From fear of inequality to fear of ‘exclusion’

- analysing the discursive articulation of migration as a welfare state threat

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Introduction

The state’s ambition to control movement across its borders is closely linked to the idea of sovereignty and often taken as self-evident. Migration scholars have provided a list of various motivations that guide attempts to control migration; among those are considerations related to security, demography, social integration, culture and identity as well as economy. To the latter category belong everything from considerations related to the labour market to considerations related to budgets for welfare provision (Brochmann 1999:6). While it is often acknowledged that the imperatives of control differ, both between countries and over time, the very ambition to control is taken to be self-evident. Accordingly, the idea that migration poses a threat to various aspects of statehood and state aspirations has often been left unproblematized.

The last decades has however seen a proliferation of research that explores the multiple ways in which migration is conceived of as a threat. Scholars studying processes of securitization has shown how migration in many countries has become politicized and regulated within a security framework (Huysmans 2006). The construction of migration, or rather certain categories of migrants, as a threat to the economic wellbeing of the state constitute a subcategory of securitization. More precisely, these kind of fears are guided by assumptions that ‘economic’ migration threatens the jobs of vulnerable groups, undermines social solidarity and poses a challenge to the ‘absorption capacity’ of the state (Guild 2009:133). The major insight of the securitization paradigm is that imperatives to control migration—whether with reference to security, economy or cultural concerns— are driven by assumptions that are embedded in particular discursive formations. That is, that ideas of migration as a threat, or as a saviour for that matter, are always dependent on a certain understanding of what the phenomena entail and how it relates to current societal arrangements. This calls for studies that investigate the historically and contextually specific conceptions of migration and their implication on policy. This paper seeks to contribute to such an endeavour by exploring how migration is discursively articulated in relation to different aspects of the welfare state in the Swedish political debate.
The paper uses Sweden, and more specifically recent parliamentary plenary debates, as the starting point for this analysis. Previous research on the Swedish approach to migration has emphasized the importance that notions of the welfare state has played in the formulation of policy and this makes the country particularly interesting as a starting point for such an analysis. Scholars tend to agree that the Swedish approach historically can be characterized as revolving around attempts to find a balance between on the one hand generous policies on entry and on the other hand comprehensive inclusion in society through various welfare institutions (Öberg 1994; Borevi 2002; Johansson 2005). At the same time recent developments suggest that there has been a significant shift in migration- and integration policy in Sweden. The general election in 2006 brought a political alliance between the four right-wing parties in parliament to government. This paved the way for the instatement of a more flexible regime of labour migration in 2008. Moreover, it brought about a shift of focus in relation to integration in the form of increased emphasis on obligations, more precisely the obligation to work and contribute, rather than rights. The awareness of these overall changes in policy makes a study of how migration is conceived of in relation to the welfare state particularly interesting since it is possible that the change of policy is accompanied by a changed understanding of the relationship between migration and welfare.

Aim

The aim of this paper is to explore how the relationship between migration and the welfare state is articulated in recent Swedish parliamentary debates. The study is guided by two ambitions; first, it seeks to contribute to a more general discussion about the understanding of migration as a threat, here specified as a threat to the welfare state, and, second, it seeks to contribute by adding knowledge about recent developments in Sweden. My analysis and interpretations will be carried out using concepts and analytical strategies adopted from the overarching theoretical and methodological framework provided by discourse theory and I am convinced that this can add new insight to the understanding of contemporary disputes over migration policy in Sweden.

It has been generally acknowledged in previous research that a relative consensus on policies on migration and integration was abandoned from the 1980s and onwards with increased politicization of this policy area. This paper suggests that this movement towards disagreement partly can be linked to broader political struggles that have followed in the wake of the ‘crisis’ of the welfare state. Hence, I contend that the debates, and the consequent formulation of policy, on migration and integration have become a battleground where struggles to determine the meaning of the welfare state are played out\(^1\). In this paper I will offer an account of continuity and change in conceptions about the relationship between migration and welfare and its link to overarching conceptions about the welfare state.

The empirical investigation consists in an analysis of ten parliamentary debates on migration taking place in between 2006 and 2011\(^2\). I have chosen to start the analysis with the

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1 More specifically, I argue, these struggles are of two kinds. First, with reference to the demarcation of the welfare state, there are struggles to determine whom to include and exclude from the community of rights-bearers. Second, with reference to the scope of the welfare state, there are struggles to determine the right balance between rights and obligations and the extensity of social citizenship. In relation to debates on migration and integration the matter of scope also entail struggles to determine whether rights should be differentiated according to status.

2006/2007 parliamentary year since I consider the shift in government to be a turning point in some senses. Furthermore, I have chosen to analyze the recurring, more specifically there are two such debates during each parliamentary year, debates that takes place in connection with decision making on proposals related to migration. I consider these debates a good starting point since they contain statements from representatives of all parties and, importantly, because the statements made is a mixture between reasoning on the overall principles that guides positions taken and a clarification on party positions in relation to specific issues.

The analytical framework

The analysis in this paper is guided by an understanding of politics that is provided by discourse theory. This entail, first and foremost, that the struggle over meaning are put at the centre of the analysis. Meaning, furthermore, is understood to be relational and dependent on orders of discourse (Howarth & Stavrakakis:3). The focus of this study is on how the relationship between migration and the welfare state is conceived of and how this understanding is embedded in particular discourses.

