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The Sweden Democrats: Anti-Immigration Politics under the Stigma of Racism

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Abstract

The 2010 Swedish general election marked a critical moment in Swedish politics, as the Sweden Democrats (SD), the country's leading anti-immigration party, gained representation in Parliament. This was achieved despite decades of systematic marginalisation and stigmatisation of the party by mainstream politicians, civil society and the media due to its historical ties to neo-Nazi and white supremacist subcultures. Scholars of the anti-immigration radical right have long understood stigmatisation to be a key obstacle to these parties' political success; however, they tend not to elucidate the contents of stigma against the radical right and the experiences of these parties under stigma. This paper explores the construction of social stigma against SD and examines the conceptual boundaries of the term 'racism' in the Swedish national imaginary. Based on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and print media analysis, this paper furthermore investigates how experiences of social stigma shape the strategies and goals of the Swedish radical right. SD's party strategy is approached through the lenses of popular conceptions of the 'norm' and the 'deviant' in Swedish society, concepts which are central in anthropological and sociological inquiries into stigma, but have been absent in literature on radical right politics. This work illustrates the processes through which anti-immigration radical right parties can, in spite of stigmatisation, negotiate the normality and morality of their politics in attempts to reduce the impact of their historical deviance and to bring their ideologies closer to the mainstream.

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Introduction

While much of Western Europe has witnessed a wave of electoral successes for radical right-wing parties politicising immigration issues, Sweden has for many years remained an exception to this trend. Sweden has also been unique in the persistence of a political culture friendly to immigration, while mainstream politicians across Europe increasingly adopt restrictive immigration policies (Ivarsflaten 2005). Since the short-lived populist party *Ny Demokrati* (New Democracy), which emerged and disappeared with a small parliamentary stint from 1991-1994, no party basing its political platform on immigration had garnered enough votes to gain representation in the Swedish parliament. However, on September 19, 2010, the Sweden Democrats (SD), Sweden's leading anti-immigration political party, received 5.7 percent of the vote in the general election, meaning that the party had finally passed the four percent threshold to gain representation in the Riksdag, Swedish Parliament.

SD emerged into the political scene in 1988, born from the *Bevara Sverige Svenskt* (Keep Sweden Swedish) (BSS) movement and heavily implicated in white supremacist subcultures. Several of the party's founders had been involved in openly Nazi and skinhead circuits, including the neo-Nazi party *Nordiska Rikspartiet* (Nordic National Party) and the fascist organisation *Nysvenska Rörelsen* (Neo-Swedish Movement), and many of the party's early events were attended by skinheads in uniforms touting Nazi flags. However, SD have over the years undergone a profound transformation to distance themselves from their unsavoury party past, expelling party members with extremist connections, publicly denouncing neo-Nazism and mirroring the ideological frameworks of more successful radical right parties like the Danish People's Party (DF) and the French Front National.

Many scholars have recognised that the contemporary anti-immigrant radical right has been more electorally successful when it has been able to 'mark its distance from past extremist forms ... and appear as a populist response to current anxieties' (Hainsworth 2000:1). Eatwell notes that these parties run the risk of being 'tarred by the extremist brush' and stigmatised as reminders of Second World War histories (2000b:364). Today, SD differ very little ideologically from 'model' radical right parties that have made electoral headway, rejecting multiculturalism, advocating major limitations to immigration and asylum intakes and stressing the need to preserve national cultural heritage. Though the party finally gained representation in parliament, they continue to be systematically marginalised, ostracised and denigrated by mainstream political parties, the media and a wide range of actors in Swedish society.

Many scholars of the radical right understand stigmatisation to be a key obstacle to the political success of these parties (Eatwell 2000a; Mudde 2007); however, they tend not to elucidate the *contents* of a stigma against the radical right and the *experiences* of these parties under stigma. Scholars have not explored this, not least because they tend not to write about the radical right

from the perspectives of the parties themselves, but also because they tend to draw heavily upon positive cases, or parties that have succeeded in becoming electorally significant, and to ignore negative cases (Rydgren 2002). The relevance of radical right parties is often measured predominantly on electoral successes; scholarly perspectives on the state of 'failure' are distinctly absent. Contrary to this conventional approach, Williams (2006) has drawn attention to the influence peripheral parties may have in shaping Western European polities. Theories on political party strategy have failed to address how parties may operate under the recognition that they may never be a ruling party. According to Williams, such parties have *other* goals and may seek alternative channels of influence. Drawing on this emerging contention, the central question explored in this paper is how experiences of stigma shape the strategies of the peripheral anti-immigrant radical right in Sweden. Stigma itself is a powerful statement enacted by a wide array of actors in society to enforce a normative social imaginary, in this case surrounding immigration policy and the nation. An exploration of stigma as a conceptual space, rather than simply as an obstacle to be overcome, allows us to understand how stigma impacts SD's strategies and goals.

This paper will examine the social construction of the 'norm' in a Swedish context, outlining the historical development of three elements pervasive in the Swedish social imaginary: egalitarianism, gender equality and democracy. I assess the reality of 'racism' and other anti-norms in Sweden and demonstrate how they have shaped the political debate surrounding immigration. I examine how stigma against SD as social deviants is enacted and experienced, setting the scene for my subsequent analysis of the party's strategies under the circumstances of stigma.

I then explore how SD engage with the inhibiting circumstances of stigma. They attempt to turn the shame-inducing politics of stigma against mainstream political parties, to capitalise on the very moral binaries of good and bad (egalitarianism and racism; feminism and misogyny; democracy and anti-democracy) that are popularly used against them. They strategically draw upon their experiences of victimisation under stigma to legitimise these claims and construct a mythology of martyrdom. Through a combination of normalised, morally acceptable rhetoric and performances of victimhood, they renegotiate their relationship with their audience and the shame of stigma associated with their ideologies.

Blee (2002) suggests that people are drawn to the anti-immigrant radical right for reasons that have little connection to political ideology; what motivates someone to join an anti-immigration group may not be animus towards immigrants. This paper impels scholars to consider collective identity change and negotiations of normality and deviance as important processes through which anti-immigration parties may improve their prospects. It illuminates the processes through which radical right parties attempt to alter (or circumvent) norms against racism and other 'deviant' behaviours and the conceptual boundaries of stigma, to allow for the mainstreaming of anti-immigration politics.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The need for party-centric analyses

Research on the radical right was dominated until the late 1990s by demand-side analyses, concerned with how societal changes and favourable opportunity structures create niches for these parties. While demand-side approaches provide insight into a number of successes of European radical right-wing parties, the frequency of outliers in these explanations impelled researchers to examine the performance of the radical right with a wider lens. Sweden has long been understood to be an exception in demand-side theories of the radical right's successes and failures, as there is significant evidence that there may be an existing niche for a radical right party to exploit: widespread popular xenophobia, high levels of discontent with political elites and flourishing anti-EU sentiments (Rydgren 2010). Kitschelt (1995) calls for us to abandon the idea that parties are the reflection of mass-level sentiments and argues that in order to succeed, radical right parties must be able to seize the moment. Even if favourable opportunity structures arise, radical right parties might fail to create strategies that enhance their power (Norris 2005).

