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Authors: Katarina Pettersson, Karmela Liebkind, Inari Sakki

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Email addresses of authors:

Katarina Pettersson (corresponding author), PhD candidate, Department of Social Research, University of Helsinki, P.O. Box 54, FIN-00014 University of Helsinki. E-mail: katarina.pettersson@helsinki.fi; Tel. +358504480985.

Karmela Liebkind: karmela.liebkind@helsinki.fi

Inari Sakki: inari.sakki@helsinki.fi

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Abstract

Individuals with immigrant or other ethnic minority background have begun to find their political home in the populist radical right and anti-immigration party the Sweden Democrats. The present study delves into this paradoxical matter by exploring how these politicians discursively account for their ethnic minority belonging in relation to their anti-immigration political affiliation. The critical discursive psychological analysis of blog entries by populist radical right politicians with immigrant or other ethnic minority background shows that their ethnic identity negotiations were highly complex and multifaceted. Typically, an ethnic minority identity was accepted at a superficial, assigned level, whereas a Swedish identity was actively claimed at a level of personal assertion. The paper analyses the discursive resources that the bloggers drew upon in order to construct and negotiate their ethnic identities and motivate their political choices. Finally, it elaborates on the discursive functions of the subject positions that these negotiations accomplished: dividing between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ immigrants, denying the existence of structural discrimination, reversing the racist label and attaching it to the political opponents of the Sweden Democrats, and providing ‘proof’ of the party having rid itself of its racist past.

Keywords

Ethnic identity, ethnic minority, ethnic identity constructions, Sweden, Sweden Democrats, populist radical right, political blogs, political discourse, immigration, critical discursive psychology, subject positions

Author bios:

Katarina Pettersson is a PhD candidate in Social Psychology at the Department of Social Research at the University of Helsinki. Her research interests include issues related to racist and nationalist discourse, radical right-wing political rhetoric, and the social psychological particularities of online political communication. Her doctoral thesis explores the rhetoric contained in populist radical right political blogs in Finland and Sweden.

Karmela Liebkind, PhD, is Professor of Social Psychology at the Department of Social Research at the University of Helsinki. She has published extensively on contact and prejudice between minority and majority members, on prejudice reduction and on discrimination. Other topics of her publications include ethnic identity, acculturation, socioeconomic and psychological adaptation as well as reactions to prejudice among members of minority groups.

Inari Sakki, PhD, is a post doc researcher in Social Psychology at the Department of Social Research at the University of Helsinki. Her research interests include social representations, collective memory, identity, discourse of otherness, and social change in the contexts of political radicalization, national and European identity, history teaching, textbook research and human rights.

Introduction

For the 2010 Swedish parliamentary elections, the campaign film of the populist radical right party the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*, SD) depicts an elderly Swedish woman, leaning on a rollator in a race against a group of Muslim women, who are dressed in dark burqas and pushing prams. Whilst a ticking sound can be heard in the background, the women are racing towards what symbolizes the state budget, aiming to grasp one of two handles saying ‘immigration brake’ and ‘pension brake’. The film was eventually censored by the Swedish television Channel 4, because it was concluded that it exhorted to racist hatred (Larsson and Kallin, 2010). Nonetheless, the SD entered the Swedish national parliament for the first time that year.

In the run up to the subsequent parliamentary elections four years later, however, the message had changed. In the SD’s campaign film we see the party leader Jimmie Åkesson accompanied by two other SD-members: a man with Sri Lankan and a woman with South Korean background. Together, they strongly denounce racism and conclude that the party’s aims – standing up for Swedish culture, traditions and history; supporting freedom of speech and opinion; and combatting honour-related violence, begging and trafficking – are all but racist. The 2014 elections became an enormous success for the SD, who more than doubled their electoral support from the previous elections, now receiving 12.9 per cent of the votes (Elections Sweden, 2014). Their success continued to grow during 2015, with support figures of nearly 20 per cent in December that year (Novus Opinion, 2016).

Thus, in four years’ time, the SD had gone from overtly positioning ethnic groups against each other to placing visible ethnic minorities at the forefront of their campaign. What lies behind the dramatic shift in the party’s public profile is actually nothing entirely novel. The reasons can be sought in the fact that the SD, with their roots in Neo-Nazi movements, have for decades striven to cleanse their image through excluding radical members and actively dissociating themselves from racism (Rydgren, 2005). Starting from the 2010’s, moreover, the party’s popularity among Swedes

with immigrant background has been steadily increasing and was at 8 per cent in May 2015 (Statistics Sweden, 2015). This development has taken place despite the SD being known for their strong anti-immigrant position and their political emphasis on the importance of a nation built on ethnic homogeneity (Jungar and Jupskås, 2014). The present paper, spurred by this quite peculiar phenomenon, sets out to explore the worldview of SD-politicians with immigrant background or ethnic minority belonging. Through examining their blog writings, it seeks a better understanding of how these politicians construct their identities in relation to the social and political world around them. In so doing, the aim of this paper is to provide an interpretation of why and how persons with immigrant background or ethnic minority belonging can feel at home in an anti-immigrant political party. Ultimately, this can help us, at least to some extent, to comprehend the party's increasing attractiveness in the eyes of the voters.