Previous research has noted that the relative consensus that characterized debates on migration and integration in Sweden during the postwar era was abandoned from the 1980s and onwards with increased politicization (Hammar 1999:197; Spång 2009:82-83). The analytical point of entry of this study is that this can be interpreted as an indication of hegemonic struggle which are, moreover, understood to arise from dislocation. Hegemony and dislocation are two key discourse theoretical concepts and can, I contend, serve as an overarching entry into contemporary debates. Dislocation is understood to be something that occurs when a discourse is ‘confronted by new events that it cannot explain, represent, or in other ways domesticate’. All discourses are understood to be susceptible to dislocation since they at some point are bound to confront events that can’t be integrated into the current system of meaning. According to discourse theory it is dislocatory events that provides the terrain for hegemonic struggles. That is, political struggles that, in essence, consist in attempts to define and solve the problem at hand. Discourse is held to be constructed in and through hegemonic struggles and are, as such, a result of political decisions (Torfing 2005:15-16). My analysis starts from the assumption that the contemporary debates are spurred by a dislocation of the welfare state3 and that they, as such, consist in attempts to settle the meaning of the welfare state. Moreover, I will treat disputes over policy, and corresponding disagreement over how to interpret ‘reality’, as attempts to establish hegemony.

The welfare state as a site of hegemonic struggles

The concept of the welfare state invokes a number of meanings and associations. It can refer to everything from the more narrow ‘state measures for meeting key welfare needs’ to a particular form of state, polity or society. In the latter, broader meaning, it refers to ‘a society in which the state intervenes within the processes of economic reproduction and distribution’ (Pierson 2006:10). On an overarching level the welfare state can thus be conceived of as a ‘particular articulation of state, economy and civil society that dominated the advanced capitalist societies in the postwar era’. This articulation, more specifically, entailed the combination of a socially responsible state, capitalist market economy and an integrative civil

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3 More precisely it responds to a dislocation of two distinct features of the postwar welfare project in Sweden, namely 1) the hegemonized assumptions of Social Democracy and 2) the underpinnings of ‘implicit nationalism. The analysis in this paper primarily preoccupied with the dislocation of the first aspect.
society (Torfing 1998:166). The term ‘The Swedish model’ sums up the particular way the welfare state in this broad sense was organized in Sweden during the postwar era. This model is understood to comprise two core features; full employment and the universal welfare state (cf. Bucken-Knapp 2009). The ‘Swedish model’ is deeply intertwined with a Social democratic hegemonic project and it is no coincidence that Sweden is offered as the key example of the so called Social democratic welfare state in the influential classification developed by Esping-Andersen. Countries belonging to this ideal type are taken to have welfare regimes characterized by universalism and by the fact that the state is the principal guarantor for the realization of social rights (Pierson 2006:173).

Esping-Andersen’s classificatory scheme is only one attempt among many to account for differences and similarities in the development of welfare states from a comparative perspective. More recently, Bob Jessop has introduced a new conceptual framework to account for welfare state restructuring. The Keynesian national welfare state, henceforth referred to as KNWS, is Jessop’s label for the ideal typical welfare state that became dominant in the Western world in the post war period. The main characteristic of this formation was that the state, to supplement market forces, engaged in demand-side management in order to secure full employment. Furthermore, it is associated with economic and social policies that linked rights to citizenship of a national territorial state. Jessop’s key argument is that this type of welfare state, as a response to ‘difficulties in the economic growth dynamic’, has been abandoned in favour of a so called Schumpeterian workfare post-national regime, henceforth referred to as SWPR. Keynesian aims and modes of intervention have, he argues, been replaced with attempts to promote innovation and flexibility in relatively open economies. The state has thus shifted its efforts to the supply side and acts to strengthen competitiveness in the international economy. Furthermore, he traces a shift from:

a welfarist mode of reproduction of labourpower based on the rights of worker-citizens qua citizens to welfare benefits to a workfarist mode based on the obligations of worker-citizens qua workers to support themselves as far as possible through integration into the labour and other markets’ (Jessop 2000:174).

The SWPR is described as a workfare regime where social policy is subordinated to the demands of labour market flexibility and economic competitiveness (Jessop 2000). As such it signifies a move away from the ideals of comprehensive social citizenship that predominated during the postwar period.

Within a discourse theoretical framework the welfare state can be understood as a nodal point that links ‘political strategies, institutional forms and power networks’ into a particular discursive formation. This discursive formation, furthermore, can be understood to respond to a need that is generated by the recognition of the failures of capitalism. More precisely, the inability of the capitalist system to reproduce itself (Torfing 1998:7). The fact that the welfare state constitutes a nodal point however means, as illustrated by the preceding discussion about different welfare regimes, that it can refer to a number of competing ideals and institutional arrangements. Jessop’s argument about a shift from the KWNS to the SWPR was brought in precisely to illustrate there has been a shift both with regard to conceptions about what the welfare state ought to do and with regard to institutional arrangements. This paper starts, as previously emphasized, from the assumption that the dislocation of the welfare state, or to use Jessop’s vocabulary: the KWNS, has spurred struggles for hegemony. These hegemonic

\footnote{It should however be noted that the terms developed by Jessop belong at a higher level of abstraction than the one’s developed by, for instance, Esping-Andersen.}
struggles, in essence, consist in efforts to fix the meaning of the welfare state in a specific way. On a concrete level different hegemonic project will favour different regimes; entailing a particular scope of social citizenship manifested in differences in the balance between rights and obligations.

**Studying discourse through policy**

At a higher level of abstraction discourses are defined as ‘systems of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects’ (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000:3-4). Discourse theory thus holds that social practice, that is our ability to speak, think and act, are conditioned by historically specific discourses which are constantly modified and transformed in the process (Torfing 2005:14). In this study I will not study discourses as such but rather traces of competing hegemonic projects that tries to articulate specific understandings of the welfare state within an overarching discursive formation. I thus assume that although the interpretations of ‘reality’, as well as preferences for policy, of political forces engaged in hegemonic struggles diverge they share certain basic assumptions. This, moreover, ‘follows from the fact that political opponents relate to each other, and therefore almost always deal with some of the same issues and use related concepts and images while struggling to reformulate and conquer other key terms’. Conflicts on the manifest level are accordingly understood to be embedded in sedimented discourse that limits the scope of change (Wæver 2005:36-37).