Scholars are increasingly calling for what Hainsworth (2008) describes as an 'internalist or party-centric' examination of the radical right (Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2003). A party-centric approach recognises that radical right parties are 'neither bystanders, nor simply recipients' of opportunities that present themselves. Many scholars agree that in order to take advantage of widespread 'latent' forms of xenophobia,[1] contemporary radical right parties must be careful to distance themselves from past extremist forms (Hainsworth 2000; Art 2006). Ivarsflaten argues that it is impossible for far right parties to make credible appeals to voters on the immigration issue unless they have 'reputational shields,' which she defines as 'a legacy that can be used to fend off accusations of racism and extremism' (2006:1). Though Ivarsflaten's theory aptly draws attention to the significance of public perceptions of a radical right party, the focus on reputation as wholly dependent upon a party's factual history implies that reputations are not flexible and that legacies cannot be renegotiated in the social imaginary. Reputations can, however, alternatively be understood as 'social identities' that are continually constructed and deconstructed by both the subject and the society surrounding it. If we recognise reputation to be determined by both actors, it must, as Goffman argues, be examined by a language of 'relationships, not attributes' (1963:12).

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[1] Rydgren describes 'latent' xenophobia as 'unarticulated negatively prejudiced stereotypes and beliefs, which normally are "taken for granted,"' as opposed to 'manifest' xenophobia, which implies a 'higher level of consciousness' (2003: 48).

Theories on stigma

Scholarly works addressing the relationships of radical right parties with wider society often allude to their marginalisation. Most of these authors focus on the political exclusion of these parties through such means as a *cordon sanitaire*, legal restrictions, or general ostracism (Widfeldt 2004; Demker 2011). The term 'stigma' itself is often used by researchers examining how mainstream parties interact with the radical right (Art 2011:26; Mudde 2007:247; Linden & Klandermans 2006:172; Spanje and Brug 2007:1023). However, these scholars tend not to elucidate the contents of the term 'stigma' and the social and cultural processes whereby a social stigma against the radical right is constructed. The social determinants of stigma and the experiences of the stigmatised have been extensively examined by anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists. There has not been any integration of the literature from different fields to shed light upon how stigma against radical right parties is constructed and contested.

Goffman, one of the foremost scholars on stigma, defines stigma as 'the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance' (1963:12). Scholars of stigma have long examined stigma with reference to widely held social norms and conceptualisations of social 'deviance.' Despite the general agreement that the anti-immigrant radical right risks stigmatisation, the role of social norms has been largely neglected in the research on these parties and, more broadly, on immigration politics (Blinder et al. 2010).

Though this paper employs norms and deviance as conceptual tools to analyse SD's interactions with wider society, I distinguish this work from earlier literature that has seen the radical right as a 'pathology.' Scheuch and Klingemann's influential 'normal pathology thesis' holds that populist radical right values are alien to western democratic values, but a small potential exists for them in all western societies (1967 cited in Mudde 2008:3). Contesting these conventional approaches, Mudde argues that rather than being situated in a 'normal pathology,' populist radical right ideology is not alien to the mainstream ideologies of Western democracy and these attitudes are not shared by just a tiny minority of the European population (2008:11). The populist radical right is thus a 'pathological normalcy,' or a radicalisation of mainstream views (Mudde 2008:11). We can relate Mudde's theory to Goffman's work on stigma, in which the normal and the stigmatised are 'not merely complementary, they also exhibit some striking parallels and similarities' (1963:157). It is important to understand the 'normal' and the 'deviant' as social constructions that are fluid, ambiguous and often incongruous with reality. Indeed, Gellner admits that 'abnormal' immoral conduct may in fact be society's 'statistical norm, and perfectly intelligible to all participants' (1979:127). A society's projected social norms against prejudice may co-exist with the actual prevalence of widespread latent xenophobia, making these norms a strategic target for anti-immigration parties to challenge and renegotiate.

Methodology

The bulk of the research for this paper was conducted during fieldwork in Sweden in the months prior to the September 19, 2010 Swedish general election. The data presented here results primarily from 30 semi-structured interviews and multiple in-depth interviews with local- and national-level SD politicians and activists in Sweden's three largest cities: Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I attended and observed a wide variety of internal party meetings, public campaigning activities, school visits and seminars organised by the party in each of the three cities. I shadowed party organisers and activists in their daily activities distributing ballots, posting propaganda and monitoring how their materials were being handled by election officials. Data was additionally collected from 101 issues of the BSS newspaper *Patrioten* (1982-1986) and SD's party newspapers, *Sverige-Kuriren* (1988-1991), *Sveamål* (1991) and *SD-Kuriren* (1991-2010). Though my research question originally focused more broadly on the party's pre-election strategies and organisation, I found that my discussions with SD activists often, of their own accord, revisited the challenge of stigma and the desire to be treated as a 'normal' party. I used this recurring focus on stigma as a springboard for my post-fieldwork data analysis.

Few scholars have produced research from the perspectives of radical right parties themselves (see Klandermans & Mayer 2006; Blee 2007). In Gingrich and Banks' (2006) anthropological contribution to the study of neo-nationalist parties, many of the authors employ traditional fieldwork methods; however, none of the authors conducted fieldwork with neo-nationalist politicians and activists. Gingrich and Banks mention that anthropologists may make a conscious choice not to conduct fieldwork with neo-nationalists 'for the sake of moral hygiene' (2006:7). Sympathy in this case is deemed impossible because the premises of neo-nationalism and its tenets of cultural exclusion and assimilation inherently contradict anthropology's endorsement—intellectual and moral—of cultural relativism.

Anthropologists have since the birth of the discipline focused on marginalised and dispossessed populations; it is often assumed that anthropologists are inclined to 'take the side' of 'fragile, marginal and politically dispossessed populations' (Gingrich & Banks 2006:24). However, the story of SD is ultimately one of a struggle for power, not only by a stigmatised people but also by a stigmatised ideology. A number of moral dilemmas for the anthropologist arise when studying neo-nationalists, as neo-nationalists themselves could be described as 'fragile, marginal and politically dispossessed populations.' As an anthropologist immersing oneself in the world of one's subject, it is one's duty to de-politicise the framework of inquiry and deconstruct the social context which allows us to deem the subject 'unsympathetic.'

Gingrich and Banks thus pose an important question for the anthropologist studying neo-nationalist movements: how is fieldwork best pursued under conditions which do not allow for any 'advocacy' by the anthropologist? (2006:11). My presence as an Indian-American woman at SD

campaigning events inevitably drew attention from bystanders, reporters and other observers. I experienced responses ranging from interested curiosity—upon which I carefully explained my position as a researcher—to hostility. My frequent presence undoubtedly influenced the image projected by the party to onlookers and to fellow party members, many of whom were equally puzzled by my presence. Though this paper explores how SD manage their 'problematic identity,' it is worth noting that on numerous occasions I was forced to manage and negotiate my own problematic identity as a dark-skinned researcher of immigrant background among anti-immigrant party activists.

The moral dilemmas of fieldwork with and the production of a paper built on data from radical right party activists leave the researcher knee-deep in quandaries: for example, how will this body of work ultimately affect the legitimisation of the party? The activists I met with often mentioned that the few Swedish researchers interacting with them often 'distorted' their statements and 'used them against the party.' I recognise that I, like any anthropologist inquiring about his/her subjects' identities, may have effectively been a springboard for SD to express their *desired* social identity rather than, perhaps, their actual social identity. Over the course of my fieldwork, I was, in effect, an audience for the party's drama. Indeed, party activists themselves highlight that even party statutes, newspapers and official discourse often 'have nothing to with content but everything to do with tactics' (Dewinter 2004 cited in Goodwin 2008). Accepting this probability, I use the data collected to examine how the party *aims to* present itself and critically analyse party behaviour and performances with a nuanced understanding of SD's factual party history in mind. I understand this data to be reflective of SD's *performative strategy*, rather than of their objective reality.

