not Muslims, but Catholics, so this left little room for demonising Islam. After Fadime's death, Kurdish organizations issued public statements disavowing any connection between Kurdish culture and honour killings.

The honour killing dramas put immigrant organizations in a quandary. First, they had to distance themselves from the acts of violence emphasizing that these were private acts, but at the same time they had to respond to specific attacks on their cultures. In various press releases, Kurdish groups were quick to respond, fearing that the media and racist forces would try to use these murders to lay the blame on all Kurds. They denied this and insisted that these were not cultural acts, but acts of families. The Kurdish national association's (Kurdiska Riksförbundet) magazine *Berbang Vildan Tanrikulul* stated that the reason for honour killings is that the Kurds have been a very marginalized people from a global perspective

because of lack of education, oppression and a lack of recognition of a Kurdish identity. Hence, the Kurdish people have created their own rules within the family and this had nothing to do with Kurdish culture (Tanrikulu, 2002).

Immigrant organizations in general and Kurdish organizations in particular were criticized by Göran Persson (Sweden's then prime minister) for their lack of involvement in preventing honour killings and were put under pressure to increase the number of women on their boards. Mijatovic, director of SIOS, an umbrella organization for immigrant associations, criticized the government's insistence that all ethnic associations confront HRV, even if it is not an issue within their communities. For him, it was a clear indicator of how honour killings are used to draw the line between 'us' and 'them', the latter perceived as being part of a strongly simplified and homogenized 'immigrant culture'(Milinko Mijatovic in an interview with the authors, 23 November 2004).

Rather than an attempt to bring immigrant organizations into the policy-making process, the government's strategy to include more women on the boards of these organizations reflects the belief that immigrant organizations represent a coherent constituency. Moreover, it reveals a naivety about how to reduce gender inequalities in immigrant communities, that one could apply the same policy of political quotas as was done in the various political parties. This is not to suggest that the image of these mainstream immigrant organizations as precisely 'male' organizations with little interest in 'women's issues' is false, or that including women on the board would not make any difference (Hellgren and Hobson, forthcoming). Rather, it is to underscore what doing gender means in the Swedish policy context, as well as the limits of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

THE FEMINIST DIALOGUE: FADIME, GENDER AND DIVERSITY

The Fadime case also set in motion dialogues among different well-known feminist politicians, policy makers and academics. Two divergent interpretations of honour killings emerged in these debates: one that represented honour killings as an expression of men's violence toward women (the patriarchal explanation); and the other, that honour killings were reflections of cultural patriarchal practices (the cultural explanation). These two positions became strongly polarized and antagonistic: a more nuanced discussion about what culture is and whose culture it is, which could have brought about an understanding of the kind of gender and generational power conflicts within a 'cultural community' that HRV mirrors, was absent.

Riksorganisationen för kvinnojourer i Sverige (ROKS), a NGO providing shelter for women who are threatened with violence, issued a press release after Fadime's murder that exemplifies the patriarchal explanation:

> Honour has nothing to do with this or similar murders. When a Swedish man follows or kills his ex-wife this is called a 'jealousy-drama'. When he kills his ex-wife and their children, it is called a 'family-tragedy'. We in the women's movements believe that it is a question of hatred of women. It is not a question of immigrants, it is a question of the patriarchal culture that dominates all societies, including the Swedish one. (ROKS, 2002).[7]

Gudrun Schyman, the main spokesperson for the Feminist Initiative[8] and the former Left party chair was one of the most visible advocates for the position that Fadime's murder was simply another expression of men's violence against women (Schyman, 2002).

Mona Sahlin, who held the post of minister of integration in the Social Democratic party when they were in power and currently is the head of the party, stood firmly on the side of the culturalists. She insisted that immigrants have to adapt to Swedish gender equality norms and values. Also arguing from the culturalist position was Yvonne Hirdman, a feminist academic who authored a well-known report on gender and democracy in 1987 within the government commission on Power and Democracy. Responding to Schyman's attempt to universalize HRV as an expression of patriarchy that exists in Sweden as elsewhere, Hirdman maintained, in an article in the main Swedish daily newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, that 'the culture gender-structure that we have in Sweden is something to be proud of despite latent outbursts of old value-systems that come from male superiority' (Hirdman, 2002).