The aim of this paper is, as previously spelled out, to explore change and continuity in how the relationship between migration and the welfare state is articulated. Accordingly, I will study those discursive articulations that establish a link between the welfare state and migration control. More precisely, I will direct my attention to conceptions of why migration control is needed and the assumptions underpinning these conceptions. Taking a discursive approach entail recognition that threats and problem-descriptions are always constructed discursively. Consequently, it also means rejection of the understanding that policy is formulated as a straightforward response to a particular problem. Discourse theory suggests a shift of focus ‘from economic and political pressures [taken as given] to the constitutive role of changes in political discourses in the course of societal restructuration’ in the study of policy change. Hence, it is assumed that:

> People act upon discursive constructions of the ‘real world’ rather than upon the hard facts themselves. Or, rather, they act upon what is constructed as facts in and through discourse (Torfing 1999:241).

According to this perspective problems are ‘manifested in an interdiscursive field’ and open for various interpretations dependent on the diverse perspectives of competing social forces. Shifts in modes of regulation is thus taken to be guided by discursive changes which, in turn, are taken to be the outcome of hegemonic struggles that arises in the wake of dislocation (Torfing 1999:240-41). Accordingly, it turns fruitful to investigate how problems and solutions are formulated in the political debate because these offer a glimpse of underlying assumptions. Moreover, diverging interpretations of problems, and suggestion for different solutions, give an indication of the presence of several conflicting discourses that seek to exhaust the meaning of the situation at hand.

The remainder of the paper is structured into three sections in which I discuss continuity and change in the ways the relationship between migration and the welfare state has been articulated in the Swedish political debates and offer some concluding remarks. Before I
proceed to the analysis I however offer a short introduction to Swedish migration history and sketch the main tenets of policy development, and the political debates that accompanied it, during the postwar era. This summary serves both the purpose to introduce the case and to provide a point of reference in the discussion about continuity and change when it comes to the articulation of the link between migration and welfare.

**Balancing openness and inclusion: a short background**

Large scale migration to Sweden took off after World War II when, in response to labour market demand, large numbers of migrants arrived from Finland and, later, southern Europe (Johansson 2008). In 1968, what was to become the fundamental principles of the Swedish approach to migration and integration was first adopted in the wake of this wave of migration. At this point the parliament accepted a government proposal establishing that the overall principle of the universal welfare state—equal social rights for all residents—would apply to immigrants on the same terms as for citizens. At the same time another, equally important, principle was established in the form of the overall need for a regulation of migration (Borevi 2010:59). The principle of equality has been described as the combined result of ‘general social welfare ideology’ and a policy of permanent immigration (Hammar 1999:175;178). The implication of the adoption of this principle has been that the important threshold has been put at the point of entry and that migrants, once granted a permanent residence permit, have been entitled to most of the rights allocated to citizens. However, it was a policy guided by implicit nationalism in the sense that the nation is taken as the given point of reference in discussions about welfare provision.

**The ambiguity of inclusionary ambitions**

Moreover, it is possible to identify an ambiguity with respect to whether restrictions on migration are imposed to secure the maintenance of current welfare arrangements for those already staying in the country or to secure the equal inclusion of those entering. The tension between these two approaches has been revealed by scholars who have investigated the motivation that were offered in connection with the decision to stop labour migration back in the 1970s. Previous research has highlighted concerns that continued migration would give rise to a socially stratified society where some groups of people were left worse off than the majority of the population (Johansson 2005:198). Scholars have thus argued that fears that current capacity and resources were insufficient to secure full inclusion for arriving migrants were one of the main determinants behind the decision. At the same time it has been claimed that one of the main reasons to adopt the principle of equality outlined above was to prevent wage and welfare dumping (Spång 2009:78-79). Immigration, then, was early on subjected to the ‘overall objectives of a regulated labour market and the welfare system’ (Schierup et al. 2006:217-18). Furthermore, among the stated reasons was that continued labour migration would counteract necessary restructuring of the economy as well as act as a hindrance to the utilization of the domestic labour reserve (most importantly large groups of women) (Johansson 2008:196; Spång 2009:78-79). In sum then, there is a tension between stated objectives with reference to who the subject of protection is taken to be; current residents or prospective residents. Finally, a further ambiguity should be noted. Although previous

5 Furthermore, it should be noted that the principle of equality didn’t avert discrimination and subordination. The incorporation of migrants into the labour market and society has been described by some scholars as a situation marked by ‘subordinated inclusion’. A description that aims to shed light on the fact that migrants, although integrated in the labour market and, as such also into the social security system, tended to be employed in sectors of the labour market with inferior working conditions and low wages (Neergaard 2009:206).
research tend to emphasize that restrictions on migration has been driven by considerations related to the welfare state, and the ability to safeguard the comprehensiveness of social citizenship, it is possible to identify a tendency to understand the challenge as cultural. It has been suggested that one reason to tighten restrictions on labour migration was the perception that it was more difficult to integrate certain groups of migrants into the welfare state (Johansson 2008).

**Recent developments**

The Swedish approach to migration could, from the stop of labour migration in 1972 up until its reintroduction in 2008, be characterized as dual in the sense that it consisted in the combination of a restrictive policy on labour migration (entailing that it would only be considered in a situation where there was a domestic shortage of labour) and a ‘generous’ asylum policy. The integration capacity of the state was openly recognized as a ground for regulation but only for certain categories of migrants as there was a principal recognition of the right to asylum. Previous research have highlighted that the tension between attempts to balance openness and the ability to secure full inclusion in the welfare state grew bigger as patterns of migration shifted from labour migrants to refugees from the 1970s and onwards. With the arrival of rising numbers of refugees the ability to control immigration was compromised as the moral imperative to safeguard the right to asylum, as well as promises to abide to international conventions, made restrictive measures increasingly controversial (Borevi 2010:71). Consequently, while the decision to tighten restrictions on labour migration in the 1970s was rather uncontroversial the restrictive turn of Swedish asylum policy, initiated in the late 1980s, has been deeply controversial and spurred intense political debate (cf. Spång 2009:82-83). Recently, however, Swedish policy in relation to migration and integration has undergone significant changes. The general election in 2006 brought a political alliance between the four right-wing parties in parliament to government and this paved the way for the instatement of a more flexible regime of labour migration in 2008. Moreover, it brought about a shift of focus in relation to integration in the form of increased emphasis on obligations, more precisely the obligation to work and contribute, rather than rights.