The construction of ethnic identity

The complexity of studying issues relating to ethnic identity is revealed already by the fact that social scientists have for decades struggled to reach a common understanding of how to define the term. Max Weber (1968) conceptualized an ethnic group as characterized by a belief in a common origin and ancestry enabling a sense of community and belonging. This belief is thus what distinguishes ethnic identity from other social identities, that is, our sense of who we are based on our group memberships such as class or gender (Tajfel, 1978; Talfel and Turner, 1979). Nevertheless, like other social identities ethnic identities are always relational and situational (Liebkind, Mähönen, Varjonen and Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2015) and should thus not be regarded as absolute or 'natural' categories (Reicher, 2001).

A central debate within social psychology has concerned whether ethnic identity should be regarded at the level of structure or agency (Verkuyten, 2005). Traditionally, approaches that take society as their starting point have leaned towards the former stance, viewing ethnic identity as something that individuals acquire from the cultural, political and ideological context that surround them. By

contrast, individualistic approaches tend to emphasize the latter, examining ethnic identity from the perspective of individual choices and assertions. It seems to us, however, that neither of these perspectives is alone sufficient to grasp the richness of the notion. Scholars such as Maykel Verkuyten (2005) and Charles Westin (2010) have argued that if we are to gain a better understanding of the complexity of ethnic identity, we need to combine different social psychological approaches, despite their ontological, epistemological and empirical differences. Inspired by this thought, even though we acknowledge the implications that shared discourses and meanings at the societal level have on individuals' ethnic identity, we do not omit the idea that individuals have agency in terms of how they position and identify themselves in ethnic terms. We thus hope that our interpretation will be a multidimensional and dynamic one, rather than reductionist.

Individuals have various optional identities available for them that they may focus on, depending both on the prominence of any certain identity, as well as on the particular social context (Verkuyten, 2005). However, not all social identities are equally easy for the individual to reconcile, like, for example the ethnic minority identity and the anti-immigration political identity of the bloggers we study. Our aim, then, is to gain insight into how these bloggers construct their identities based on the various ethnic, cultural, political and ideological alternatives that are available to them.

Social psychological research has shown that individuals can construct for themselves both insider and outsider positions in relation to more than one ethnic group (Liebkind et al., 2015). Individuals may resist ascribed category memberships (Ellemers, Spears and Doosje, 2002) and/or insist on self-recognized self-definitions not accepted by others (e.g. Liebkind, 1992). Strategies available to members of low-status minorities include categorizing themselves at the superordinate level (Hornsey and Hogg, 2002), self-recognizing their group membership at a superficial level but feeling uncomfortable about it (Ouwerkerk and Ellemers, 2001), trying to leave the group for a more attractive one (Ellemers et al., 2002), adopt the majority culture while retaining their ethnic

minority self-definition (Liebkind, 2001), or 'subtype' the self into a favourable subcategory within the minority group (e.g. Barreto and Ellemers, 2003).

Unlike the more traditional social psychological approaches outlined above, our aim in the present study is not to analyse the bloggers' attitudes towards their respective minority groups, to measure their level of acculturation or to determine the extent to which the bloggers actually identify themselves as immigrants or ethnic minority members. Rather, our interest lies in examining how the bloggers discursively accommodate multiple (compatible as well as conflicting) identities within their accounts. The intricacy of ethnic identities occurs also at the level of discourse: discursive ethnic identity constructions are both multi-layered and complex, and socially negotiated and situated (Merino and Tileagă, 2011; Sala, Dandy and Rapley, 2010; Verkuyten and de Wolf, 2002; Yamaguchi, 2005). Since ethnic minority members may have access to both the minority (immigrant or other) and the majority (usually the 'host' population) groups, ethnic minority identities can be accounted for not only in relation to the majority group, but also through comparisons to members of the ethnic ingroup (Sala et al., 2010).

Previous research has shown that ethnic self-definitions can occur at different levels of identification, which may both complement and contradict each other. From a discursive perspective, identities can be *assigned* or *asserted* (Berbrier, 2008), the former referring to identities resulting from being categorised by others, and the latter to identities that individuals actively construct and claim for themselves. Verkuyten and de Wolf (2002) demonstrated how ethnic Chinese residents in the Netherlands constructed their ethnic identities in everyday talk. Through drawing upon various discursive resources, such as early socialisation, the possession of critical attributes, and physical appearance, the interviewees constructed their ethnic identities at the distinct yet related levels of *being*, *feeling* and *doing* Chinese. Being Chinese referred to a

biological, inevitable identity that had been given to them at birth and that they were unable to influence. By contrast, describing a strong sense of feeling Chinese (or Dutch) due to their early socialisation, and possessing certain talents or group-prototypical features (e.g. being able to speak the language) became ways for the participants to claim an active role in categorising themselves and others along ethnic group boundaries. Verkuyten and de Wolf's study highlighted the complex way that issues of determinism versus personal agency, continuity versus change, and tensions between solidarity towards and diffusion from the ethnic minority group all contributed to the constructions of ethnic self-definitions. Similarly, Merino and Tileagă's (2011) study of members of the Mapuche population in Chile demonstrated how the participants drew upon common-sense and practical reasoning in order to claim, negotiate and resist certain ethnic identities. In their talk, participants distinguished between *knowing* about their shallower, ascribed ethnic identities, and *feeling* a deeper sense of personal belonging to an ethnic group. Together, these studies highlight that ethnic identity is not merely something that people *are*, but also something that people *do* in social interaction.

