(De)constructing European Citizenship - Political mobilization and collective identity formation among immigrants in Sweden and Spain

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Abstract

The political construction of a European citizenship and a “European identity” is a project whose support among the diverse European peoples is uncertain indeed. Questions as to how notions of citizenship, collective identity, and the more abstract sense of belonging to a community will be – and are being – transformed by immigration are becoming increasingly salient in national and European discourse and policy. The ambiguous relationship between the welfare state and the increased mobility of migrant workers further complicates the picture. In this paper, I am interested in the role immigrants themselves play in such dynamics.

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Among approaches to immigrants as a political actors, focus has generally been placed on “homeland” oriented diasporas (Münz and Ohliger 2003), or multicultural politics represented by ethnic minorities who, characterised by strong bonds to cultural traditions, defend their right to maintain “a way of life” outside the scope of central state control and majority rules and norms (e.g. Kymlicka 1995; Parekh 2000). In contrast to many scholars who focus on diasporas and struggles for cultural autonomy, I do not see immigrants and their descendants necessarily as bearers of stronger cultural identities or traditions than the autochthonous population1.

My case studies of the Swedish Anti-discrimination movement and the Spanish movement for undocumented immigrants’ rights both represent political

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1Although the importance of “culture” and strong ties to the ethnic community indeed often increase in exile, as external vulnerability augments the need to search stability and security amongst one’s fellows.
mobilisations with a transethnic and universalist\(^2\) form of claims-making. These movements suggest that varied particularist and/or hybridised identities unite under a common frame that transcends ethno-cultural, national or other divides. There are indeed important differences between the two movements. Mobilizing to combat ethnic discrimination appears consistent with European (and national) policy aims. Conversely, the Papers and Rights for All movement in Spain directly contests European immigration policies. Nevertheless, I find that there are similarities between these groups, and that an immigrant experience that is shared by ever more Europeans could potentially form a base for future, more inclusive collective identities.

Immigrants mobilising against discrimination most likely have formal rights, and their basic needs are covered by the social rights of the society in which they reside; undocumented immigrants are at a different level of struggle. Yet, immigrants with different legal statuses coexist in European societies and constitute parts of the multicultural panorama. Indeed, statuses can change, and the Spanish case supports the thesis that immigrant claims-making might follow some kind of Maslowian hierarchy of needs, starting with claims for the right to immigrate and ending with participation on equal terms with the majority population within all spheres of society. Recently arrived, undocumented immigrants initially struggle for residence permits. As they become increasingly established in society their demands shift towards citizenship, voting rights and non-discrimination.

Mezzadra (2005: 118) defines the common experience of non-belonging as the basis for reciprocal identification among undocumented immigrants. Full inclusion furthermore implies more than a set of formal rights. Also regular immigrants, and even their children and grand-children, are confronted with hostility or distanciation in societies where they – in spite of being born there, and perhaps not knowing any other mother tongue than the language spoken by the majority population – still are not considered as part of the same national identity (Lipponen et al 2006). Immigrants’ political interests might in this view spring from them – in Fraser’s (2003) Weberian framework – not being recognised as peers in social life. This experience could constitute a potential basis for the formation of universalist collective identities, that unite people across ethnic, national, religious or other divides through the shared situation of being – or being defined as – an immigrant.

\(^2\) Transethnic means that it cuts across ethnic divides, which may or may not include the majority population. The term universalist is in this context used in the meaning that an agenda, a claim or otherwise has the ambition of representing general or “universal” as opposed to particular interests or identities.
Besides actual political mobilisation, immigrants modify everyday life and practices in the societies where they live through just being there. In some cases, their presence influences the very way citizenship is understood on an interpersonal level. Irregular immigrants in Spain constitute a clear example of this. They take part in society in a variety of ways: they go to the doctor, have their children in school and work for months, years or even a lifetime, but constantly live with the risk of being disclosed and expelled. Formal membership categories, including legal residence or citizenship, however do not automatically lead to social inclusion. The Swedish case shows that exclusion and discrimination operate through subtle mechanisms; through common people’s reproduction of ethnic boundaries in everyday life. Representing individuals who share experiences of non-belonging, the two movements I study challenge these boundaries at different levels. Their activism could therefore, in a broader sense, be interpreted as immigrants’ struggle for a place within the new Europe that is taking shape. More importantly, not only do they have to find a place within given contexts, but also participate in processes that redefine such contexts.