**Exploring the undisputed: on the logic of control**

The discursive formation of the welfare state has been held together by a social imaginary that invokes the image of a society based on freedom, equality and solidarity where people are protected through the means of social citizenship. Citizenship, in this context, refers to a status in a community that grants everyone some basic economic, political and social rights. In this context, hence, citizenship is the expression of an equivalential logic in the sense that it erases differences between individuals and groups and unites them all under the same formal status with a corresponding set of rights and obligations (Torfing 1999:229). At the same time citizenship has been articulated within an overall framework of meaning where the boundaries of the nation-state is taken to be the undisputed and where the chain of equivalence, consequently, has been confined to a particular territorial unit. The articulation of citizenship tends to rest, then, on a ‘fixed relationship between state, citizen, and territory’ (Anne McNevin 2011:16). Hence, as has been pointed out by Linda Bosniak, citizenship has both an universalist and an exclusionary dimension. The former is ‘applicable within the national political community’ while the latter ‘applies at its edges’. There is, she argues, an inherent duality in the way we currently understand citizenship:
The idea of citizenship is commonly invoked to convey a state of democratic belonging or inclusion, yet this inclusion is usually premised on a conception of a community that is bounded and exclusive (Bosniak 2006:14).

I argue that the duality of citizenship can be used to shed light on the logic of migration control in the national welfare state. This logic, I contend, prescribe a restrictive entry policy in order to secure a comprehensive social citizenship (for those admitted as well as current residents) (cf. Brochmann 2010:16).

Previous research on Swedish migration policy has highlighted that the need for regulated migration is based on a particular notions of the needs and workings of the welfare state. Scholars have identified continuity throughout the post war period in the form of conceptions that take the need to limit immigration to be necessary in order to safeguard welfare ambitions (Johansson 2005:252). Furthermore, it has been claimed that it was the belief that the inclusion of migrants would be too costly– and as such threatening the economy of the welfare state– that spurred a restrictive position. The resources necessary to assure adjustment to Swedish circumstances were simply conceived to be unsustainable (Mörkenstam 2010:602). Underpinning this conclusion is the belief that welfare should primarily be reserved for the Swedish population and, further, that economic considerations set a limit to solidarity (Johansson 2005:252).

Migration policy is founded on the assumption that a there is a community whose members hold the right to control entry and the distribution of resources. Migration politics, in essence, consist in drawing boundaries between a ‘We’, with a right to control entry and the allocation of community resources, and different categories of ‘Others’. The very existence of a Swedish ‘We’ with a right to control movement in order to achieve different goals is more or less undisputed in contemporary political debates. This, I argue, is manifest in the complete lack of questioning of the very idea that the state has a right to regulate movement in and out of its territory. Correspondingly, statements in the debate are founded on a non-articulated assumption of the right of a collective to control. So far I have shown that notions of the welfare state have constituted key points of entry for the legitimation of migration control from a historical perspective. I contend that there is an element of continuity in the sense that regulated migration continues to be justified with reference to the welfare state. More precisely to the conception that, as the resources of the welfare state are insufficient to provide for all prospective residents, there is a need for a selection procedure.

Our politics is based on that Sweden, as an independent country with its own laws and welfare systems, after all, as said, need to have a regulated immigration (2007/08:43, Ulf Nilsson, Addr. 26).

The statement above explicitly links the need for regulation to welfare. As the following quote indicates this is often taken to mean that those in greatest need should be prioritized.

My very personal belief is that this is founded on that we need a system where the one who is in most need of protection also should get it. It is also about economic prerequisites for being able to offer a good and worthy reception (2007/08:43, Fredrick Federley, Addr. 21).

Many statements in the debate, explicitly or implicitly, is underpinned by the assumption that resources are scarce and therefore should be directed towards those most deserving. Regulated migration is thus motivated with reference to the need to ‘find those who are in most need of our protection and for them to get it’ (2006/07:103, Mikael Cederbratt, Addr. 40). The emphasis on need is in line with the overall consensus that the right to asylum should be
safeguarded and that refugees should be prioritized among those seeking entry. Moreover, as is proposed in the following quote it is the fact that the right to entry must be accompanied by the acceptance of responsibility, to guarantee certain rights for instance, that is considered to require resources.

I don’t believe in free immigration in the world of today. In the same moment as we give people the right to settle in the country we accept a responsibility for these people and their rights. I am, however, open for an expansion of possibilities for people from other countries to find an income and settle in our country where one, apart from supporting oneself and having a future, also contribute to the common good and the prosperity of Sweden (2009/10:107, Lars Gustafsson, Addr. 29).

As the quote above illustrates there has recently been an opening towards a second path of entry. I will discuss labour migration more thoroughly in the next section. Therefore, suffice it to say that there has recently been proposals that those people who are considered to be able to support themselves, i.e. those who are not considered to potentially end up in welfare dependency, and make a contribution should be allowed to enter irrespective of need. Need of protection is thus being supplemented by ability to contribute as criteria of eligibility for entry.