In this study we apply a critical discursive psychological approach in order to enhance our understanding of how SD-politicians belonging to ethnic minorities construct and accommodate their social identities within their discourse. Critical discursive psychology draws inspiration from both discursive (Edley, 2001; Potter, 1996; Wetherell and Potter, 1992) and rhetorical psychology (Billig, 1987; 1991). The approach views discourse as a production of its historical and societal contexts, and also takes into account the societal implications of discourse (Wetherell, 1998). In viewing individuals as both productions and active producers of discourse (Billig, 1991), the endeavour of critical discursive psychology is to delve into the complex relationship between discourse and the speaking subject (Edley, 2001). The concept of *subject positions* (Davies and Harré, 1990; Edley, 2001; Edley and Wetherell, 1997; Wetherell, 1998), which in Edley's (2001,

pg. 210) words ‘...connects the wider notions of discourses and interpretative repertoires to the social construction of particular selves’, lies at the heart of this approach.

In this paper, we explore how the SD politicians with immigrant or other ethnic minority belonging construct their subject positions based on their identification with a multitude of ethnic, cultural, political and other social identifications. We understand subject positions not as roles, and neither as fixed states or personhoods, but see them as the locations or identities that speakers claim in their talk and text. We are sensitive to the malleability and changeability of these identities; in other words, we do not assume that a person can claim only one subject position for him- or herself in any given situation. Peoples’ subject positions may vary in conjunction with the particular discursive context and with the rhetorical aims of the individual. Following Davies and Harré (1990), we are interested in how ‘(a)n individual emerges through the process of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they [sic] participate’ (p. 47).

Material

The material for this study consists of blog entries by four SD-politicians with immigrant or other ethnic minority background. In choosing to focus on discourse contained in political blogs we are able to study discourse that has been of crucial importance for the SD’s political communication and mobilization of popular support: as a despised political actor, the SD receive little – and predominantly negative – attention from mainstream media (Hellström, 2016), and has thus largely been confined to the alternative public sphere provided by the Internet, such as political blogs (Sakki and Pettersson, 2015). Research indicates, however, that discourse contained in political blogs do not only reach a limited likeminded readership, but manage through journalists to reach mainstream media and a broader public (e.g. Baumer, Sueyoshi and Tomlinson, 2011). Another benefit of studying political blogs is that most studies of ethnic identity constructions have been conducted through utilising interviews as material, a fact which – given the socially situated

character of ethnic identity – implies that the interviewer inevitably plays a part in negotiating the interviewees’ self-definitions. Thus, in approaching the present topic through the analysis of ‘naturally occurring’ accounts of ethnic identity, our study has potential to deliver new insights to our understanding of ethnic self-definitions as constructed and argumentative.

The discourse we examine in this study was chosen according to the criteria that the politicians, first, are of immigrant or other ethnic minority background, and second, that they were active bloggers at the time of data collection. We were able to find four SD-politicians fulfilling these criteria. The first one is MP Paula Bieler whose parents were Polish immigrants to Sweden. The second is Nima Gholam Ali Pour², a local SD-politician who came to Sweden as an Iranian refugee at the age of six. The third blogger is Camilla Jonasson³, who at the time of writing was active in the board of the SD’s youth organization and one of the actors in the party’s 2014 campaign film. She was adopted from South Korea at the age of five. The fourth blogger is Ilona Michalowski, a local SD-politician who was born in Kazakhstan in the former Soviet Union and immigrated to Sweden from Ukraine as an adult.

The period for the blog entries we studied is 2010-2014, a time frame that captures the discourse from the SD’s national breakthrough in 2010 to the parliamentary elections and the party’s disputed campaign-film in 2014. Our aim was to analyse the entries where the bloggers discussed their ethnic identity in connection to their political affiliation and the political debate on immigration in Sweden. We identified the accounts relating to this topic by searching for keywords such as immigration, immigration politics, immigrant, ethnic minority, Sweden Democrat(s), Swede and Swedish. Our final set of material consisted of a total of 67 blog entries.

Method

In choosing a critical discursive psychological approach we were not confined to our textual material, but were able to study the discourse as part and parcel of its surrounding social, political

and historical environment. Our analytical procedure involved three distinct, yet intertwined stages. In the first stage we carefully read the material multiple times in order to identify the patterns, i.e., the consistency and variability within and between accounts in the material (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The patterns we sought for were the ways in which the bloggers discursively constructed their identities within the textual accounts. Given our present research topic, i.e., how the bloggers accommodated various complementing or conflicting identities in their discourse, we were especially interested in whether and how the bloggers discussed their ethnic minority belonging or immigrant background and their political affiliation in the entries.

After having distinguished from each other the accounts where the bloggers' ethnic identities were or were not drawn upon, we set out to explore in detail *how* these identities or locations within the discourse were claimed, and how the navigation between different identities was managed. More specifically, we examined what discursive *resources*, i.e., conversational practices, rhetorical commonplaces and liberal principles (Potter, 2012; Wetherell and Potter, 1992) that the bloggers drew upon when constructing and negotiating their identities. In addition, we were interested in the rhetorical organization (Billig, 1987, 1991) of the discourse, i.e., what rhetorical strategies and devices, such as consensus warranting and disclaimers, (e.g. Augoustinos and Every, 2007; Potter, 1996; Verkuyten, 2013) the bloggers made use of.