Four feminist scholars involved with gender and diversity issues, labelling themselves intersectionalists, challenged both the culturalist position and the gender/patriarchy explanation. They maintained that the culture of immigrants and the culture of Swedes cannot be separated from each other. They were most critical of Mona Sahlin's statements, which they claimed characterized immigrants as bearers of their homeland culture, but denied them any place in Swedish culture. In addition, they challenged Hirdman's assumption that Sweden was a gender-equal society, noting that her analysis of the Fadime murder as violence common and sanctioned in another culture, presumed that violence against women was antithetical and abnormal in Swedish culture (de los Reyes, 2002).

Immigrant women's organizations were absent from the public debates. After Fadime's murder, mostly immigrant men were invited to speak for ethnic organizations in the media. Swedish feminists were contacted to speak as experts on the gendered dimensions of honour killings. This is a general pattern that has been confirmed in our interviews with women from immigrant women's organizations who claim that they are not given

political space in the debates on gender and diversity (Hobson et al., forthcoming).

In the post-Fadime era, organizations and networks that represent young feminist immigrant women's voices have emerged speaking out both against HRV and racism. They do not take a one-dimensional 'universalist' nor 'culturalist' perspective, and above all speak from their own experiences in immigrant communities. Two of the most well known are Varken hora eller kuvad (Neither a whore nor submissive) (based on the French organization *Ni putes ni soumises*), which won one of Stockholm city's Anti-xenophobia awards in 2006, and the network Glöm aldrig Pela och Fadime (Never forget Pela and Fadime), which collects information and informs the public on honour crimes. Every year they organize a demonstration to honour Fadime and Pela on the anniversaries of their deaths, together with other active feminists, immigrant women's groups and politicians.

With the increased funding addressing HRV, there are now some resources for shelters run by immigrant women for immigrant women. Somaya is one such shelter founded in 1998 that provides help for immigrant women in general and Muslim women in particular. In contrast to ROKS, they are not overtly political, but see their role as helping young women to build strategies to cope with their situation and mediate with families; in the more extreme cases, they hide young women from their families. Their view of HRV lies somewhere between the culturalists and the intersectionalists: They affirm the role of traditions in HRV as the perpetrators come from countries where patriarchy is stronger than in Sweden; at the same time, they acknowledge that these traditions might become more important when immigrants face exclusion and discrimination in the new society (interviews carried out by the authors in 2007).

One of the few national organizations for immigrant women in Sweden, RIFFI, ranks HRV as its main priority and one of the most important questions for immigrant women today. According to Maryam el-Mezouak, who represents RIFFI in the Swedish women's lobby (SKL) as well as working for a women's shelter in collaboration with Somaya, these tensions increase as immigrant women become ever more aware of their rights and refuse to accept the cultural codes of the homeland, particularly true for girls who grow up in Sweden and know no other homeland.

Maryam el-Mezouak notes that gender conflicts among immigrants often are strong, and that immigrant women might even experience stronger tensions and a greater distance in relation to the men in their 'community' than with the Swedish majority society: 'Many women come to Sweden and want to adapt to this country after one month, they feel that they can develop here. But I know men who have lived here for more than 30 years and cannot accept that men and women are equal here' (interview with the authors in 2007). Such an assumption clearly brings another dimension into

the debate between 'universalists' and 'culturalists', indicating that HRV can be seen as a culturally defined variety of men's violence against women, but it is far from clear which culture is being referred to: how the perpetrators interpret and define the culture that supports their acts and, alternatively, what culture means to their victims. The culturalist position invokes culture as a way of understanding the perpetrators and potential perpetrators; the 'universalist' view denies the role of culture. Both perspectives ignore the internal conflicts over the definition of one's culture that daily are being played out in immigrant communities.