In sum, as suggested by the quotes above, there is a widespread agreement that Sweden don’t have enough resources to be able to offer all prospective migrants an acceptable standard while being able to keep costs at a reasonable level. ‘Reality’ is thus taken to put limits to how open Sweden as a country can be. This condition is far from straight-forward and it instantly opens for political struggles over the right way to interpret both what ‘acceptable’ standard might mean and what ‘reasonable’ costs are. Struggles over how to interpret current circumstances and what implications these should have with reference to action are at the heart of struggles over migration policy. These interpretations, and preferences for actions, are linked to other political ideals. Policy preference on migration are linked to what kind of welfare state one envisions, on the balance between rights and obligations and the comprehensiveness of the social citizenship, and the kind of labour market regulations one sees necessary. Furthermore, estimations of the ability to offer full citizenship to prospective migrants are partly based on conceptions of the mechanism that produces inequality. Consequently, these conceptions turn interesting to scrutinize and this is what I turn to in the next section.

Exploring the disputed: conceptions of the threat

The previous section sketched the main tenets of the undisputed aspects of migration control. I highlighted that considerations relating to the welfare state continually is offered to legitimate such controls. In this section I will however proceed to explore those aspects of migration policy that are disputed. More precisely I will start out studying those discursive articulations that establish migration as challenging or threatening in relation to the welfare state. I am particularly interested in the assumptions underpinning these articulations and the specific preferences with regard to regulation they reveal. Through a mapping of differences in assumptions and policy preferences it becomes possible to discern the sources of dispute and, consequently, what is at stake in the struggles to establish a new hegemony. In the analysis I will understand welfare threat in a broader sense. I will, following the opening discussion about the two components of the ‘Swedish model’, investigate two distinct ways in
which migration conceived as threatening; 1) with regard to welfare state costs and 2) with regard to implications on the labour market.

Migration and welfare state implications

One of the strongest elements of continuity in Swedish debates and policies on migration is that considerations relating to the welfare state are offered to justify migration control. However, in the contemporary debate the link between welfare ambitions and migration control are often made only implicitly. The fact that migration, at least if you look at explicit statements, is primarily articulated as something positive is at first glance one of the most striking results of my analysis. The spokespersons of different parties repeatedly start their contributions to the debates with outlining the many benefits that comes with migration. Migration is taken to be a sign of personal initiative, of ‘people’s will to do something about their lives, to take on challenges’ (2006/07:37, Mikael Cederbratt, Addr. 62), and migrants are primarily constructed as potential assets that contribute to society:

If every person contributes to society she doesn’t increase costs but strengthens society, both economically and with regard to resources. This should also imply that the more people who come here, the more we strengthen Sweden (2006/07:37, Fredrick Federley, Addr. 71).

It is they [the immigrants] that have made it possible for us to build our industrial state and increase the well-being of our country. Immigration will also continue to be as important in the future, to enrich our country and be beneficial for us (2006/07:103, Solveig Zander, Addr. 53).

Sweden has become a richer, more open and culturally enriched country with the diversity of today’s Sweden (2008/09:37, Magdalena Streijffert, Addr. 31).

As is evident from the quotes above migration is conceived to be positive and contributive in a number of different senses. Migrants are understood to be an economic resource, most importantly in their capacity as labour, as well as contributing to diversity which is most often articulated as something desirable. Participants in the debate also tend to link their positive stances to their principal ideological outlook. There are recurrent statements that articulate a link between liberalism, open societies and free movement. For instance by stating that it is in the interest of all liberals to ‘strive for openness and a world that is not based on borders’ (2006/07:37, Fredrick Federley, Addr. 71). Or, by suggesting that ‘liberals of all times have aspired for open societies’ knowing that ‘immigration and emigration are simply linked to economic development, freedom and democracy’ (2010/11:31, Ulf Nilsson, Addr. 94).

Statements that explicitly suggest that migration poses a threat to present welfare arrangements or the ability to provide assistance to current residents are thus rare. This does not preclude, as will soon be evident, that migration is discussed in terms that suggest that it is considered to bring about serious challenges and as such can be seen to result in problems that needs to be dealt with politically. Statements are continuously being made where migration is constituted not as a fully articulated threat but as a potential source of problems. The tendency to conceive of migration as a challenge, and potential problem, is most visible in the recurring

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6 All quotes in the paper have been translated from Swedish to English by me. I have tried to keep as faithful as possible to the original statements while making some small adjustments in order to make the translations comprehensible and (somewhat) grammatically correct.

7 Such statements are completely absent from the debates until 2010. In the two debates studied that takes place after the election in 2010, that is after the Sweden Democrats, a right wing populist party, entered parliament, such links are being made but exclusively by representatives of this party.
calls for increased cooperation within the EU. Such demands are often motivated with reference to the inability of Sweden alone to deal with migration flows:

The challenge that refugees and migrants will constitute Sweden alone cannot handle. That is why we say: cooperation, cooperation and again cooperation but also a harmonization of that cooperation within the EU (2007/08:43, Mikael Cederbratt, Addr. 4).

The continued harmonization of asylum policy within the EU is also important. Sweden shall take its part of the responsibility for the international protection of refugees. But if Sweden gets to take a disproportionate big part of the consequences of the refugee situation in our surrounding world in relation to comparable countries it can in continuation result in that the sustainability of our entire asylum system is put into question (2008/09:37, Tobias Billström, Addr. 130).

The quotes express an underlying assumption that Sweden has a certain capacity for refugee reception which is taken to set a limit to the number of people who can be admitted to the country. It however remains unspecified what aspects, more precisely, it is that sets a limit. This also applies to the following quote which clearly conceives current migration patterns to be challenging:

We can’t disregard from that the development in primarily Iraq instill deep worry about the migration political consequences. Every other Iraqi who wishes for asylum in Europe today seek to go to Sweden. There is reason to consider what the consequences might be if this development isn’t interrupted (2006/07:37, Tobias Billström, Addr. 102).