Meanings of citizenship in an age of increased mobility

Marshall’s classical model of citizenship as a set of territorially bound social rights is being increasingly contested. The age of globalisation is doubtlessly also an era of migration, where new forms of transnational lifestyles and communities emerge (Levitt 2003). How to make criteria for citizenship more compatible with global mobility, without giving up the social rights related to citizenship in European welfare states, is a crucial problem for social scientists (Schierup et al 2006). But besides being a concern for scholars and policy-makers, actual meanings of citizenship are being contested and transformed at the grassroot level. My studies of mobilising irregular immigrants in Spain, and the anti-discrimination movement in Sweden, both reflect this although in different ways.

Irregular immigrants and “informal citizenship”

The right to move seems to divide transnational migrants into roughly two camps. The mobile, highly qualified workforce, typically occupying management or expert positions in the global economy, might represent one side of globalisation – the one that sets the rules of the game. At the same time, irregular labour migrants are an increasingly present “social class” in many economic centres of the world (Sassen 1991, 1994, 1996; Benhabib 2004). In Spain, undocumented immigrants take part in society in several ways, but lack most basic rights related to formal citizenship.

Benhabib (2004: 215) argues that democratic societies need to construct citizenship categories that represent how people actually lead their lives. Similarly, Mezzadra
(2005: 33-34) conceptualises a *dual deconstruction of citizenship* taking place in contemporary Europe: the neo-liberal deconstruction, and simultaneously, the disintegration by immigrants who neither can – nor necessarily wish to – become included into the already defined categories for formal membership. Such disintegration might eventually modify the very meaning of citizenship, as increasing numbers of people in European societies live outside the current frames for state membership, and even actively mobilize to demand inclusion on other terms. Suárez (2004; 2005) develops the concept of a participative citizenship, freed from nationhood, which refers to active participation in a community instead of formal (and often passive) membership in a merely legal sense.

**Discriminated citizens and the call for a reconstruction of national identities**

In Sweden, the situation is different. The extensive shadow economy that characterizes southern European countries, and makes it possible for irregular immigrants to find work, is virtually inexistent in Scandinavia, largely due to the organization of the labour market. Agreements between unions and employers’ organizations still prevent the race to the bottom of salaries and work conditions that occurs elsewhere (Hjarnø 2003). There is little space for the development of “informal citizenship” here. Immigrants in Sweden often hold Swedish citizenship, and although there clearly is a relationship between immigrant background and belonging to the lower social classes, precarious life conditions comparable with those many immigrants in Spain experience are extremely rare (Schierup et al 2006).

Furthermore, Sweden has adopted EU directives against ethnic discrimination and reformed discrimination laws to make them significantly stricter⁴, although many anti-discrimination lawyers and activists claim that there is a wide gap between law and practice (Hellgren and Hobson 2006). Immigrants’ struggle for inclusion appears in the Swedish context to be primarily a question of challenging social structures where a notion of Swedishness still invisibly divides people in “A and B citizens”. Anti-discrimination groups consequently advocate for a more inclusive notion of national identity, and, more controversially, for ethnic quotas and affirmative action.

**Flexible citizenship and the welfare state**

The need of a more flexible form of citizenship due to increased immigration has been highlighted by a number of Spanish scholars over the last years (see, for instance, Suárez 2005; Solé and Parella 2003). Missing from these analyses is however a discussion of what such a citizenship model would imply for the welfare state; the risk that easier access would mean less welfare benefits cannot be neglected.

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1 Which according to several NGO actors was the result of their intensive lobbying in Brussels, at a time when political receptiveness was high due to the fear of increasing right-wing extremism in Europe.
This concern is probably symptomatic for a Scandinavian perspective: the Spanish welfare state is comparably weak. In Sweden, similar debates more often refer to the inclusion of ethnic minorities into an existing model of social membership than a reconstruction of the model *per se*.