POLICY RESPONSES

Since the late 1990s, there have been numerous laws and policies that seek to protect young immigrant women from family violence and weaken patriarchal family codes and controls. The tendency has been toward stiffer penalties for honour-related crimes as well as extensions in the jurisdiction to prosecute crimes committed abroad.

Most recently, we see expansions in the definition of what constitutes HRV as seen in the application to a recent case, in which a young man with an immigrant background was murdered by the immigrant family of the young woman whom he sought to marry, but whose marriage had been arranged (Törnberg, 2006). Honour in this context is used in the broadest sense of the family's authority and the honouring of nuptial agreements. This case embraces two basic principles in the Swedish political and policy context: that gender equality encompasses men's rights as well as women's; and that human rights embrace the rights of children.

The planning and knowledge of HRV crimes is now also a criminal act. This applies to honour killings and child marriage, as well as FGM. The extension of Swedish jurisdiction to crimes committed in other countries, which Pela's case paved the way for, also expands the protections for immigrant women (SFS, 1999: 267). Other legislative measures follow the same path of protections against a family's right to control a young woman's choice of a partner. There is a minimum age of 18 for marriage. Since May 2004, the marriage law does not recognize child marriage or forced marriages carried out abroad. Considering asylum seekers, the Swedish Migration Board has adopted more compassionate guidelines for women applying for asylum in Sweden who face the threat of honour violence. In practice, this should mean that these women will have an easier time obtaining permission to be resident in Sweden

Since Fadime, preventative and educational measures have been the main focus in Sweden. One hundred and eighty million Swedish krona was budgeted (from 2003–07) for HRV, including educational programmes in

schools. The Conservative government has transferred HRV to the policy area of gender equality, and more specifically placed it under the umbrella of men's violence against women.

Despite the infusion of resources and numbers of shelters that have emerged to protect young women, there is much scepticism about the ability of the police and other agencies to handle these sensitive situations. Fadime's case revealed the inability of Swedish social services to deal with honour killings. This has been interpreted in light of their insistence on retaining a 'famialist approach', which seeks to prevent the break-up of a family at all costs, and has left immigrant girls vulnerable (Schlytter, 2004). Social workers have tended to view the immigrant family as a cultural entity with its own rules insulated from the rest of society (Schlytter, 2004). Elisabeth Fritz, a lawyer who has specialized in the area of HRV for the last 15 years, has affirmed that girls turn to her law-firm for help because they are too scared to go to the police or unwilling to press charges against their parents (Larsson, 2006). The children's rights NGOs, including Save the Children (Rädda Barnen) and BRIS, are inundated with calls during the summer from young women seeking help, as they suspect that the vacation back to the home countries of the parents will result in a forced marriage.

The city of Stockholm initiated a large-scale project against 'honour oppression' to be headed by the former expert and criminal investigator on honour killings, Kickis Åhré Älgamo, who maintains that current laws do not offer enough protection for young women and men coming from countries where cultural practices force them to marry against their will (Kristersson and Älgamo, 2007). The line between forced marriage and arranged marriage is elusive in the Swedish context, in which individual legal rights trump special rights and gender equality and children's rights are embedded in law and policy.

CONCLUSION

Why did these honour killings become sensationalized and why did Fadime become part of a Swedish national drama? As the articles on multicultural conflicts in this volume reveal, societies have different threat points and their own response. Even looking across the Nordic countries, often clustered together in welfare state comparisons, we find differences in which issues are pressure points and how they are represented (see Siim and Skjeie, this issue). For example, whereas in Norway the role of religion and Islam has been the focus in debates, in Sweden, not religion, but ethnocultural difference is the discursive field in which these cultural conflicts are played out (Wikan, 2003).

In Scandinavia, gender equality is a salient dimension in debates on integration of immigrants; in Sweden, the intercultural dialogues are not merely inflected with issues of gender equality, they are the heart of the matter. Honour killings appear as a blight, an intolerable occurrence in a country ranked as the most gender equal in the world by United Nations, and in which feminists in government envision themselves as the vanguard of woman's emancipation.