Finally, in acknowledging that individuals in general – and politicians especially – claim identities or subject positions for themselves (and others) in order to achieve certain argumentative and persuasive outcomes (Billig, 1987; 1991; Potter and Wetherell, 1987), we analysed the discursive identity constructions as part of their argumentative context. Thus, in the detailed analysis that follows below, we elaborate also on the discursive *functions* of the subject positions that the bloggers claimed for themselves and others. Importantly, we pay attention to whom the Other is, in other words, in relation to whom any certain identity or subject position was claimed. We finish with some concluding remarks about our results and their implications.

Analysis

As we hope to illustrate, the ways in which the bloggers constructed their ethnic identifications were by no means straightforward. Rather, the discourse was characterised by a complex shifting between ethnic majority and minority identifications, at an assigned, external level as well as on an asserted, more personal level (Berbrier, 2008; Merino and Tileagă, 2011). This is not to say that this pattern occurred throughout the material, since at times the bloggers did not touch upon their immigrant or ethnic minority background at all, but rather included themselves in an unproblematised way in the category of ‘Swedes’. Nevertheless, with our present research focus in mind, we chose the blog extracts that we present below on the basis that they, in our view, illustrate well how the bloggers engaged in the intricate navigation between different ethnic identity constructions.

A common pattern in our material was that whilst any certain identity – ethnic minority or majority – could be resisted at one level of identification, this same identity might be embraced at another. Typically, the ethnic minority identity was accepted at an assigned level, yet rejected at the level of assertion. As we will demonstrate through the first extract below, such multi-layered identity constructions occurred even within the same blog entry. This extract is drawn from an entry where the blogger – an ethnic South Korean – is responding to criticism that had been directed at her on the social media after her participation in a campaign-film for the SD’s youth organisation. Below, the identity navigation takes place between an ethnic (minority) identity, on the one hand, and a cultural and national (majority) identity, on the other.

Extract 1: Jonasson, 3 Aug 2014

1 By the way, I do not ‘deny my roots’, but am fully aware of the fact that I am not an ethnic

2 Swede. Like, I have at least one mirror, good contact lenses and a high IQ (we East-Asians
3 and our übermensch-IQ, you know). Yet I define myself according to the citizenship I have
4 had since six months' age, the culture that has been mine for just as long, and the land I love
5 and have given my heart and soul for in order to save. I am culturally and nationally
6 Swedish, and this does not stand in contradiction to being ethnically East-Asian. People can
7 of course be of a different opinion but that I solemnly and unabashedly disregard.

In this extract the blogger immediately explicitly embraces her position as a non-ethnic Swede (lines 1-2). The blogger confirms her ethnic minority identity through ironic references to physical appearance and biological features (lines 2-3). These first two sentences, discussing biological traits and the blogger's ethnic identity at the level of *being* and *knowing*, serve as justification for the subsequent shifting of focus to her early socialisation that has shaped her Swedish cultural and national identity (lines 3-6; see Merino and Tileagă, 2011; Verkuyten and de Wolf, 2002). As has been shown elsewhere (Jurva and Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2015), utilising the notion of love for a country enables speakers to access the national identity of that country. In our present example the blogger, through the use of factual language, draws upon her love for Sweden in order to claim a cultural and national Swedish identity (lines 4-5), and remarks that this does not stand in contradiction to her ethnic minority membership (lines 5-6). The blogger seems, however, to anticipate the potential counter-argument that this simplistic statement might raise, since she dodges it with the self-sufficient conclusion that she does not care (lines 6-7).

At a superficial level, then, the blogger bases her membership in the ethnic minority group on her knowledge of her biological attributes, whilst claiming the majority (Swedish) identity through references to her own feelings, socialisation and cultural identification. What emerges here is a distinction between 'inevitably' being an ethnic minority member and actively claiming a Swedish identity. Thus, rather than simply identifying with either the majority or majority community, the

blogger is able to construct her own position through her access to both groups (see: Sala et al., 2010).

A similarly multi-layered identity-construction is visible in the following extract. Unlike in Extract 1 above, here no explicit distinction is drawn between an ethnic identity on the one hand, and a cultural and national one, on the other. In what follows, the blogger (of Iraqi origin) is discussing a question he claims that he is often forced to answer: ‘You as an immigrant, why are you in the Sweden Democrats?’.

Extract 2: Gholam Ali Pour, 18 Dec 2014

1 I usually begin my response to this question by asking a few questions: ‘What opinions do
2 you think that I as an immigrant should hold? What opinions do immigrants tend to hold,
3 according to you?’ (...) Why immigrants are supposed to have a liberal view on the
4 immigration policy is nothing that is explained. It is simply part of ‘immigrantness’ (Swe:
5 *invandrarskapet*). This is the established view of how an immigrant should be. Professional
6 immigrants (Swe: *yrkesinvandrare*) have bought this hook, line and sinker. When a
7 professional immigrant sees that another immigrant has not completely embraced
8 ‘immigrantness’ it is deemed to be a betrayal. So my simple but logical explanation for why
9 I am in the Sweden Democrats causes anger within the professional immigrant, since he
10 considers it to be a betrayal against the fundamental principles of immigrantness.