Norms and Anti-Norms in the Swedish Social Imaginary

Establishing the 'norm': Democracy, Egalitarianism, and Gender Equality

Sociologists have long understood social norms to be widespread beliefs that persons ought to assume certain behaviours in certain situations (Hechter & Opp 2001:xi). A 'robust and complex' system of expectations, or norms, is built by members of a group, constituting a 'social imaginary' (Fine 2001:139; Taylor 2004). The three elements of the Swedish national imaginary expanded upon in this paper are democracy, egalitarianism, and gender equality. These three characteristics are merely several of undoubtedly numerous normative aspects of modern Swedish society; however, this paper focuses on these particular elements because they are the norms that are called upon when SD are publicly sanctioned by politicians, media, civil society and counter-demonstrators. SD have quite popularly been understood as the *anti-norm* with reference to these particular social expectations. Scholars across disciplines agree that social norms become most visible when those who violate them are vulnerable to sanctioning (Hechter & Opp 2001).

Though social norms are unwritten and their context and rules for application are 'imprecise,' they do not simply occur without explanation but are taught and 'emerge through socialisation' (Fine 2001:140). The dichotomy between the accepted 'norm' and the 'deviant' may be reinforced through processes of stigmatisation (Ainlay et al. 1986). This section, however, indicates that the norm and the deviant in a Swedish context share some key features and are closer than such a dichotomy would indicate, impelling us to reconsider accusations that SD represent a trend that is entirely 'un-Swedish' (Sahlin cited in *Dagens Nyheter* 2010).

There are several major threads running through Swedish history that are reinforced, remembered and capitalised upon by dominant politicians. The Social Democrats, the oldest and largest political party in Sweden who have governed the country for 65 of the past 79 years, were instrumental early on in promoting **democracy** as a quality that was intrinsically Swedish. Ingrained in this Social Democratic notion was the understanding that Swedes were not only inherently democratic and freedom-loving, but egalitarian. Democracy and **egalitarianism** were thus not simply a matter of ideology or constitutional writing, but were understood to be rooted in the very soul of the people. They became part of a national narrative that cast the Swedes as 'having democracy in the blood' (Trägårdh 2002:77).

Part of a broader concept of *jämlikhet* (equality) is *jämställdhet*, or **gender equality**, which is an 'axiomatic component of the Swedish welfare model and "Swedishness" itself' (Rabo 1997:83). There is a 'total consensus' on gender equality in Swedish political culture, and it is infused into public institutions through a 'systematic institutional approach' known as 'gender mainstreaming' (Cos-Montiel 2008:206). Cos-Montiel stresses that cultural norms of gender equality play important roles in the success of such institutional arrangements, which have performed less successfully in other nations. Democracy, egalitarianism and gender equality are thus pervasive norms in the Swedish social imaginary, influential in modern Swedish politics and reinforced by a shared belief in the particularity and morality of these characteristics.

The historical reality of the 'anti-norm'

It is important to recognise that identity norms are neither a statistically proven reality nor a cognitive illusion, but rather, shared understandings of 'ideal' persons based on a society's historical trajectory (Goffman 1963:126). These understandings are, as Douglas states, 'the memory of what was most socially successful in producing the feelings we seek in life,' and are enforced by the 'powerful feeling' of shame (1977:62). As such, social norms are shaped by the politics of remembrance, through which the elements of history that are unsavoury and perhaps shameful become understood as inherently un-Swedish, the 'anti-norm' or the 'deviant,' despite their very real presence in the nation's past, and perhaps even present.

Colla argues that contradictions in the 'democratic' actions of the Swedish political elite have been 'glossed over' by historians (2002:134). He attributes this to the enduring notion that democracy has been a perpetual norm and presence in Swedish society, 'if not in reality then at least in spirit' (Colla 2002:134). Though it has been taken for granted that Swedish institutions could be nothing other than democratic, the reality of Swedish democracy is more problematic than the idealistic portrayal of Sweden as 'the most democratic and equal nation in the world' (Trägårdh 2002:123).

Several scholars have touched upon the tinges of xenophobia and racism in early Swedish practices of 'democracy.' Homogeneity was considered necessary for the functioning of Swedish social democracy in the early 20th century and Sweden had a history of unfriendly policies towards ethnic minorities, including the indigenous Saami (Rosenberg 2002, Milani 2008). Sweden's early restrictive immigration policies indicate the dramatic transformation required to reinvent Sweden as a multicultural success story.

Sweden also harbours an often overlooked history with regard to the Second World War. The first Swedish Nazi party was formed in 1924, and it was followed by a long list of extremist parties and movements (Widfeldt 2007). Though inter-war Swedish extremism was numerically limited and its impact was never great, its membership was not insignificant in a Scandinavian comparison. Lööw estimates that the Swedish Nazi parties had a combined total of approximately 30,000 open and secret members in the mid 1930s, accounting for nearly 0.8 percent of the Swedish electorate, which is higher than such pre-occupation figures for extremist parties in Denmark and Norway (Widfeldt 2007). However, by the end of the 1930s, membership and electoral support had significantly declined, and Swedish Nazi extremism had diminished by the outbreak of the war.

While Sweden's policy of neutrality during the Second World War is well known, some scholars have brought to light the passive and antiheroic nature of Swedish diplomacy during the war. Sweden avoided invasion by accepting the transit of German troop transports and maintaining agreements to supply Germany with high quality iron, wood, coal and semi-finished goods (Bjørgo 1997). Colla (2002) describes the reality of Swedish neutrality as highly undemocratic, with laws passed restricting the free flow of information from the beginning of the war. Furthermore, the wave of refugees fleeing the Third Reich materialised the xenophobic sentiments that underlay the Social Democratic ideals in the early 20th century. The Social Democrats were instrumental in propagating fears about war-time immigration, and the early war period in Sweden witnessed a growing discourse that characterised the presence of particular ethnic groups as a danger to Swedish society.

Sweden's surrender to German demands has been suppressed in the common consciousness, buried by collective post-war efforts to remodel Sweden as a beacon of democracy and equality in Europe, a model for the world. Taylor posits that societies continually need new ways of telling their stories, or modes of narration, whereby the projected growth of the society entails

'coming to see the right moral order' (2004:176). He claims 'the story (or myth) of progress' to be one of the most important modes of narration (Taylor 2004:176). A renewed emphasis on modernity was an effective means of washing away Sweden's war-time history and distancing Sweden from the failure of German nationalism. These kinds of dramatic shifts in national ideology require an active and conscious effort in the politics of remembrance. It was thus necessary for historians, social scientists, politicians and a wide array of actors to participate in the forgetting and suppressing of certain events and the reinventing of a national ideology based on Sweden's foundational threads or 'ideals,' including the three 'normative' elements presented here.

The conceptual boundaries of 'racism'

Considering the country's controversial status during the war and the reality of the anti-norm, Sweden's ability to completely re-invent its national ideology and claim moral ground is remarkable. At the end of the war, the economic and political success of post-1933 Social Democratic Sweden was juxtaposed by both Swedes and foreign observers with the 'contemporary collapse or crisis of democracy elsewhere' (Trägårdh 2002:91). However, some of the most 'far-reaching prophecies' of Sweden's influence on the world came from inside Sweden itself, indicating a collective effort within Sweden to reinvent the nation's image (Ruth 1984:6). Consumed by the notion that Swedes were 'the people of the future,' it was thought there was little to learn from the past, giving way to an ahistorical sense of superiority: Sweden as a model of modernity to be emulated.