The quote above, as the previous one, is vague in its descriptions of what the challenge, more precisely, consists in and consequently never specifies what it is that makes the scenario alarming. There is however other brief statements that give some indication of what the problem is taken to be. The clues provided in these statements suggest that the challenge is linked to the capacity of different authorities to process applications as well as the ability of local societies to provide access to jobs, housing and schooling:

It is after all big challenges and difficulties associated with the large number of people who come to Sweden for the Migration Board, for the municipalities and for society in large (2007/08:43, Mikael Cederbratt, Addr. 4).

The result is that these municipalities are severely afflicted and that it is hard to manage the housing issue, it is hard to arrange with jobs, it is hard to ensure that the children get to attend good schools (2008/09:37, Magdalena Streijffert, Addr. 124).

The distribution of responsibility for the reception of refugees is extremely skewed and results in large strains on housing and welfare in the big cities (2010/11:31, Fredrik Lundh Sammeli, Addr. 77).

These quotes suggest that the challenge is conceived to consist in a set of social problems, such as unemployment and welfare dependency, that are linked to segregated suburbs in the bigger cities. Furthermore, the problem is partly constituted as due to concentration of immigrants to certain parts of the country as well as to certain neighborhoods. The problem, thus, is articulated to be failed integration. Or failed inclusion if one chooses to speak in the terms that came to dominate the debate during the last decade where the persistence of a group of people living in ‘exclusion’ rose to the top of the political agenda.

However, these articulations are marked by a certain ambiguity and it remains unspecified whether it is the costs of different kinds or the failure to offer full inclusion in society that is conceived to be the main problem. The statements quoted above suggests that there is a wide spread conception among participants in the Swedish debates that migration, under certain
conditions, can turn into a challenge and, consequently, a problem. The challenge is however conceptualized in very general terms and the mechanisms that produce the challenging outcomes remain unspecified. The quotes clearly suggest that there is a certain limit to how many migrants Sweden can accept and underlying this conclusion is a conception that accepting migrants comes with a cost and that resources and insufficient to provide for all. This conception is, moreover, linked to the conception that accepting people comes with certain responsibilities since the state has an obligation to secure a minimum social standard for all residents. In some sense it is thus hard to disentangle assumptions about costs, resources and ability to offer an acceptable standard of living from each other. This said, I argue that a closer investigation into the debates on ‘exclusion’ sheds light on both a shift in emphasis over time and a difference in emphasis between different political camps.

**Debating the mechanisms of ‘exclusion’**

The concept of ‘exclusion’ [‘utanförskap’] moved to prominence in the campaign leading up to the 2006 election. Concerns about an emerging state of social exclusion, especially with regard to ‘multi-ethnic suburban environments’ however go back to the 1990s (Dahlstedt 2009:262-63). Exclusion is, as I will return to, an ambiguous concept with various interpretations. In Sweden it has lately come to be used to refer to those people who, because of unemployment or sickness, aren’t integrated in the labour market. The term however, as has been pointed out by some scholars, has tended to primarily be associated with lack of employment among people with migrant background (Neergaard 2009:203).

The comparatively high unemployment rates among immigrants is a recurring topic in the political debates on migration and integration and all political camps share the view that the current circumstances are troubling. Their interpretation of the origin of the problem, and correspondingly their suggested solutions, however differ. Representatives of the parties in government continuously make attempts to link the set of problems referred to as ‘exclusion’ to the previous majority’s failure to uphold full employment. More specifically, the former approach is accused of having caused, or at least exacerbated, the situation through the unwillingness to pose demands. The lack of demand is articulated as the root of welfare dependency and failed labour market integration and, correspondingly, the introduction of a more work oriented approach to integration is taken to constitute a partial solution to the problem of ‘exclusion’.

In migration policy, as everywhere else in government policy, the emphasis on work [‘arbetslinjen’] is inserted. This is done through an increased focus on self-support already during the asylum period and on contribution to making oneself employable (2007/08:43, Tobias Billström, Addr. 32).

The importance of a work oriented policy is also being emphasized in relation to family reunification. A government proposal to introduce economic requirements for migrants who want to bring their family to Sweden was widely debated and considered to be deeply controversial during the period I have studied. The proposal was motivated by representatives of the ruling coalition as a procedure to ensure that people arriving to people will not end up in ‘exclusion’.

It is about creating a positive incentive for people to seek to go where there are jobs and housing (2008/09:37, Mikael Cederbratt, Addr. 34).
[...] one must try to work towards making people come to inclusion ['innanförskap'] and not to exclusion ['utanförskap'], that one ensure that people actually arrive to orderly conditions as far as it is possible (2010/11:31, Tobias Billström, Addr. 115).

By making a requirement that there should be both work and housing before one can bring relatives the chances are better for good integration and for an avoidance of exclusion. The incentives to self-support should be strengthened. Instead of arriving to crowded housing and benefit dependency the relatives will arrive to settled and stable conditions from the start (2007/08:83, Tobias Billström, Addr. 53).

The proposal thus seek to avoid those problems that are conceived to (potentially) arise with migration by creating incentives for the individual migrants arriving to move to places where the opportunities to find a job and housing is good. Moreover, the approach is not only conceived to be a solution to ‘exclusion’ but also to counteract tendencies to demand restrictions on migration:

It is also the case that the family reunification immigration never can be said to be a problem, nor do we need to put a limit to it, if we know that it won’t become a burden on the Swedish welfare systems (2007/08:43, Fredrick Federley, Addr. 13).

The quote above clearly links the proposal to the safeguarding of Swedish welfare systems. Such a move is suggested to ensure that migrants don’t end up in welfare dependency and therefore, simultaneously, that there is a continued popular support for openness. It should be noted that the proposal is based on an understanding of the mechanisms that produces ‘exclusion’ which focus on individual actions and choices. It turns into the individual’s responsibility to ensure that sufficient inclusion can be guaranteed for family members. A move that has been criticized:

[...] with the current labour market situation and housing opportunities many of those concerned runs the risk of standing far away from the labour market and a shrinking housing market so that they never get the opportunity [to bring their family] (2010/11:31, Fredrik Lundh Sammeli, Addr. 92).