11 ‘People who romanticise immigration’ is the second group that gets angry about my
12 explanation. These people have sat around and romanticised about immigration and how
13 immigrants should be. They have various romantic images of how immigrants should
14 behave. But all these people cannot accept that an immigrant joins the Sweden Democrats
15 because that does not match their ideal image of how an immigrant should be. The image
16 these people have of immigrants is pretty tragic. As long as I express my political opinions,

17 they hate me. But as soon as I put on a cap, a couple of golden chains and sing some hip-
18 hop song, they lift me to the skies and thank me for my existence. So I cannot be who I want
19 to be. I can be what they want me to be.

20 (...) It is pretty offensive when people associate your ethnicity with your political opinions.
21 It is as if I would say that all ethnic Swedes must think exactly the same way because they
22 are ethnic Swedes.

In this extract the blogger elaborates on how two groups, ‘professional immigrants’ and ‘people who romanticise immigration’ are challenging his choice of having joined the SD, being an immigrant himself. As it appears, the blogger does not discard this question as irrelevant. Rather, he engages in laborious discursive work in order to respond to it and defend his position. He does not explicitly reject the immigrant or ethnic minority group-membership; in fact he at various points positions himself within this category (lines 2, 7-8, 14-15, 20-21) and outside the ethnic Swedish one (lines 21-22). This positioning seems, however, to occur only at the level of *being* – it is depicted more as an inevitable state of affairs than an identity he is claiming through a personal sense of belonging. The reluctance to fully position himself inside the immigrant category is further transmitted through the blogger’s use of third-person formulations (lines 3, 7, 14) and active voicing (lines 1-3) when referring to himself as an immigrant.

Indeed, though at a superficial level accepting his membership in the immigrant group, the blogger actively rejects the assumptions and attributes this membership is accompanied with: having a liberal view on immigration (lines 3-4); dressing prototypically (lines 17-18); and holding certain political views (lines 16-17, 20-21). The blogger constructs his own position in differentiation from those that he calls ‘professional immigrants’, who he describes as having accepted this stereotypical, ‘idealised’ way of being an immigrant (lines 5-6). Thus, the blogger makes an ingroup comparison (Sala et al., 2010; Verkuyten and de Wolf, 2002; Yamaguchi, 2005) whereby

he differentiates himself, as an immigrant, from the ‘professional’ ones. The contrast is made evident through the depiction of the generalised category of ‘professional immigrants’ as having ‘hook, line and sinker’ (lines 5-6) bought the idealised way of being an immigrant, whilst the blogger himself has through rational choice (lines 8-9) and free thinking and will (lines 16-17, 18-19) resisted it. Not only has the blogger refused to conform to outside pressure, but has done so despite being accused of betraying the immigrant group (lines 9-10) – an accusation that typically does require extensive discursive work by ethnic minority members (Verkuyten and de Wolf, 2002).

Apart from differentiating himself from the ‘professional immigrants’, the blogger also constructs his identity as a response to the expectations of ‘those who romanticise immigration’. These expectations are expressed through extreme-case formulations: if the blogger does not abide by the prototypical, idealised way of being an immigrant, he is despised (lines 16-17), if he does, he is praised (lines 17-18). Later in the blog entry the blogger clarifies that by ‘those who romanticise immigration’ he is referring to left-wing politicians. As we can see, the demands of these political antagonists of the SD are presented as naïve (lines 12-13), unjust (lines 14-17) and ignorant of individuality (lines 18-19). Importantly, again, the blogger presents these expectations as aiming to rob him of his free will (lines 18-19). Rather than providing an extensive explanation for his political choices, the blogger merely refers to his ‘simple but logical explanation’ (lines 8-9) and his own will (lines 18-19) that serve as ‘accounts for not accounting’ (Verkuyten and de Wolf, 2002), or self-fulfilling arguments that are utterly hard to argue against.

Throughout this blog entry, then, a strong sense of personal agency is transmitted: whilst accepting the immigrant categorization at an assigned level (*being*, lines 2, 7-8, 14-15, 20-22), the blogger actively rejects it at a levels of *doing* (lines 14-15, 16-17) and – what appears to be important here – *wanting* (lines 18-19). The subject position that emerges is constructed in contrast to the ‘professional’ immigrant Other, a generic, passive category against which the blogger appears in a

positive light; as an active defendant of his freedom of choice. The fact that the blogger does not altogether reject being categorised as an immigrant, however, produces an important discursive function: as an *immigrant with agency* he has been unjustly treated by ‘those who romanticise immigration’, i.e., by proponents of multiculturalism. This pattern is taken a step further in the following extract, where the blogger discusses the treatment she receives because of her political affiliation within the SD:

Extract 3: Bieler, 6 Sept 2010

1 The fact that I am not an ethnic Swede seems to bother the 'anti-racists' especially much.
2 The times they have realised that I actually stand for my own opinions I have instead of
3 brainwashed been called traitor and self-denier. They have accused me of 'pretending to be
4 a Swede' and wondered how I, as a Polish person, can hold such opinions. In my ignorance
5 I have thought that origin doesn't determine who you are, but I was wrong. My 'Polish
6 blood' is supposed to limit my thoughts to not willing to defend the Sweden I feel at home
7 in, because I am not and can never become Swedish. What about that racism again?