Out of Sweden's appetite for humanistic modernity developed a sense of global duty and awareness that the state had a responsibility for the well-being of migrants, particularly refugees. Swedish scholar Lars Gustafsson evokes this relationship in his description of Sweden as the 'world's conscience' (Ruth 1984:6). Sweden shifted from a model of strict 'Swedishisation' and assimilation to one of multiculturalism, inviting and fostering cultural diversity, and the 'Swedish model' came to connote openness and inclusivity. In 1975 Sweden was officially proclaimed a multicultural society, a term that has for decades defined Swedish immigration policy. Sweden's immigration policy is internationally renowned for its openness and the array of rights granted to newcomers. In the 2007 Migrant Integration Policy Index, Sweden's migration policies rank the highest in integration practices of all 27 European countries included in the study (Nielssen et al. 2007).

There are high stakes involved in maintaining a 'superior' standard of democracy and egalitarianism in Sweden (Trägårdh 2002:91). While, as Schain et al. are careful to note, the emergence of radical right parties does not necessarily constitute a 'democratic crisis,' the political environment is certainly changed and manipulated by these parties, who could gain the power to 'legitimis[e] policies founded on racism and intolerance' (2002:4). The lofty moral standards to which Swedish society are held (and the massive efforts in collective identity change involved in order to

attain these standards) are threatened by the possibility of a power-wielding radical right party, particularly one tarred by a neo-Nazi and fascist party history.

Bicchieri (2006) argues that norms can be 'cued' or made salient in particular environments. The norm or ideal of egalitarianism becomes salient when threatened and manifests itself in the self-protective measure, *anti-racism*. According to Goffman (1963), one element of stigma management is the use of specific 'stigma terms' in daily discourse as a source of imagery against the stigmatised, 'typically without giving thought to the original meaning' (1963:15). Racism as a concept is commonly loathed in public discourse, but the conceptual boundaries of the term 'racism' and a 'racist' stigma vary by national context.

Ivarsflaten claims that widespread social norms of racial equality can be circumvented by parties with positive legacies, but not by parties with extremist or 'ultra-nationalist' legacies, like SD (2006:6). While SD's tarnished party history certainly impairs its ability to evade social norms against racism, it is not simply neo-Nazi histories that permit accusations of racism in Sweden. When *Folkpartiet* (The Liberal Party), a party with a positive legacy, suggested a language test as a condition for Swedish citizenship in the 2002 election campaign, the party was widely accused by politicians and the media of racism and pandering to the extreme right (Wikstrom 2010). The boundaries of 'racism' ingrained in the Swedish imaginary clearly stray beyond simply the existence of extremist legacies.

Bonnett offers a helpful starting point in demarcating the boundaries of racism in a particular space: 'Since anti-racism is a negative category, defined in opposition to something considered bad, a good starting point in any attempt to demarcate its different forms is by reference to what it is that anti-racists object to' (2000:5). The high stakes in Sweden, identified earlier as the moral standard to which Swedish self-understanding is held, provide a framework for understanding the characteristics that Swedish anti-racism opposes: an attack on the Swedish open-door immigration policy is an attack on the moral high ground on which these Swedish policies reside. The mobilisation of anti-immigrant attitudes is thus understood not just to be deviant, but as an outright threat to this moral self-understanding, and is conceptually incorporated into the broader threat of 'racism.'

The aversion to anti-immigrant sentiment in Sweden is visible in the unwritten codes of conduct dictating the public debate on immigration policy. Mainstream politicians rarely make anti-immigrant remarks and those that do have often been forced to resign (Art 2011; Petersson 2006). Dahlström and Esaiasson (2009) argue that the established parties in Sweden have deliberately chosen to not exploit the immigration issue and that party elites have not responded to the reality of anti-immigrant policy views prevalent among Swedish citizens. The topic of immigration in Sweden has generated its own set of permissible discourses and notions of political correctness.

Taguieff argues that, ironically, anti-racist discourses often allude to overtly nationalist symbols (Lentin 2004). While Sweden's anti-racist discourse does not employ overt nationalism, it

does draw upon idealisations of constructed national norms which may not necessarily resonate with the lived experience of most Swedes. The notion that 'racism is foreign' is outlined by Bonnett as a main tenet of anti-racism, maintaining that racism 'has been brought in from outside and represents a malignant foreign body within the national community' (2000:5). Social Democratic leader Mona Sahlin highlights this attitude, stating, 'SD are an un-Swedish phenomenon and should remain so' (*Dagens Nyheter* 2010). These understandings exemplify the practice of 'structural nostalgia' outlined by Herzfeld, where images of an 'Edenic order' without racism are understood to be the Swedish norm in order to position racism as the inherently un-Swedish 'other' (1997:109).

However, racism and xenophobia are neither foreign nor merely a distant past in today's Sweden. Measured participation in the Swedish neo-Nazi scene is numerically much larger than in Denmark and Norway; by 2000, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) estimated that Sweden had the second highest level of racial and extreme right violence in Europe, after Germany (Lööw 1998; Pred 2000). While Swedish politicians have for decades proudly touted the banner of multiculturalism, the ideologies behind these policies do not necessarily translate directly to popular sentiment. Throughout the 1990s, a majority of Swedish voters were in favour of reducing the number of asylum seekers, peaking at 65 percent in 1992. These attitudes declined slightly over the course of two decades, reaching 45 percent in 2007 (Rydgren 2010:65). Data from the International Social Survey indicates that in 1995 Swedish voters were just as opposed to immigrants and immigration as voters in other Western European countries. The EUMC indicated that these statistics had changed very little by 2000 (Rydgren 2010).

Despite these negative outlooks, recent statistics from the SOM Institute do indicate that Swedes are more positive about immigration and refugee reception today than any other year since the Institute began its investigation in the early 1990s (Lindohf 2010). On the European Social Survey chart mapping anti-immigrant attitudes across Europe in 2002, Sweden is notably the lowest of all European countries, averaging 44 on a 100-point attitudinal scale (ESS 2002). However, Dahlstrom and Esaiasson (2009) question these depictions of Sweden as the 'most tolerant' by indicating that measures of attitudes towards *specific* policy proposals clearly suggest that the general public supports more restrictive immigration policy. The rise in votes for the Liberal Party following their controversial language test proposals in 2002, despite accusations of racism, indicates that their criticism of immigration policy was not as far-fetched from voters' imaginaries as the accusations held. The existence of popular xenophobia in Swedish society indicates that the 'deviant,' anti-immigration sentiment, and the reality of the 'norm' are not as dissimilar as the deviant-norm dichotomy would suggest. This paper has likewise indicated that the reality of the anti-norm was not insignificant in shaping the norm. If, as Douglas posits, it is societies undergoing social transitions that produce a protective reaction, then the growing reality of popular xenophobia and concern about immigration may be met by a protective emphasis on egalitarian norms and stigma against the anti-

norm to diminish the threat (1977:77). Douglas terms those who react to social transitions in this manner 'reactionary stigmatisers' (1977:77).