The intense political debates on honour killings and integration can also be viewed in light of the threat posed by populist anti-immigrant parties in the early 1990s (Rydgren, 2004) and the rise of overt ethnoracist parties a decade later. Although New Democracy had a short-lived career, we should not underestimate the impact that their dramatic rise to power had on all mainstream political parties. Nor can one disregard the victories of ethnonationalist parties in France and Netherlands and the anti-immigrant stances of parties in Denmark and Norway. Much like the Liberal Party in neighbouring Denmark, the Swedish Liberal Party has appeared to be the advocate for hard integrationist policies in the Conservative coalition government. However, unlike their Danish counterparts, they support policies to encourage labour immigration, which is coherent with the neoliberal labour market approach of the Conservative coalition. Indeed, they insist that they are not anti-immigrant, but pro-integration. The emphasis on gender equality in relation to the integration of immigrants is reflected in the joining of two ministries (Equality and Integration) as well as the appointment of a Minister of Equality and Integration, Nyamko Sabuni, who has taken a strong stand against any special rights for ethnic minorities, with safeguarding women's rights as her argument. Similar to Hirsi Ali from the Netherlands, with whom she has been compared, Nyamko Sabuni, born in Burundi as a refugee from a Kongolese family, witnessed and experienced traditional patriarchal codes and practices.

An open dialogue around issues of cultural conflict in Sweden has been closed because it defies Sweden's self-image as a good society; an international defender of human rights, a paragon of gender equality. Moreover, the taboo about confronting everyday racism has inhibited dialogue across and within majority and minority cultures. The drama of honour killings opened up the debates between feminist groups and paved the way for cultural dialogues that have included immigrant women's voices, increasing their visibility. The organization Glöm aldrig Pela och Fadime profile themselves as a 'progressive social immigrant movement'. They have published several articles, most recently one at a web forum accusing the NGO Save the Children and government authorities for not having enough courage to publicly condemn HRV, religious free schools or arranged marriages. They frame these practices as discrimination of immigrant youth; as a politically correct cultural relativism, so that fear of being portrayed as racist results in politicians and organizations looking the other way (Paraply Projektet,

2007). These immigrant women speaking for immigrant women have a legitimacy and authority to speak out on 'multicultural rights'; they cannot be dismissed as racist.

These debates bring into stark relief multicultural tensions that are complex and multilayered: between the dominant society's secular values of individualism and between minority groups' cultural and religious values; between parents rooted in other traditions and their children who grow up and live in a society that is one of the most secular in the world, and with a high degree of sexual freedom for men and women.

A simplistic view on ethnic communities as harmonic wholes (Parekh, 2000) lies dangerously close to a form of cultural racism that exoticises ethnic minorities and sees western people as less bound by culture – and more morally mature – than 'primitive others' (Benhabib, 2002). This perspective appears particularly important when analysing the complexities surrounding HRV, often debated in precisely these kinds of culturalizing terms. Furthermore, an understanding of difference, not as a dividing line between 'us' and 'them', but also as differences *among* 'us' and 'them', has the potential to counteract stereotyping of immigrants highly prevalent in Swedish society.

As our Swedish case clearly demonstrates, within the discourse and policy debates around HRV, there is a need to recognize that diversity also embraces diversity within 'cultures', often marked by gender, class, religious, ideological and generation conflicts. From this perspective, culture is not merely understood as equivalent to 'ethnicity', but also in terms of urban versus rural culture, middle class culture, intellectual culture, etc.[9] After the murder of Fadime, several immigrant men's and women's organizations, fearing increased racism and anti-immigrant scapegoating, issued statements questioning what culture actually *is*, and *who* defines it. They made the point that Fadime could not even speak Kurdish or Turkish; she was expected to obey a 'culture' – her father's culture, which was not her own identity.