In this extract, through references to ‘inevitable’ traits such as ethnicity (line 1), origin (line 4) and blood (lines 5-6) the blogger includes herself in an ethnic minority category. She detaches the issue of *being* Polish, however, from her identification as ‘Swedish’ at a level of agency (lines 2, 4, 6). The emphasis on her free will and on having made her own choices when joining the SD (lines 2-3, 4) is paramount here: it serves to disclaim insinuations that she is being exploited by the SD as an alibi that would protect them from accusations of racist politics. Through a discourse of her own personal encounters, the blogger creates an image of the ‘anti-racist’ political Other as a holder of classical biological racist attitudes (lines 4-7). Here again, ironic formulations (lines 4-5) serve to add strength to the blogger’s argument. The rhetorical question in the final sentence (line 7) serves as a ‘reversal of racism’ (Van Dijk, 1992; see also, e.g. Goodman and Johnson, 2014; Sakki and

Pettersson, 2015; Wood and Finlay, 2008), by which the blogger transfers the racist label commonly attached to her ingroup, the SD, to the party's political opponents. In so doing, she produces her own subject position that stands in stark contrast to this 'racist' Other: that of a victim of racism, yet a proud defender of 'her Sweden' (line 6). Similar to what we saw in Extract 2 above, this subject position could not have been claimed without the blogger embracing her ethnic minority membership at an assigned level (*being*, lines 1, 4, 5-6). The Swedish identity, by contrast, is actively claimed through using the notions of free will (*wanting*, lines 2, 4, 6) and *feeling* (line 6) as discursive resources.

Extract 4 below (by the same blogger as in extract 1) captures a pattern that was common among the female bloggers, namely, the intermingling of ethnic and gendered identity constructions. As we shall see, such constructions rendered a distinct discursive function.

Extract 4: Jonasson, 8 Oct 2011

1 So: Ethnic Minority. Outside the norm. Woman. Fulfilling all the criteria for automatically
2 being the target of suppression, discrimination and racism according to a collective Swedish
3 establishment. Still I claim that nothing of what Patrik Lundberg [person who like the
4 blogger is born in South Korea] calls racism is actually racism. (...) Whilst others start
5 seeing ghosts and get inferiority complexes because of a big nose, curly hair or a big belly,
6 people like Patrik Lundberg see racism instead and choose the easy road by accusing the
7 society. And who can blame him? Naturally it is easier to choose the victim's shroud in a
8 country where you as an ethnic minority can claim discrimination and infringement for
9 every fixation, something that you then have a good chance of building a career upon – all
10 without being questioned in the public domain.

In this extract, again, an ethnic minority identity is accepted on an assigned level: the blogger *knows* how she is categorised by others (line 1). What the blogger actively rejects, however, is the content of this categorisation: that of being a victim of discrimination (lines 1-4). By making an ingroup comparison to another ethnic South Korean, these ‘ingroup others’ are constructed as unjust exploiters of Swedish society and its people (lines 5-10), and accused of unrightfully highlighting their minority membership and wrongfully claiming to be victims of racism (lines 3-4, 5-6). This argument is supported by deprecating the existence of racism by aligning it with other forms of adverse treatment (lines 4-5). The blogger also makes use of creative and metaphorical language (lines 4 and 7), which underlines an impression of these ‘bad immigrants’ as causelessly taking on the martyr’s role. Intriguingly, then, and in contrast to what previous research on discursive identity constructions among ethnic minority members has shown (Verkuyten and de Wolf, 2002), here the experience of discrimination is used not as a resource in order to associate with, but to *dissociate* oneself from one’s ethnic minority group. In so doing, the blogger reaches a position of a ‘good immigrant’, a ‘subtype’ that serves as living proof of the possibility for immigrants to make it ‘on their own’, as long as you are willing to do so (see also: Verkuyten, 2005).

In the present extract, the blogger makes use also of the notion of gender as a discursive resource to construct her subject position (line 1). Indeed, all three female bloggers typically resisted the need for structural measures to enhance the position of immigrants and women in Swedish society with the argument that both gender equality and ‘immigrant-friendliness’ are already accomplished (see also Pettersson, 2015 for a study of the discourse of female populist radical right politicians): ‘In Sweden the white man’s tax money has financed the most expensive immigration policy in the world. It is in the white man’s world that we women enjoy more rights than anywhere else in the world. (...) It is surely only in the white man’s world that freedom fighters of other colours have succeeded?’ (Michalowski, 5 August 2014). They furthermore actively distanced themselves from a label as a victim, claiming instead that ‘I don’t want to be regarded as a little extra vulnerable

because of my ethnicity or gender, because I am not. On the contrary, I am convinced that I am spared [of discrimination] in comparison to my blonde, blue-eyed male comrades.’ (Jonasson, 10 April 2014). Both these examples illustrate a pattern that was common among the female bloggers: it not only protects but even glorifies white men. This finding is certainly intriguing in light of the fact that as race and gender intersect, immigrant women often face a double disadvantage in society (e.g., Breakwell, 1986). Furthermore, the SD are besides their anti-immigration stance known also for their patriarchal politics and male dominance (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2014; Norocel, 2013; Pettersson, 2015); thus, accommodating both an immigrant and a female identity within an SD-affiliation seems to require a significant amount of rhetorical work. Seen from a different perspective, it might be that claiming the position of the good immigrant woman is an even more powerful one than the ungendered version thereof: it serves efficiently as an indication of the non-necessity of affirmative action for both immigrants and women.