In Spain, the presence of large numbers of undocumented immigrants is an undisputable fact that calls for pragmatic solutions. Advocacy for irregular immigrants’ rights nevertheless tends to intertwine with neo-liberal discourses on free competition and movement of labour. Consequently, the fact that large numbers of Spaniards reject nationally available jobs in spite of high unemployment rates fuels the argument that labour immigration is necessary (Cachón 2001) – not that salaries and job conditions are precarious and ought to be reformed. Spanish unions generally support labour immigration and have mobilised for undocumented workers’ rights at several occasions. In Sweden, contrastingly, the labour unions have prevented migrant workers from accepting lower wages than Swedish agreements state, and the perception of immigrants as a threat to the welfare state and labour market conditions is widespread.

From a welfare perspective, both discourses are problematic. In Spain, the construction of a stronger and more universalist welfare state is prevented by an acceptance of the widespread precariousness on the labour market and a lack of state interventionist policies. Regularisation of immigrants often means their incorporation into the lowest strata of a society where opportunities of social mobility are low also for the autochthonous population. Logically, it is easier to imagine flexibilisation of a citizenship that means few social rights. Simultaneously, leverage for demanding stronger social rights related to citizenship might be weakened. In Sweden, the discourse on “symbolic citizenship” and national identity is generally separated from that of labour immigration and the (declining) welfare state. Not uncommon, unholy alliances between welfare protectionism and xenophobia take shape. It might seem more compatible with the labour movement’s ideals to talk of international workers’ solidarity and define the threat to social rights as neoliberal discourse and practice instead of labour migrants, but it is of course much more uncomfortable – and perhaps risky – to confront employers than migrants.

In this paper, I will not dig deeper in this problematique, but merely state that coping with mobility without giving up welfare state principles is indeed a major challenge of our time. Instead, my focus lies on *immigrants as actors*, who participate in processes that redefine the meaning of citizenship, both through their actual ways of life and their political organization. I am primarily interested in a sociological rather than legal definition of citizenship, which focuses on an individual’s role as an actual member of society: participation in everyday life, institutions and organisations,
social relationships and responsibilities. This focus does not exclude the possibility that new forms of “social citizenship” eventually could lead to changes in criteria for legal citizenship.

**The immigrant as a social and political actor**

Let us now imagine the immigrant as a social and political actor, underlining the difference between ethnic and cultural *belonging* and the *situation* in which an immigrant encounters him- or herself. Being an immigrant is not an established identity. It is a legal status and a life history that very well might be transformed into an identity, alongside other collective, ethno-cultural and individual dimensions of a person’s identity. A political mobilisation that reclaims rights for immigrants does not necessarily imply an agenda that also demands the recognition of these immigrants’ cultural identities, although neither does it exclude this possibility.

The diversity both within and between many ethno-cultural groups might certainly lead us to question the idea that there would be a common identity strong enough to form the base for political mobilisation. Yet, if immigrants define a common interest in acquiring more rights in the society where they reside, and subsequently to participate on equal terms with the majority population in all – formal and informal – aspects of life, there is indeed more potential for such transethnic collective identities to take shape. Furthermore, immigrants do participate as social actors in their new homelands; on the labour market and in everyday life. They create bonds to compatriots, to immigrants with different origins, and to people from the autochthonous population. One might therefore view the formation of collective identities and political interests as a simultaneous and interrelated process.

Multiculturalist thought sometimes risks to culturalise immigrants and ethnic minorities, by assuming that their political interests are related to strong cultural identities and traditions. The two movements I study, the Spanish Papers and Rights for All movement and the Swedish Anti-discrimination movement, are both mobilised around collective interests (residence permits and equality of opportunities, respectively) rather than group identity. Interests in turn give rise to new political identities, reflecting the way interest and identity are intertwined in political mobilisation processes. Immigrants’ experience of exclusion and discrimination is universal in the sense that it transcends cultural particularities⁴.

⁴ Although this experience is evidently racialised: an immigrant who is defined as “white” will probably encounter less problems than his dark-skinned fellow. Simultaneously, mobilising immigrants do not represent any foreign resident in a country. Exact definitions are hard to make, but categories as “Third world” immigrants or non-EU immigrants are clearly relevant. Exceptions are other Western citizens as Northern Americans and Australians, and the fact that also Southern Europeans may face
Both movements challenge status quo, although in different ways. While the former challenges the fundamentals for territorial control and EU border policies, the latter is formally supported by state and EU policies but pose challenges to national power structures.