Critical voices thus articulated concerns that structural obstacles turn it impossible for individual migrants to fulfill the requirements. Consequently, the proposed regulations are considered to be cynical since they end up denying migrants the possibility of family reunification. The proposed solution to the problem of exclusion, i.e. increased pressure for labour market integration, is thus disputed.

Migration and labour market implications

The shift in policy towards labour market emphasis is also visible in the openings towards labour migration that has been made since the shift in government in 2006. The introduction of a new legislation in 2008 was heavily disputed and at the heart of contention were the implications the proposed reform would have on the ability to enforce labour market policy, more specifically the goal of full employment, and the effects on wages and working conditions.

The introduction of new legislation in 2008 followed in the wake of years of debate and there was a general agreement that labour migration as such was both desirable and necessary (Bucken-Knapp 2009:2). Politicians from all political parties, with the Sweden Democrats as sole exception, thus agree that increased labour migration is crucial if current levels of growth and wealth are to be maintained in the future. In this sense there is a very strong tendency
where (labour) migration is linked to the long term survival of the welfare state and as such as a form of promise. Migration of this sort is generally conceived to be positive and is rather constructed as a solution, rather than a problem, to both immediate lack of labour in some sectors of the labour market and the long term demographic challenge that follows with an ageing population.

Through increasing the opportunities to labour migrate to Sweden we contribute with one piece to the puzzle to counteract labour deficit and make sure that the supply of labour is maintained. Everything is being done to ensure a continued economic growth and to secure our future welfare through encountering the challenges that follows from the demographic development (2007/08:83, Tobias Billström, Addr. 53).

At the same time we know that the prognosis for the Swedish labour market /…/ the situation we have with regard to our demography means that we need to become more people in Sweden, more people who work. There is a clear interest for Sweden also as a nation to, to larger, open for labour migration (2006/07:37, Fredrik Malm, Addr. 84).

[…] migration gives many people the opportunity to follow their dreams and leave their country to create a new and better future. /…/ It also gives Swedish companies the opportunity to get the competence they require. It also gives us in Sweden the opportunity to secure welfare (2008/09:37, Mikael Cederbratt, Addr. 34).

Labour migration is, as the quotes suggests, conceived to be a solution to demographic challenges and labour deficit. These components become interlinked in a discourse that establishes labour migration as key to the safeguarding of the welfare state and continued economic growth. Moreover, the labour migrant is articulated as an enterprising person with dreams and ambitions who Sweden should welcome.

The notion that labour migration, as an abstract possibility and long run solution, is something that should be understood positive is undisputed in the debate. This sheds light on the force of the overarching discursive articulation of labour migration as necessity. When it comes to the actual organization of labour migration there are on the other hand divergent opinions. Those opposing the reform proposed by the government consider this to be a threat to the current ‘order’ at the labour market. They repeatedly come back to that while labour migration as such is positive it must be ‘with decent conditions, under dignified circumstances and with orderliness on the labour market’ (2008/09:37, Kalle Larsson, Addr. 32).

The threat to the current ‘order’ that is taken to be characteristic of the Swedish labour market is something that the opponents of the reform recurrently come back to. In their statements they link the new legislation to a number of threatening scenarios; wage dumping and the undermining of collective agreements. The critics repeatedly return to state that they are not objecting to labour migration as such but that their support is conditioned on that it is ‘the same rules, same wage and same terms on the labour market’ since anything else would entail ‘questioning the safety nets that it has taken many years for people in this country to put in place’ and be equal to make an argument for wage dumping (2006/07:37, Kalle Larsson, Addr. 52). Furthermore, these estimated effects are not only suggested to be an unwelcome side-effect of the proposed legislation but one of its main purposes. The reform is repeatedly described as a way to shift the balance of power to the benefit of the employers and undermine the power of the trade unions. Moreover, some debaters imply that the new legislation constitute an attempt to covertly change the entire system of labour market regulation despite a lack of general support for such measures (see for instance 2006/07:37, Göte Wahlström, Addr. 78).
The removal of external (authority) trial is the primary source of criticism of the new legislation. It is this move that is taken to open for a number of undesired outcomes when it comes to wages and labour market conditions. I have already shown that labour market is articulated as an opening to a downward pressure on wages. Moreover, it is taken to open for that ‘the unscrupulous employers continue to exploit people and undermine fair competition’ (2008/09:37, Magdalena Streijffert, Addr. 31). The removal of external checks is continually also being discussed as an opening for the exploitation of migrant labour. In the historical overview I emphasized that there has been an ambiguity with regard to whom control serves to protect. This tension between emphasizing effects on the current labour force and effects on prospective workers is visible also in the contemporary debate. Those debaters who discuss labour migration as a threat tend to have a dual focus and stress both factors without acknowledging that there might be a conflict of interest between different categories of workers.

There are thus diverging understandings of the implication of the adoption of the new labour migration regime when it comes to effects on the labour market. The overarching understanding of labour migration as a promise is accompanied by the understanding that certain ways of organizing it poses a threat to current ways of organizing labour market relations.

Struggling to determine the scope of social citizenship

With regard to migration states control a double set of boundaries; first, the admission to the territory and, second, the access to full or partial membership. The first set of boundaries is governed by regulation on admission while the second set of boundaries is governed by regulation that specifies the provision of rights to residents with different status (Lister 1997:47-48). I contend that this distinction can be used to illuminate how changes in Swedish policy, as well as current sources of disputes, can be interpreted. In the historical overview I stressed that the Swedish approach to migration has been characterized by the combination of a strict entry policy and (close to) equal treatment for those admitted. Recent developments suggest that the current approach has moved towards increased openness while there has been a tendency towards an erosion of the comprehensive social citizenship present during the heydays of Social democracy. This movement can be understood to constitute the source of disagreement and at its core is the question of what kind of welfare state one envisions. In the preceding discussion I have sketched the main areas of contention with regard to Swedish debates on migration and integration. I claim that diverging notions on the scope of social citizenship can be regarded a point in common with regard to the debate on the origin of ‘exclusion’ and the debate on labour migration. Consequently, I will offer an interpretation of current disputes that takes its starting point in the idea that it is possible to identify a drift over time both with regard to the understanding of what inclusion in the welfare state should entail and with regard to why inclusion is considered to be crucial.