In the extracts presented above, the SD-bloggers seem to navigate between acceptance of an ethnic minority identity at an assigned level, and a rejection thereof at an asserted level. The fifth and final extract that we present below – where the blogger discusses her SD-membership in relation to her Ukrainian origin – differs in important ways from those we have thus far explored.

Extract 5: Michalowski, 17 May 2014

1 That is why the assimilation policy of the Sweden Democrats appeals to me. Regardless of
2 origin we can unite under nationalism and Swedishness. I won't be a Ukrainian in Sweden,
3 but rather a Swede from Ukraine. No us and them, only us. I don't have to give up my
4 Ukrainian culture and identity, but these also don't have to affect my Swedish ones. Even
5 though a part of my heart will always be Ukrainian, my daughter will be completely
6 Swedish. Even though we haven't been part of creating Sweden's fantastic history, we will
7 be part of creating its future.

8 Many Swedes see it as something ugly to be a nationalist.

9 But I think one should love one's country. We have so much to be proud of.

10 (...)

11 How can we immigrants become proud Swedes if not even ethnic Swedes themselves are

12 allowed to do so?

13 We immigrants should honestly ask ourselves the question if we want Sweden to be more

14 like the country we came from? Even if I love my country of origin I don't want Sweden to

15 become more like Ukraine.

16 That's why I'm a proud nationalist and will fight to keep Sweden Swedish (Swe: *bevara Sverige svenskt*)⁴.

This extract provides an illuminating example of the complexity of the ethnic identity constructions within our material. Similarly to what we have seen in the four previous examples, also this blogger positions herself within an ethnic minority category at the level of assignment: she explicates her Ukrainian origin (line 3) and refers to herself as an immigrant (11, 13). In this extract, however, the ethnic minority identification is not claimed merely through references to inevitable biological or ascribed traits, but extends to the personal, 'deeper' levels of culture and identity (line 4) and love for her country of origin (lines 5, 14). Yet also a Swedish identity is actively claimed: she refers to herself as a 'Swede from Ukraine' (line 3), to her Swedish culture and identity (line 4), and implicitly includes herself in the category of Swedes through using the word 'we' on line 9. Categorising her daughter as an unquestioned member of the Swedes by using the extreme-case formulation 'my daughter will be *completely* Swedish' (line 5) serves as indication of the blogger's active efforts to socialize her child into 'Swedishness'. The fact that the two, because of the blogger's inevitable immigrant background, have not been able to contribute to shaping Sweden's history is compensated by their active, personal efforts to do so in the future (lines 6-7). Furthermore, the blogger is able to claim both a Ukrainian minority and a Swedish majority identity

through using the notion of *feeling* – in this case her love for both countries, as a discursive resource (see also extract 1 above).

It is possible to envision two different recipient groups that are addressed by the present blog entry, namely, those groups that would raise counter-arguments to those presented by the blogger. The first group is comprised of the ‘other immigrants’ that she poses her rhetorical question to (lines 13-14), subtly encouraging them not to influence Sweden with their own culture. The second refers to those political actors that oppose the national assimilationist policies promoted by the SD, who here are implicitly accused of not allowing Swedes to feel national pride (lines 8, 11-12).

The tone of this blog entry is, at first glance, straightforward and simple, as is the blogger’s account of how she has solved the puzzle of combining her multiple identities. Yet a closer look reveals the contradictory character of the discourse. The blogger makes a strong case of her being able to join the Swedes in nationalism (lines 2, 16), ‘Swedishness’ (line 2) and in ‘keeping Sweden Swedish’ (line 16) without having to let go of her Ukrainian identity and culture (lines 3-4). Harmonious co-existence of different cultures and identities – within the same country or even one individual – seems, in other words, to be possible in the blogger’s discursive world. On the other hand, however, she calls for unity: ‘no us and them, only us’ (line 3) and for not allowing Sweden to be influenced by other cultures, including her own (lines 13-16). Indeed, at many instances the extract above offers a strong and explicit transmission of the SD’s assimilationist and nationalist politics (lines 1, 2, 8, 16). The blogger seems, in other words, to be caught up with an ideological dilemma (Billig et al., 1988) between policies that favour integration and multiculturalism on the one hand, and the assimilationist policies promoted by the SD, on the other. The powerful finishing slogan, however, works efficiently to allow the latter voice to draw the longer rhetorical straw. As a result, the blogger is here claiming a subject position that – despite her explicit emphasis on her immigrant and ethnic minority identity – promotes an assimilationist and nationalist politics.