Reflections on the future

There are countervailing tendencies regarding the future for xenophobic currents in Sweden. The Swedish ethnonationalist party, Sweden Democrats, has made inroads on the local level, but in order to do so they toned down their rhetoric. They have shifted their discursive ground from immigrants as a threat to Swedish cultural values involving gender equality toward another pressure point in Swedish society: immigrants as a drain on the generosity of the Swedish welfare state, a cunning subterfuge for anti-immigration politics. Still, it is important to keep in mind that while they have a mandate in 144 local governments, few parties have been willing to form coalition governments with them (Expo, 2007). Not to be forgotten is

that during the last years when many European societies were closing off political opportunities for immigrant groups, the Swedish government expanded and strengthened its laws and programmes to address ethnic discrimination (Hellgren and Hobson, forthcoming). Nevertheless, the future appears less sanguine; among the first acts of the new Swedish government in this field was to cut the funding of the nationwide anti-discrimination network Centre Against Racism.

Looking at the political opportunities that honour killing debates have provided for diverse actors, we can also see cross-currents. They have given xenophobic actors discursive resources, but they also have opened up political space for immigrant women working against HRV to enter the debates on multiculturalism, gender equality and human rights. On the one side, the public airing of HRV can be empowering for young immigrant women to challenge openly the traditionalism of their families and communities, which can be seen in the surge of women seeking advice and shelter. On the other side, the national obsession surrounding honour killings and forced marriages can pave the way for intolerance toward immigrant groups and ethnic minorities. The sense of mission to protect women's rights can encourage hard integrationism, coercive policies that force immigrants to accept the values and norms of 'the good society'. There is a growing shrillness in the public debates on HRV in Sweden, affirming the limits of tolerance for those who do not accept the norms and values of the dominant society. Developing policies that support all women's rights without culturalizing and stigmatizing whole immigrant groups is indeed a challenge for all multicultural societies. In the good society, which has projected itself as the champion of human rights and gender equality and in which overt racism is taboo, it is even more difficult. It remains to be seen whether the fragile tolerance between majority culture and minority cultures will persist, and whether the debates on HRV will lead to a more open intercultural dialogue on equal terms or short-circuit these channels.

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Notes

1 Recent research shows that ethnic discrimination often prevents politically active immigrants from reaching higher positions within the parties, and dampens their participation in 'Swedish' organizations (Edfast Ljungberg, 2004; Bengtsson and Borevi, 2004).

2 We include either people born in another country or with two immigrated parents.

3 These EU laws, in turn, were largely the result of intense non-governmental (NGO) lobbying at the European level (Hellgren, 2005).
4 Honour ethics is part of the traditional patriarchal culture, and is not a phenomenon specific to the Middle East and Muslims, but also occurs in many other countries and religions. This concept of honour has strong roots in the Middle East, but it existed before Islam and exists also among the Christian population in this area (Koctürk-Runefors, 1991).
5 There is a common perception that young boys will commit or admit to committing honour crimes because they expect to receive lighter sentences.
6 Although he changed his story and appealed to the highest court, Hovrätten, the technical evidence and his prior statements, and the testimony of Fadime's sister who was at the scene of the crime, was enough to convict him of murder in the first degree to a lifetime sentence in jail.
7 Five years after the murder of Fadime, ROKS has however modified its position and states there are certain characteristics that make it relevant to speak of honour related violence. One could interpret this shift from their political approach to men's violence against women to a more pragmatic attitude as adapting to a reality in which the number of women seeking shelter and protection from HRV has increased over the last years. This is confirmed by the women's shelters Alla kvinnors hus, ROKS and Somaya; the latter, e.g. saw an increase of 62 percent of women and girls asking for help in 2003, and it has kept increasing since (interviews with the authors in 2007; Somaya, n.d.).
8 Feminist Initiative (FI) is a group of different women's organizations who see themselves as a radical feminist alternative to the mainstream parties. They have considered forming a separate women's party to run in the next Swedish election.
9 For further in-depth discussion on these different dimensions and multiple categories, see for instance Benhabib (2002), Darvishpour (2004, 2005) and de los Reyes and Mulinari (2005).

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