Kierkegaard states about offensive ideologies, 'the degree of offence held depends on what passion a man has for admiration' (Gellner 1979:118). Given the admiration at stake in the Swedish context, it is not surprising that a deep-seated aversion to even the mildest forms of 'racism,' even criticism of immigration, is so prevalent. The maintenance of a 'racist' stigma becomes a normative expectation in Swedish society and is enacted not only by institutional elites but by a broad range of actors in civil society and the general public.

Experiencing Stigma

Stafford and Scott describe the usage of 'labels of inferiority' against the stigmatised to reinforce their outsider status (1986:80). SD have been denigrated as 'racists' by politicians across the political spectrum. Lars Ohly, the leader of the Left Party, recently called SD a racist party with 'disgusting' ideologies that 'aim to divide society' (Tanaka 2010). Social Democratic leader Mona Sahlin described the election as a great loss for democracy because a party with 'roots in racism' garnered a place in the Swedish parliament (*Dagens Nyheter* 2010). Every society has mechanisms of social control to ensure that its members conform to its norms (Becker and Arnold 1986), and a heavy social stigma ensuing from the label 'racist' is evident in the Swedish case.

Marginalisation, designed to restrict the expression of racism and xenophobia in public spheres, has been described as a common reaction to the far right (Widfeldt 2004). Marginalisation is frequently enacted through laws against racist remarks, restrictions against extreme right groups, and the formation of coalitions to ensure that an extreme right party is excluded from power. An example is manifested in the *cordon sanitaire* erected by mainstream parties against the Swedish Democrats, whereby these parties have avoided any kind of collaboration and any anti-immigration rhetoric (Rydgren 2005). The stigmatisation of SD is, however, more far-reaching than simply political coalitions   excluding the party.

The stigmatisation of SD occurs on nearly every level of the party's existence. Informants recount having lost their jobs, often numerous times, when their activities with SD were made public. The party regularly reports that they are unable to rent office space, book spaces for meetings or hold the same campaign activities as mainstream parties, both because they fear attacks or violence against them and because they are discriminated against and barred from doing so. Every SD interviewed in this study recalled fellow candidates who had their windows smashed during election periods or recounted personal experiences of violent threats. The national headquarters of the party lies in a parking garage in Southern Stockholm with no signs or indications of their presence, the entrance an unmarked blue door with no doorknob. Local party leaders mention that this is partially for their own safety, but also because renters would often refuse them.

The stigma against SD was employed with particular force during the months leading up to the September 2010 election. When SD erected their first *valstuga*, a Swedish election hut occupied by political parties and traditionally arranged in *Sergels torg*, the main square in Stockholm, the hut was destroyed overnight by anti-racist activists. Sweden Democrats in Uppsala reported that anti-racist activists threw paint at the party's election hut and spat at party activists. The party's website was also attacked numerous times by hackers and others staging group server overloads during the campaigning period. The party devotes a significant portion of its campaigning efforts to checking that its campaign materials and ballots are handled democratically; on numerous occasions, party activists in Stockholm and Gothenburg mentioned that local postmen had not delivered their campaign materials to some households or that their ballots had been stolen from voting booths. Aside from organised anti-racist activism and attempts to inhibit their electoral capabilities, the party is generally treated as a pariah.

The stigma against the party is further reinforced by the media. Prominent Swedish media outlets upheld a ban on all SD advertisements until 2006, when they agreed to implement a policy of inspecting and making judgments on all advertisements individually. In September 2009, one major Swedish tabloid, *Aftonbladet*, announced another policy refusing to publish SD advertisements (Helin & Mellin 2009). Despite SD's attempts to distance themselves from their extremist past, the general public understanding of SD is that they are a party of 'racist, neo-Nazi lunatics.' A journalist reporting on SD for the Gothenburg paper *GT* states that SD are 'almost like a freak show' and jokes to me that I will need a 'brainwash' after my fieldwork. SD are aware of the negative images that plague them and go to great lengths to counter them. As one party activist in Gothenburg, states, 'We want people to see we aren't scary monsters.'

Though stigma is quite systematically enacted against SD, Ainlay et al. emphasise that stigma is not a static reflection of culture, but a cultural process (1986:12). Horne describes those who take the risk of public disapproval and challenge social norms as 'innovators' who must 'repeatedly engage in new strategies' (2001:8). Like Horne, Douglas grants these groups credit for their entrepreneurial spirit, positing that all deviance is 'creative' (1977:13). The following sections will examine SD's creative strategies under stigma and how the party communicates its identity to the wider world with the aim of relieving stigma and bringing its ideologies closer to the mainstream.

Circumventing Stigma

The party understands their audience to be the electorate, or the Swedish people, to whom they explicitly appeal in their campaigns, advertisements and public performances; for example, the party states that they are 'calling upon the Swedish people' in their recent campaign against 'rape perpetrated by immigrants' (*SD-Kuriren* 2001c). As in any variety of populism, the 'Swedish people' are understood to be distinct from the political elites 'having a monopoly of power' (Sagarin

1977:12). Benford and Hunt argue that it is against these more powerful antagonists that social movements 'compete to affect audiences' interpretations' (1992:38). The question then arises how a stigmatised radical right movement fosters the conditions under which audience members are willing to take the risk of social sanction and consider affiliating themselves with the radical right.

Theorists have hypothesised that growing public pessimism, anxiety and disaffection with political elites and immigration are prerequisites for the emergence of radical right parties (Betz 1994, Rydgren 2002, Norris 2005). The use of conspiracy theories and enemy discourses to foster a culture of disaffection are well-documented in literature on the anti-immigrant radical right; less is known, however, about how these parties lend legitimacy or a sense of normalcy to these claims, particularly when the radical right is widely considered unacceptable and offensive. The following sections examine how SD interact with the social norms often used to counter them, playing upon these norms and constructing an identity of victimhood to pull their audience into ideologies that seem to contradict these very norms.

Banks describes neo-nationalist parties as engaging in performances with 'an element of showmanship, of awareness of an audience, and a manipulation of symbols' (2006:52). The following sections support Banks' characterisation, as they demonstrate that SD script their political performances with an awareness of their audience and tactfully play upon the exact languages and emotions popularly used to exclude them from the Swedish social imaginary.

The liberal discourse of illiberal politics

SD take hold of the language of shame and moral denigration that is spoken towards them and, in turn, use this language against their adversaries. Let me give a straightforward example: the party has been described with language typically associated with mental illness, which labels their nationalism a 'sickly and pathological craze' led by 'lunatics' and 'nutcases,' and SD activists likewise describe Swedish mainstream politics as 'schizophrenic' and 'crazy' (*SD-Kuriren* 2007a, 1992b). More broadly, SD sustain the dramatic tensions upheld against them, but use them in their favour. This section outlines how SD manage the tensions of what Baumann terms 'the binary grammar of "we are good, so they are bad,"' in the Swedish case, the binaries of egalitarianism and racism, feminism and misogyny, and democracy and anti-democracy (Baumann 2004:19).

Anti-racism and egalitarianism

Accusations of racism nearly universally carry a strong element of shame, indicative in the popular statement, 'I'm not a racist, but...' (Blum 2002; Ivarsflaten 2006). Just like many other extreme right parties, SD adopt anti-racism as a weapon against the very groups that accuse them of racism, throwing this accusation upon immigrants and mainstream politicians to suggest that they promote discrimination against the Swedish people. Perhaps the party's most conspicuous strategy to

renegotiate who embodies an anti-norm like the 'racist,' involves drawing attention to scholars, public figures or party members of immigrant background who lend credibility to their perspectives. The party invited Farshad Kholghi, an actor and an Iranian immigrant to Denmark, to speak at their Islam Seminar in Gothenburg in September 2010; Kholghi announced that 'people are enslaved by Islam' and compared the ignorance of intellectuals in Scandinavia to Nazi ignorance.