**Immigrant identity-formation and claims-making within two different structures**

Geographically, Sweden and Spain are about as far away from each other as two countries can be within European borders. They are far apart in other senses as well; politically and socially. Immigration politics might be increasingly Europeanised; integration and “multicultural” policies are however still nationally defined. Simultaneously, media and political discourses as well as people’s everyday practices and attitudes vary among countries and regions, meeting immigrant actors with support or hostility. In this section, I shall briefly present two movements that I have been researching over the last two years. My concern is with how these actors define collective identity and interest, and what implications this in turn has for national and European citizenship.

**The Papers and Rights for All movement in Spain**

The organisation of undocumented immigrants in Spain started to emerge during the late 1980s. Immigrants from third world countries, most of whom had no legal residence or work permits, started to meet in certain Spanish areas and communities. An awareness of their situation and a desire to change this situation took shape. In 2001, the mobilization escalated through a massive protest against the reinforced Alien law. The platform “Papers for all”, who demanded unconditional regularisation of all undocumented immigrants in Spain, played a leading role during the protests, and was frequently present in mass media. Both my own research and another sociologist’s fieldwork (Laubenthal 2004) indicate that emotion-laden articles with titles as “They ask for help to legalise their situation” and “Death does not need nor discrimination in Sweden, indicating that looks might be more important than belonging to an abstract “European community” for the perception of a person as “different” instead of part of the collective “we”. The word “immigrant” is in itself a marker of status; the Northern American researcher recruited to work for a medical company would obviously not be considered an immigrant, and would hardly identify with a “common experience of non-belonging”. The mobilising immigrants are mostly those who are disadvantaged by global status hierarchies with roots in colonialism, identified as “Others” in relation to the white, western hegemony (de los Reyes and Mulinari 2005). Though often influenced by European directives, specifically regarding the agenda of Anti-discrimination.

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ask for papers” (La Opinión 5.1.2001; La Opinión 7.1.2001) helped form a discourse that supported the mobilisation out of sympathy and humanitarianism.

In Barcelona, 8 churches were squatted and turned into “immigrant camps” during January and February 2001, supported by “Papers for all”, NGOs, trade unions, Christian organisations, neighbour associations, organised squatters and the public. Several manifestations and public protests against the law took place during this time, and the streets and squares of the city centre filled with demonstrators. Even the Pope made a statement in favour of the protesting immigrants, which surely had a heavy weight in Catholic Spain. As the mobilisation was intensified, representatives among the immigrants’ rights advocates were invited to negotiations with government officials. Finally, the amnesty of 2001 was declared, and 334,882 out of 615,377 applications for regularisation were approved. Since then the movement persists, although mobilisation intensity varies strongly.

The irregular immigrants who started the mobilization process in 2001 appeared to act out of desperation rather than strategy, particularly at the initial stage. The one-issue character of the “papers” furthermore creates a situation where it is unclear whether immigrant actors will remain politically active once they achieve their permits. The shaping of a coherent political struggle and claims-making discourse among immigrants, directed at a wider range of demands than the acquisition of the papers, is an ongoing process whose outcome is yet unclear. One indication that this one-issue character is changing is that the movement recently broadened its agenda to include the more general focus on “rights” for immigrants (Papers and Rights for All). If such a development takes place, it implies increasing similarities with my other case of the Anti-discrimination movement in Sweden, and reflects the emergence of more universalist immigrants’ rights discourses and movements in Europe.

Identification with an immigrant experience is central for the movement Papers and Rights for All. When following the movement’s activists as they demonstrate from time to time on the streets of Barcelona, the catchphrase “We are all immigrants” is constantly repeated. In the movement’s internal publications, the collective “we” is also defined as “immigrants”. This way, the more universalist notion of global workers’ interests may discursively include the concept of an exploited immigrant (as a subcategory to the former), which is more rooted in the mobilising immigrants’ own

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6 Links between the Spanish okupa movement, consisting of primarily young squatters occupying empty flats and houses and protesting against capitalism, real estate speculation and “police repression”, and irregular immigrants, were established during the 1990’s. Shared experiences of a precarious housing and labor market situations created boundaries between the collectives, and squatters from Barcelona periodically participated in the platform Papers for all (Morén-Alegret 1999: 191).
experiences. The same agenda is thus embraced both by Spaniards (who interpret the politicised immigrant identity as part of the workers’ struggle) and immigrants (as it is based upon their narratives).