Concluding discussion

Previous studies on constructions of ethnic minority identities have been conducted in the form of individual or group-based interviews (Jurva and Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2015; Merino and Tileagă, 2011; Sala et al., 2010; Varjonen, Arnold and Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013; Verkuyten and de Wolf, 2002; Yamaguchi, 2005). In such settings, where the researcher can explicitly prompt for and problematize the construction of the interviewees' ethnic identities, it is perhaps not entirely surprising that these identities are produced in a manner of argumentation and negotiation. The present study differs from these previous ones in utilising individually authored blog entries as analytical material, thus exploring discursive constructions of ethnic identity that occur without any identities being readily 'offered' to the writers, and without them having any explicit counterpart to negotiate these identities with. Nevertheless, as our analysis above has attempted to demonstrate, the ethnic identity constructions among the populist radical right politicians with immigrant or other ethnic minority background were both complex and multifaceted, and shifting between different – complementary or contradictory – identities took place even within the same blog entry. The present study thus adds new insights to the view of ethnic self-definitions as highly malleable and interactional, and as ever sensitive to potential criticisms and justifications (Billig, 1987; Ullah, 1990).

We acknowledge that a limitation of this study is that not all of the politicians had gone through the process of immigration themselves, a matter which may affect their identity constructions significantly. Another limitation and potentially distorting aspect is that three of the four studied politicians were women. However, from a social psychological perspective they all have an ethnic minority background which they need to acknowledge in their identity constructions. In order to gain an even deeper understanding of the present topic, an avenue for future research would thus be to analyse the discourse of politicians with even more diverse minority backgrounds and to extend

the research to other country contexts, where the immigration policy and political climate differ from those of Sweden.

As we hope to have illustrated through the analysis above, a core element in the bloggers' accounts was the discursive tension between an assigned immigrant or ethnic minority identity on the one hand, and an asserted Swedish identity, on the other. One way for the bloggers of solving this tension was to make a distinction between an *ethnic* minority identity and a personally claimed *national* and *cultural* majority one. More typically, the ethnic minority identity was accepted at a level of *knowing* and *being*: the inevitable, matter-of factness of being an ethnic minority member was established through drawing upon biological traits, origin and physical appearance as discursive resources. Yet, at the more personal level of *feeling*, *doing*, and *wanting*, this identity was resisted. The strong prevalence in our material of identity constructions at the level of *wanting* reflects that these identities were being claimed in the context of political discourse, where matters of personal choice and desired futures can weigh even heavier than in everyday talk. Concomitantly, the bloggers could actively claim a Swedish identity through drawing upon their early socialisation, their love and pride for Sweden and their free will as discursive resources. As our final example showed, however, constructions of an asserted, deeper sense of immigrant or ethnic minority identity could also be combined with an equally actively claimed majority one.

Mitch Berbrier (2008) has concluded: 'Ethnicity and race are cultural tools – things used as resources in social action' (p. 586). Certainly, the ethnic identity-constructions that we have explored in the present study allowed the bloggers to claim subject positions for themselves and others, which in turn produced important discursive functions. One such function was the separation between the bloggers themselves as 'good immigrants' and the 'bad ones', who were accused of mechanically accepting a pre-made pattern for how to be an immigrant, and, even more importantly, of causelessly claiming to be victims of racism. This rhetoric gained argumentative power explicitly because it was presented by a supposedly disadvantaged category-member, him- or

herself, rather than coming ‘from above’, e.g. from a white populist radical right politician. As Maykel Verkuyten (2005) remarks, arguments in favour of assimilation and against special measures for ethnic minorities are not only presented by majority group members, but also, for a variety of reasons, by ethnic minority group members themselves. The present study suggests that one such reason might be the context of transmitting a political message that resists immigration and a multicultural society.

According to our analysis, the rhetoric of SD politicians with immigrant or other ethnic minority background has much in common with that of their ‘white’ political comrades: they produce their subject positions against the same Others, i.e., not only against other immigrants but also against anti-racists, multiculturalists and left-wingers (e.g. Rooyackers and Verkuyten, 2012; Sakki and Pettersson, 2015; Wood and Finlay, 2008). In these discursive contexts, claiming an immigrant or ethnic minority identity – even if it remained at a superficial level – allowed the bloggers to make claims about who is and is not racist, and who the actual victims of racism are. Whilst managing to deny the existence of structural racism in Swedish society, the bloggers drew upon their minority membership as well as their independent free will in order to accuse political opponents (as well as other immigrants) of discriminating against them because of the political choices they have made – precisely as immigrants. Such accusations do not only serve the function of efficiently reversing the racist label of the SD and attaching it to their political opponents, but – perhaps even more importantly – maintains the SD’s anti-immigrant political agenda whilst serving as ‘proof’ of the party having rid itself of its racist past. In this regard, it seems that politicians with immigrant or other ethnic minority background may become powerful political weapons for a populist radical right and anti-immigration party. Alternatively, such politicians could, if they wanted, promote a discourse that supports inclusion of various ethnic groups into a broader definition of Swedishness (see Varjonen et al., 2013, for a study of the construction of a Finnish identity). In light of our research findings it seems, however, that they have chosen a rather different path.

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Notes

¹ The title is a quote from Nima Gholam Ali Pour's blog.

² Nima Gholam Ali Pour's blog had been removed in the autumn 2015. However, his blog writings have been transferred to sites such as *Samtiden.nu* and *lab.exponerat.net*.

³ In July 2015, Camilla Jonasson resigned from her activities in the SD.

⁴ *Bevara Sverige Svenskt* was the name of a nationalist and racist movement, one of those from which the Sweden Democrats evolved in 1988.

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