In his speech at the Islam Seminar, Kholghi affirmed the irony of an immigrant being accused of racism, exclaiming to the crowd, '*I'm* called a racist in Denmark. They call me right-wing. Is it right-wing to say you like freedom? To say women are equal? To say, "stop harassing Jewish people"? If that is the case, I am right-wing. And I'm so damn happy I'm not left-wing.' The party's International Secretary, who invited Kholghi to speak at the seminar, describes how immigrants contribute to SD's message: 'To educate, we bring in a guy from Iran. He's been through this; he can show them what things will look like in Sweden. It brings credibility. We don't have anyone Swedish to bring to talk about this, because they are scared.' *SD-Kuriren* frequently features articles profiling 'many with immigrant backgrounds who have chosen to join in with SD' and, preceding the election, the party issued a *Letter from Immigrants in SD*, stating, 'Writings of xenophobia are nonsense. The right to criticise the Swedish immigration policy, which in all respects is extreme, cannot be branded as racism and xenophobia' (*SD-Kuriren* 2007b; Datsishin 2010).

Bicchieri (2006) notes that Swedes are particularly sensitive to pleas for the 'common good.' In their approaches to policy making, SD play into this sensitivity and the appetite for humanistic modernity in the Swedish social imaginary. The party describes the 'inhumane immigration policy' designed by Swedish elites and the widespread 'prejudice and ignorance about immigration,' arguments which are often used against SD by opponents (*SD-Kuriren* 2007b). They argue that attempts in Swedish policy to be 'kind' and allow equal opportunity are ultimately ineffective and perpetuate inequality. Åkesson argues that the terms of Swedish humanitarianism are unreasonably lofty, stating, 'There is no particular tree that grows money for everything that is kind, nice and worthy' (Tanaka 2010). SD have since the 1990s claimed to uphold the true goals and vision of UNHCR (*SD-Kuriren* 1992b). Åkesson describes his humanitarian vision: 'It is better to help those who need help on the spot. In the neighbourhood, in the refugee camps. Here, they end up only in lifelong alienation and end up on income support. It is not humane' (Granestrand 2010).

Defenders of feminist values

In recent years, SD have come to recognise that feminism is as ingrained in the language of Swedish morality as humanitarianism and egalitarianism, despite their often critical and hostile attitude towards feminism in their early years. A 2001 *SD-Kuriren* article marks this recognition, stating, 'Feminism is compatible with nationalism. Feminism can mean more than one thing. There is therefore no reason to reject all forms of feminism…SD's talk of anti-feminism may deter women'

(*SD-Kuriren* 2001a). In the past decade, five of the eight parliamentary political parties in Sweden have officially declared themselves to be feminist parties (Dahlerup 2004); SD have followed suit.

Since its early years, the party has touched upon women's issues; however, these issues have often been manipulated in ways that reinforce aspects of 'bruised masculinities' and socially constructed gender roles. They have disseminated warnings to Swedish women about getting involved with immigrant men, describing, for example, how 'girls let themselves be easily charmed by second-generation immigrants, but they soon discover that it is a male-dominated and violent world they are entering into' (*SD-Kuriren* 2003a). Though these warnings draw attention to the plight of women, party activists describe the abuse of Sweden's women as inciting a patriarchal call to action. Former party leader Jansson states, 'We are defending, like in war. Men are anxious to defend, and women take care of the country.' One activist states about their recent emphasis on rape, 'For women, it's about their bodies and themselves. For males, it's about not being able to *protect*.'

The party's encouragement of female empowerment became visible in 2001, when they began to publish articles calling upon Swedes to 'fight the Islamic attitude towards women' (*SD-Kuriren* 2001b). Several issues of *SD-Kuriren* depict a woman with boxing gloves poised to fight, reading, 'Fight back against the violence against women' (*SD-Kuriren* 2001c). Articles tackling these feminist issues have, ironically, often been written by men in the party. However, in 2010, two female candidates created the *SD Women's Network*, a blog, well-advertised on the party website, containing articles written by female candidates about women's issues in the party. The site existed for eight months until shortly after the election. The abrupt end to the project with little effort to sustain dialogue indicates that its purpose was likely to paint an image of gender sensitivity largely for campaigning objectives.

SD's most visible attempt to espouse the language of feminism is their 'campaign against rape,' initiated in 2001 and augmented before the 2010 election. Though immigrants are, in fact, overrepresented as perpetrators in rape statistics, SD leave out several relevant factors, like socio-economic determinants, to encourage the perception of a single cause determination, linking the prevalence of rape to ethnic background (BRÅ 2002). However, the party's recent discourse on these issues focuses less on anti-immigration statements than on statements challenging Sweden's much admired feminist movement, claiming that they 'betrayed' Sweden's women (Poohl 2010). SD thus attempt to circumvent accusations of cultural racism by bringing the debate back to Swedish norms of gender equality and by playing into a political norm of feminism. Åkesson argues, 'A women being treated a little worse compared to a man for the exact same job is not acceptable, but it can hardly be compared to a rape. This is a fact our feminist political parties do not seem to have embraced' (Sverigedemokraterna 2010d).

SD continued their provocative challenges to Sweden's feminist party, *Feministiskt initiativ*, by inviting its leader, Gudrun Schyman, to debate with Åkesson in August 2010 on television about

women's issues. The resulting debate was, however, ultimately dominated by Schyman and Åkesson appeared rather shaky in his knowledge of gender issues, revealing the unpolished nature of the party's transition from a culture of masculinities to one of self-professed gender sensitivity. Though opponents like Schyman argue that the party's strategy of 'hijack[ing] various select groups by defending them' is transparent (Sundberg 2010), SD offer scapegoats for the violation of women's rights: immigrants and—by their unresponsiveness—mainstream politicians. SD use the language of the feminist movement in an attempt to moralistically reject the leaders of this movement and present themselves as the embodiment of feminist ideals.

'Sweden is not a democracy'

Though scholars argue that the radical right may not be anti-democratic in a procedural sense, core tenets of its ideology are understood to 'stand in fundamental tension with liberal democracy' (Mudde 2007:138). The focus of politicians and scholars alike has been on the fundamental deviance of the radical right from liberal democracy; there is little awareness of how SD interact with and even adopt the languages of Sweden's liberal democratic norms like egalitarianism, gender equality and democracy on the whole. SD intrinsically borrow from the language of democracy, most evidently in the name of the party itself. The party uses the language of democracy and its anti-norms (corruption, violence and extremism) to foster disillusionment with the implementation of Swedish democracy and position themselves as the true democrats.

Party activists dismiss the criticism of SD as part of a conspiracy by the media and mainstream politicians to suppress the true voice of the Swedish people and undemocratically thwart the party. One party candidate states, 'The backlash against SD is not about racism, it's about power and money. I don't buy arguments about "institutional racism," that was a Social Democratic invention.' The party thus disregards accusations of racism and extremism as attacks from institutional elites seeking to sustain their power, controlling the media, education system, and government services to propagate their message. This conception of Sweden's ruling elite is reflected in the party's preoccupation over the years with George Orwell's book *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The book is profiled as recommended reading by the BSS movement as early as 1984 and by SD as late as 2001. One activist states, 'The reality in Sweden is like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Bureaucrats take control. No one cares because they have only good memories of the state.' The notion that 'the Swede is deceived' by immigration policy has been sustained from the party's earliest stages through today (*Sverige-Kuriren* 1988).