How could a movement that represents extremely resource-weak individuals without any formal rights to make demands against the state actually influence governmental policies? The movement for irregular immigrants’ rights has, as Solé and Parella (2003) state, made evident that non-parliamentary action is an important instrument to achieve rights in Spain. Besides the existence of large informal labour markets, southern European countries seem to be characterised by a higher degree of scepticism towards authorities and state control than Scandinavia.

Suárez (2004: 104-128) argues that there are multiple factors in Spain impeding the implementation of strict immigration control policies in accordance to EU norms. This increases opportunities for actors who demand regularisation of undocumented immigrants. Ambiguity in relation to immigration policies both at the administrative level and among the Spanish public are important such factors. Suárez describes the “legitimisation of legality” as a symbolic component of Spain’s transformation to a modern European country, which not yet has become integrated in people’s relationship towards the state. In a rural community in the south of Spain, factors such as an informal economy, strong local ties and loyalties, and little identification with the central state or with an abstract European identity, provide a structure that both might produce hostility towards outsiders as immigrants, but also, once they have become accepted, integrate them into a local community that cares little of legal statuses. In Spain, state control and bureaucracy are typical targets for popular jokes about corruption and abuse of power. Traditional structures of a certain communitarian self-help and non-control still remain alongside the rapid Europeanisation and modernisation processes, which provides potential for more participative citizenship practices.

This meaning of citizenship is exemplified by the salient neighbour associations in Barcelona, as they embrace immigrants in their ongoing project of constructing citizenship from below. They actively try to build links between the immigrated and the autochthonous populations through local activities. Identification with the local neighbourhood is the common reference point, and the objective is to “promote solidarity, equality and coexistence among the neighbours”. Neighbour associations are centres of the social life in Barcelona’s barrios7, where both local fiestas and political protests are organised. These associations also played a central role in supporting the immigrants who locked themselves up in churches during the protests

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7 Neighbourhoods, often with a village-like local character.
of 2001, and the umbrella organisation FAVB (Federation of Neighbour associations in Barcelona) currently accommodates Papers and Rights for All’s main office.

The “Papers and Rights for All” movement challenges common perceptions of citizenship and political agency, as it represents the political voice of those who have no formal right to express such a voice. The claims of irregular immigrants are ideologically founded on the notion of universal human rights. Hence, the rights and claims of the individual do in this case not only transcend the citizen (Soysal 1994: 142), but reach beyond all forms of territorial boundaries. The definition of citizenship applied by FAVB furthermore lies close to Suarez’ participative citizen concept. Irregular immigrants in Spain contest current citizenship categories and European policies, both through their actual ways of life and their political organisation. Increased bonds between these immigrants and the autochthonous population, within the movement Papers and Rights for All, the neighbour associations, or in everyday life, strengthen ties between people at the grassroot level and do somehow represent a new kind of (informal) citizenship.

The Swedish Anti-discrimination movement and Gringo

Aytar (2004: 70) argues that immigrant organisations in Sweden are currently undergoing important changes regarding the framing of their agendas. His research shows that they increasingly focus on the country where they live instead of the ethnic homeland or their own ethnic group. Within this new direction of immigrant activism, anti-discrimination appears to be a main thread that connects active immigrants’ interests. All immigrant actors I have interviewed during my studies share the experience of having been a victim of ethnic discrimination. To change discriminatory structures and practices is thus an objective that unites immigrants (of certain characteristics\(^8\)) across ethnic divides.

Due to the perceived discrepancy between anti-discrimination laws and actual everyday discrimination, mobilisation against ethnic discrimination is currently directed primarily towards education, opinion moulding and discursive change. Two nation-wide networks mobilised around the Anti-discrimination agenda were

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\(^8\) Remember the earlier notes on global status hierarchies and racialisation. It should furthermore be noted that ethnic organisations in this context refers to associations founded by immigrated ethnic minorities. Indigenous groups, more specifically the Sami population in Sweden, has not been visible as a part of the Anti-discrimination movement, although organisations working actively against discrimination sometimes include the Sami among immigrants, homosexuals and other discriminated groups. The Sami have used other channels to present their claims and there seem to be no explicit mutual identification between the Sami and the immigrated ethnic minorities. Furthermore, the Sami generally claim the right to maintain their traditional lifestyle in the very north of Sweden, Norway and Finland, while immigrants mobilising against ethnic discrimination demand the right to participate in the Swedish mainstream society on equal terms.
founded in 2003, in close relation to the new laws: the national umbrella organisation Centre Against Racism, which united more than 100 ethnic associations and antiracism organizations (www.centrummotrasism.nu), and the national network of Anti-discrimination bureaus, which inform potential victims of ethnic discrimination about their rights, and help those who wish to make a formal complaint take this to court (www.adb-stockholm.org). Besides the networks that are exclusively dedicated to the struggle against racism and ethnic discrimination, several mainstream NGOs – such as Amnesty, Red Cross and Caritas – include antiracism and anti-discrimination as important parts of their agendas. These networks and NGOs are transethnic in the sense that both immigrants and ethnic Swedes collaborate to combat discrimination.

The increased emphasis on ethnic discrimination in Swedish society has also resonated in the agendas of ethnic and immigrant organisations, as the Immigrants’ national organisation and SIOS. One example are the Iranian associations, who hitherto largely have focused on socio-cultural activities and considered politicisation as detrimental for their relations to the Swedish authorities. The Swedish sociologist Abbas Emami (2003: 76-80) describes how the discrimination many Sweden-Iranians face on the labour market has been acknowledged by the Iranian associations and increasingly prioritised in their work.

Among Swedish Anti-discrimination actors, the movement/magazine Gringo represents a rather unique case, and the one that most explicitly focuses on collective identity and discourse formation. Most anti-discrimination actors underscore that nothing influences public opinion more than media, and that the image of immigrants transmitted by mainstream TV and newspapers is generally negative and stereotyped. To challenge this trend, Gringo started their own magazine in 2004, which has been quite a success story (www.gringo.se). The members are frequently invited as “multicultural consultants” by companies and politicians, participate in public investigations, and are involved in several projects to promote young people from disadvantaged housing areas. Founder, editor and leading figure, Swedish-Kurd Zanyar Adami, started Gringo as a reaction to the discrimination he experienced himself. Initially, he called the ethnic youth associations to organize a broad, transethnic mobilisation. They were however not interested in such an agenda, but maintained their emphasis on ethnic identities. According to Adami, these organizations mainly “want to preserve their own culture and live in a parallel Sweden” (interview 2005).

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9 Immigranternas riksförbund (www.immi.se) and The Cooperation group for ethnic associations in Sweden, (www.sios.org), respectively.

10 As Zanyar Adami is by now such a well-known public person in Sweden, it would make no sense to try to obscure his identity. He has also been informed about the interview with him being used in scholarly work and publications. The names of the other Gringo members are however fictitious.
In contrast, the “Gringo identity” is defined by cultural hybridisation, where particular ethnocultural identities mix with the majority culture in their “update Swedishness” project. Gringo largely represents second generation immigrants’ experiences from growing up between Swedish and minority cultures.

“The first generation [immigrants] was a very heterogeneous group, they came from half of the world. The idea with Gringo is that the second generation can be generalized, there are common experiences. We have grown up in Sweden but all tasted exclusion, which is very much related to class. Our culture has developed in suburbs.” (Pedro, 2005)

“Our parents were grateful for their right to be here and have democratic liberties. Our generation doesn’t feel this gratitude, because we see ourselves as Swedes. We are here to build Sweden just as anyone else and demand our rights, we demand to be your equal. And then the problems start immediately.” (Zahra, 2005)

There is an explicit class dimension in Gringo’s discourse on suburban identity. In the words of one Gringo member, suburban identity is commonly taken for equal to an immigrant identity, when it is rather a question of “underdog solidarity” (which, in turn, includes an “immigrant identity”). This definition thus implies an experience of exclusion and disadvantage that also is shared by parts of the ethnic majority population. Parallels could be drawn to the notion of “international workers’ solidarity” within the Spanish Papers and Rights for All movement.