Emphasising the violations of egalitarianism, gender equality, and democracy on the whole allows SD to position the Swedish people as victims of abuse by mainstream political elites and their policies. One party activist reflects on the necessity for performing the victimhood of the audience, stating, "People don't act until it's in their face. 9/11 sparked people in the U.S. to action. It woke

people up. People haven't drawn these conclusions in Sweden. So it's about showing people what *can* happen. It's about educating people."

This statement reflects the subtle irony of the party's strategy, raising awareness of the *potential* victimhood of the Swedish people under Swedish immigration policy, by essentially constructing and dramatising this conflict themselves. This strategy is not without purpose; as Williams (2006) argues, it is *fear* rather than actual experience that motivates support for the radical right.

Performing victimhood

According to Roslund (2009), constructing victimhood inherently involves mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, or 'we – them' dichotomies. Constructing the victimhood of the audience is a strategy adopted by marginalised populist and radical right parties across Europe to exacerbate a rift between the 'people' and both political elites and immigrants. SD, however, bring a sense of genuineness to performances of their audience's victimisation by also performing their *own* victimhood, which is grounded in an unfortunate violent reality. Party representatives take every opportunity to couple their fear-mongering rhetoric with concrete examples of violations of democracy against their own party.

Some characteristics of stigma may be manipulated and enhanced by SD to gain power. An important element of SD's stigma is their persistent subjection to mainstream politicians' and the media's strategy to 'silence' them. The party's image of victimhood is to a great extent thrust upon them by fervent activism against the party. This image is also, however, actively maintained by the party. Jones et al. describe the process of embracing, making visible and exploiting the 'inhibiting circumstances' of stigma in order to gain social power (1984:212). The circumstances of stigma are thus not only experienced but may be actively performed; Anspach's (1979) study on social movements of the stigmatised asserts that victimhood is not necessarily a passive identity but an active one. In Goffman's (1963) work on stigma, the stigmatised emerge not as powerless victims, but as strategists. By drawing attention to and dramatising the very real suppression they face, SD aim to translate these debilitating occurrences into social and political gain.

The party often draws attention to non-violent forms of exclusion by contesting its exclusion from political and social affairs. Social movements of the stigmatised must make visible the disadvantage they face in order to gain sympathy from wider society (Anspach 1979). The most effective means of gaining sympathy for a group that is considered ideologically hostile is to make visible the violent forms of opposition that they face. Attempts at 'silencing' radical right parties, though founded on ideals of equality and tolerance, reveal a darker face when manifested in violent suppression. In addition to unorganised activism, *Antifascistisk Aktion* (Anti-Fascist Action) has since the 1990s countered SD through violent and anti-democratic means, smashing candidates' windows

and threatening local council members. SD activists frequently express their struggle to draw attention to this violence to make known their 'undemocratic treatment.'

Party activists state that they are careful not to fight back physically when met with aggression, so as to stress their victimhood rather than risking being associated with the violence of their adversaries. One informant states, 'Three years ago in the [Stockholm] office, at an internal meeting they entered and threw full beer cans and rocks at us...they want to disturb meetings, but SD didn't back down or fight back. We never fight back.' SD often send press releases and articles to local news outlets when they experience personal threats or violence against them at their events. However, they argue that when they are physically attacked or abused in public, the media often wrongly associates the violence with the party itself, rather than stressing that the party was the *victim*.

Issues of *SD-Kuriren* in the 1990s and early 2000s occasionally depicted blood-filled images of violent attacks on SD, a tactic to gain visibility that was toned down in the party's later years. Though violence remains a valid concern for the party, their challenge is to raise awareness while also avoiding a causal association of the party with violence. One party activist states, 'It's a balance. We must communicate we're under threat, but don't want to scare away new members too.'

When SD invited Alan Lake of the EDL to present at a 2009 Islam Seminar in Malmö, he informed SD that football hooligans are a valuable base for parties countering Islam. Lake's instructions to exploit hooligan scenes were, however, disregarded by SD, as they prefer to present a Swedish hooligan scene as dominated by 'violent immigrants and extreme leftists.' While the BNP, the EDL and various other marginalised far right movements often play into these subcultures as a support base, SD instead benefit from presenting themselves as victims of extreme *left* hooliganism and violence.

Maintaining a collective image of innocent victimhood is a challenging undertaking, as some performances by individual actors in the party have undermined rather than strengthened the party's ability to successfully exploit their stigmatisation. A desperate performance of victimhood by a single actor in the party occurred one week before the 2010 election, when a SD candidate in Malmö was allegedly attacked in his home by 'left-wing extremists,' reportedly of Arab descent, who tortured him and carved a swastika into his forehead. Åkesson immediately wrote in a press release about the event, 'It is for me difficult to reconcile with the idea that many socialists considered threats, violence and torture as a legitimate political tool. It is as far as one can get from the democratic values that I and my party represent' (Sverigedemokraterna 2010e).

The party took the opportunity to not only to highlight their victimisation, but to project an image of party members as morally righteous victims of immorality, in a sense, as *martyrs*. This image was, however, ultimately undermined when a police investigation revealed that the story was fabricated by the 'victim' and the wounds had been self-inflicted. Though this was the rather extreme

work of a single candidate in the party, it reflects a sense of desperation in making the party's victimhood visible before the election. In their work on the unfolding of political dramas, Benford and Hunt describe the impact of lone actors: 'They fail to understand their appropriate roles, misframe the tenor of the unfolding drama and use power illegitimately. Their actions thus not only upstage or parody collective performances, they tend to discredit movement attempts to sustain a unified image' (1992:45). Collective performances of victimhood are similarly undermined when the media picks up on events where individual SD actors have engaged in small-scale acts of criminality or violence.

Aside from such incidents, however, stigma has provided SD with plenty of opportunities to collectively dramatise their unjust treatment. Their experiences of ostracism and exclusion offer a compelling argument against the 'faulty' implementation of Swedish democracy. Election periods have, in particular, been critical spaces for this strategy; Åkesson describes the situation of democracy in Sweden, referencing pre-election attacks to the party's website:

> If you add this new internet attack to our already existing problems with our representatives being abused and threatened, it is difficult for us to rent premises, we find it difficult to advertise in newspapers, we find it hard to hold undisturbed public meetings and we find it difficult to visit schools around the county, so it is extremely doubtful whether the elections in September will be described as free and democratic. (Expo 2010)

The party has succeeded to some extent in eliciting the notion that their own victimhood is symptomatic of a broader degradation of Swedish democracy, as their claims were further legitimised on August 31, 2010, when DF, supported by the Conservative People's Party and the Left Party in Denmark, issued a statement urging that the Council of Europe send election observers to Sweden to monitor 'violations of democracy' regarding the treatment of SD (Halle 2010). The statement substantiated SD's myth of their martyrdom in a broader struggle for democracy shared by *all* Swedish people.

It is important to note that recent studies indicate that Swedish voters are demonstrably *as discontented* with political institutions as those in countries in which radical right parties have successfully gained popular support. Over the past 40 years, Swedish public confidence in political institutions has decreased from its once exceptionally high level. The puzzle that remains is how stigmatised parties like SD 'manage to tap into reservoirs of popular disaffection' (Norris 2005:163), particularly when they are widely understood to be socially unacceptable and their voters run a high risk of social censure.