"Maybe we will be Europeans, or citizens of the world. People from the suburbs here can really relate to people from suburbs in Paris or London or Greece, the same things are going on.” (Lisa, 2005)

“In the suburbs, talking to people in the streets (…) There is a frustration in the air, it is hard to control the movements that are emerging. The frustration and anger people feel makes our task a bit ambiguous, we don’t want riots. There is an immense power in the suburbs, but we have been fooled all our lives. We have been told that we are not good enough, that we live in bad neighborhoods, and when you realise that you have been fooled…I want to open people’s eyes and make them see themselves.” (Zanyar, 2005)

Gringo has clearly influenced what is spoken of and how this is spoken of. Their discourse contains potential for the redefinition of national identity, if it has the
impact on people’s hearts and minds its advocates hope and aim for. In any case, it is the most explicit intent of a public actor to achieve such changes that has entered the Swedish scene so far. Their discourse furthermore implies that immigrant or ethnic identities intersect with social class, and that disadvantage not only is a question of ethnic status hierarchies but of socio-economic ones as well. This, in turn, opens for a broader identification where both disadvantaged immigrants and Swedes could define shared interests.

Conclusions

In this article, I have used the cases of two contemporary European movements for immigrants’ rights to show how the established meaning of citizenship might be deconstructed, or reconstructed, from below. Evidently, there are important differences between the movements. Unlike Spain, immigrants in Sweden have never struggled for residence permits. Perhaps one could say that while the irregular immigrant activists in Spain fight for basic rights and legal inclusion, Anti-discrimination activists in Sweden reclaim recognition of their equal worth and inclusion in a more symbolic sense. The Spanish movement would then to a higher extent emphasise collective interest and aim at redistribution, while the Anti-discrimination movement (and particularly Gringo) seeks to reform national identity and aim at recognition. Yet, it would be far too simplistic to make such a division and leave it to that. Exclusion operates on different levels, but effects are similar: perpetuated precariousness; lacking opportunities to ascend in society; a damaged self-image. Both movements furthermore make references to status hierarchies that are universal in the sense that they are not merely defined by ethnicity but also by class, implying intersections between their agendas and autochthonous groups of disadvantaged in relation to the current power structures. Such discourses challenge the unfortunate coupling between welfare concerns and anti-immigrant agendas.

The movements I study highlight important dilemmas at two different levels: at the level of citizenship, how to include the majority society into more inclusive collective identity formations; and at the level of struggles among disadvantaged groups, how to achieve their aim to bridge ethnic particularities and construct broad agendas with strong mobilising power. The irregular immigrants that become political actors furthermore highlight the ongoing and increasing tensions between national and European border policies, informal labour markets and the limited right to mobility that is defined by global status hierarchies.

Without claiming that these are solutions to such dilemmas, I suggest that the same movements also reflect opportunities. At the mobilisation level, shared experiences of
exclusion transcend ethnic divides and forms the basis for a stronger political voice that unites the ever larger numbers of immigrants and ethnic minorities that are not recognized as peers in social life. The way Spaniards within the Papers and Rights for All movement interpret “immigrant” as part of a broader worker’s identity, and the way Gringo defines collective identity as based on suburban roots, indicate that parts of the majority populations share immigrant activists’ interest in challenging current power structures. At the level of citizenship, immigrants and autochthonous share experiences through everyday life in local neighbourhoods. This interaction might give rise to new constructions of informal forms of “citizenship”, in a participative rather than a legal sense, which in turn fosters broader identifications. Perhaps could the neighbourhood (be it the barrio, the suburb or the whole city) function as a “construction site” for the shaping from below of the kind intercultural and rooted cosmopolitan (Appiah 2005) identities that can bridge unnecessary discrepancies between the universalist and the particular in multiethnic societies.

This article was created under the support of the European Union within the "How Many Paths to Florenc?" project. Multicultural Centre Prague bears the responsibility for its contents.

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