Roslund (2009) argues that the construction of victimhood produces political truths, stating, 'The victim [is] given a particular status embodying a particular moral integrity to determine the truths about "what really happened," a status that [makes] the victim a vital agent in the political battle for "the hearts and minds"' (2009:295). Victimhood provides SD with an opportunity to gain

moral integrity, project their innocence and present themselves as martyrs, more effectively competing with those who already stand on high moral ground in the Swedish social imaginary.

Processes of victimisation in any radical right party can be understood as processes of exclusion (Mack 1990), separating the victimised 'people' from the immigrants and the political elites who pose a threat to society. SD, however, uniquely take advantage of their own violent exclusion to emphasise a shared*, inclusive* victimised identity with the 'people,' contesting their social identity as deviants and lending credibility to their claims. By eliciting a sense of vulnerability and susceptibility on the part of both the party itself and the wider Swedish people, SD construct their audience as co-victims within their drama. The party reconceptualises the contents of 'us and them,' constructing a new understanding of who shares in an identity with the Swedish people and who does not.

Conclusion

Stigmatisation has been understood by scholars to be one of the 'main obstacles' to the success of radical right anti-immigration parties (Mudde 2007:245; Eatwell 2000b:364). SD are certainly imagined to be deviant and socially unacceptable through the persistence of Swedish norms. However, this paper demonstrates that SD attempt to renegotiate nearly every established, valued moral virtue of Swedish society: its world-renowned egalitarianism, feministic approach and democratic model. They employ the language of Social Democratic norms that resonate with and are familiar to their audience, so as to elicit a 'positive, unproblematical appeal,' normalising their ideological frame (Gellner 1979:121). They tactfully play upon the exact binaries that are used to reinforce a stigma against them: the egalitarian and the racist, the feminist and the misogynist, and the democratic and the undemocratic.

Norris suggests that 'far from being a deeply irrational rejection of democratic politics' the orientations of the radical right towards the political system may be the 'rational product of persistent exclusion' (2005:164). This paper supports this inference, noting the ways in which SD navigate and aim to capitalise on the constraints imposed upon them. Victimhood becomes central to SD's party identity and SD draw upon very real experiences of violent and undemocratic exclusion to impart credibility and moral ground to their frame of understanding. Shame and other emotions employed in social exclusion and stigma, are powerful political tools that may be manipulated both by stigmatisers *and* the stigmatised.

The rhetorical strategies analysed here indicate that SD are far from rigid in their political strategies but are rather, in Gellner's words, 'bi-lingual,' adopting and co-opting the concepts that are used against them to justify their moral righteousness and make attractive their ideological positioning (1979:124). It is important to note that the strategies outlined here are based on

rhetorical and performative tactics, more so than ideological change.[2] As one might expect, the adoption of liberal languages to promote illiberal ideologies is characterised by an awkward transition. An historical analysis of this strategy over the years reveals instances where the meaning of professed democracy to SD activists has not comfortably aligned with conventional Swedish understandings of democracy. The adoption of norms surrounding gender and sexual equality has been SD's most awkward transition, as such a transition fundamentally clashes with core ideological beliefs held by a substantial set of party members. The party still grapples with refining its own notions of democracy so as to more effectively resonate with wider understandings; however, it is clear that anti-immigration politics can and *do* delicately use the language of liberal democracy and its values to justify their claims against immigration.

It is important to note that while the radical right has agency in determining its fate, there are limits on the party's power to negotiate its own identity; there is not, in Art's words, 'unlimited room for manoeuvre' (2011:233). The question that arises is to what extent SD succeed in renegotiating their stigma and the Swedish social imaginary. To what extent do the strategies outlined here result in political and social 'success' for the party? Though the impacts of such strategies are difficult to measure, some research on social movements has indicated the success of similar strategies in different contexts. Herzfeld (1997) and Einwohner (2002a, 2002b) cite examples of social movements in which stereotypes and negative categorical ascriptions in popular circulation have been selectively manipulated to bring about social and cultural change.[3]

Though it remains to be seen how SD fare in the next election after their increased political representation, the emotional, ideological and dramatic appeals of SD are not to be underestimated. Anspach states that while deviant social movements may have instrumental components, like public policy changes, they also 'consciously endeavour' to alter self-concepts and societal conceptions (1979:766). The outrage, shock and sadness expressed by both political elites and wider Swedish society following the 2010 election is itself an indication of the impact this party has on societal conceptions, and the power the party has come to hold over Swedish national self-understanding. SD have clearly even managed to jolt the global imaginary of Sweden as a tolerant ideal.

Some scholars have alluded to the dangers of continually silencing and stigmatising the far right; Gullestad warns that the taboo against political parties' cooperation with the far right creates the opportunity for many of their ideas to enter the mainstream *quietly* (2006:82). Norris likewise suggests that when radical right parties are excluded consistently from power, it encourages

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[2] SD *have* shifted some elements of their ideology. However, ideological shifts are difficult for the party, given the reality that many of their supporters and members maintain illiberal or extreme views; even their recent distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' immigrants is disputed within the party.

[3] Einwohner's (2002a) study of the animal rights movement demonstrates how activists renegotiate external claims in a positive light, producing positive evaluations and self-serving attributions. She argues that these processes have demonstrable internal effects, maintaining sustained involvement and pride in a movement, and external effects, inspiring participation in collective action (2002b).

supporters to mistrust the responsiveness and performance of the government (2005:163). SD have demonstrably gained from some elements of their stigma, exemplified by the Danish call for election observers to monitor violations of democracy against SD and the increased audience the party received after their election film was banned from Swedish television stations.

There may be an existing niche in Sweden for a radical right party to exploit: widespread popular immigration criticism, high levels of discontent with political elites and flourishing anti-EU sentiments (Rydgren 2010). SD's steady rise in votes also attests to the significance of this niche of discontent. If we continually conceptualise the radical right as deviant and alien to the norm, we risk overlooking how parties like SD create a space for themselves *within* the norm. Anti-immigration sentiment may, in fact, *be* an unarticulated norm in Swedish society; beyond simply vote-seeking, SD's primary aim is to push Swedes to perceive anti-immigration politics as a norm.

Literature on immigration and national identity often examines how the presence of immigrants contributes to shifting imaginaries surrounding the nation, or as Gullestad states, an 'increasing pluralisation of norms' (2006:101). It is perhaps valuable to examine how the anti-immigration radical right can *also* shift the conceptualised norm and imaginaries surrounding the nation. SD may not wield significant political power anytime soon, but if we look beyond the party's electoral results and 'deviant' social identity at the actual dynamics and creative strategies they engage in, we can better understand how the party creates *alternative* channels of influence, despite their marginalised status. Williams encapsulates this proposition with the statement, 'Peripheral parties matter, in exciting, dynamic ways. Their influence is being felt across Western Europe. They will not be taking over governments. However that is precisely the point—they do not have to!' (2006:51).

Politicians must be cautious that in countering SD and reinforcing the Swedish social imaginary that is so globally highly regarded, they confront the *roots* of concerns within this niche of discontent over immigration policy. It is when these root concerns are not confronted that SD are able to take advantage of disaffected voters and thus perform their political drama for the audience they intend. The findings here impel scholars to pay heed to the processes through which anti-immigration parties can, in spite of stigma, negotiate the normality and morality of their politics to bring their ideologies closer to the mainstream.

Acknowledgements

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