In making this argument I will turn to Ruth Levitas whose discussion on different ways of understanding social exclusion can illuminate the source of contention. Levitas stresses that there are several ways to define exclusion and that these ‘differ in how they characterize the boundary, and thus what defines people as insiders or outsiders, and how inclusion can be brought about’. Different understandings are based on different conceptions of the mechanisms, such as poverty, morality or lack of work, at work in the production of exclusion.

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8 It should however be noted that I have refrained from discussing disputes over asylum policy which is another deep source of contention in contemporary debates.
Scholars have argued that the meaning of ‘exclusion’ in political discourse in Sweden has moved from being concerned with poverty, and the rectification of general patterns of inequality, to being almost exclusively concerned with labour market integration:

Swedish politics have witnessed a gradual shift towards a welfare policy regime that is placing an increasing emphasis on individual autonomy, initiative and freedom of choice vis-à-vis governmental control, endeavours to achieve equality and the redistribution of societal resources, i.e., a shift towards an active citizenship (Dahlstedt 2009:253).

At the centre of this development is the shift in policy from what is conceived to be encouragement of passivity and welfare dependency to measures aimed at activation and, in the long run, self-support. A development that has been described as a shift from welfare to workfare. Parallel to this runs a redefinition of the problem where this went from having been conceived of as ‘a question of a lack of job opportunities /…/ to be defined in terms of a shortfall in employability (ibid:255;259). It is thus possible to identify a general shift in the way exclusion is conceptualized. Still, and this is crucial to understand contemporary disputes, different political camps maintain different understandings of the meaning of exclusion with varying degrees of labour market emphasis.

I argue that the shifted understanding of exclusion have a bearing on assumptions about the relationship between migration and the welfare state. Historically, the exclusion envisioned to arise from migration consisted was conceptualized as not being offered equal standing in society. The contemporary understanding of exclusion on the other hand tends to reduce exclusion to weak or nonexistent labour market integration. While different political camps disagree on the interpretation of why, and under what conditions, people need to be integrated into the labour market they share the basic idea that wage labour is a big part of the solution. At an overarching level policy has moved from being concerned with securing a comprehensive social citizenship to ensuring that migrants don’t end up excluded from the labour market. The latter concern is, moreover, at least partly driven by fiscal considerations and a fear that unemployed migrants become a drain on welfare state resources. Moreover, I argue that the same kind of logic can be used to explain the recent opening towards labour migration. Given that one conceive the possibility of unemployment, and corresponding welfare dependency, as the primary challenge that migration gives rise to it makes sense to open for a form of migration that guarantees, at the start, that those arriving will be integrated into the labour market. Correspondingly, labour migration turns potentially problematic if one holds the view that migration needs to be monitored to ensure welfare political ambitions for current and/or prospective residents. That is, for instance trying to uphold full employment, safeguard collective agreements or ensure certain basic rights and room to manoeuvre for workers. If one takes different conceptions of (social) citizenship as the start of analysis it is thus possible to understand why different political camps hold various forms, and various

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9 It should be emphasized that this shift was initiated before the change of government in 2006; this has certainly brought about an intensification of emphasis on the duty to work and provide for oneself but the tendency as such can be identified in earlier policy as well.

10 As I have previously argued it is hard to disentangle social and fiscal concerns from each other in discussions about the problems of exclusion. The fact that there is a parallel discussion about the need to create incentives for labour market integration through adjusting compensation from welfare programs, i.e. making work more advantageous through a reduction of benefits and compensations, suggest that it is indeed warranted to speak about a drift in focus over the last decades. More precisely from a concern to secure dignified terms of employment, linked to a general vision about a comprehensive social citizenship and equality, to a concern to secure employment without further interest in the corresponding conditions.

11 As I have previously touched upon it often remain ambiguous whether it is the perceived interests of current or prospective workers that critics of the reform try to enforce.
aspects, of migration to be challenging or threatening to the welfare state. The political left tend to emphasize the threatening scenario insufficiently regulated labour migration will bring about with regard to the labour market. The political right on the other hand tend to emphasize the threatening scenario, in the form of welfare dependency, unlimited refugee reception would bring about. A scenario they seek to minimize with the introduction of a strengthened obligation to engage in paid labour and through ensuring that migrants admitted have a job at arrival.

Concluding remarks

In this paper I have explored how the relationship between migration and the welfare state is articulated in recent Swedish parliamentary debates. I have offered an account that takes its starting point in the idea that recent struggles, conceptualized as struggles for hegemony, can be understood to arise from a dislocation of the welfare state. Starting from a discourse theory framework I take the movement of migration and integration into contested political fields to signal the end of hegemony. The analysis of this paper have shown that while there continues to be consensus on the need for regulated migration as such the more precise details of what this should entail have undergone some revision as well as become deeply disputed. First, it is possible to identify a drift over time with regard to the overarching purpose of migration control parallel to the redefinition of the meaning of societal inclusion; from access to a comprehensive social citizenship to labour market integration. Second, it is possible to identify a growing cleavage between different political camps when it comes to the interpretation of why regulation is necessary. These differences are, moreover, closely linked to different welfare ideals. Consequently, I contend, contemporary debates on migration are intertwined with attempts to establish hegemony and fix the meaning of the welfare state. Different understandings of the workings of the welfare state, along with ideals of how this should ideally be organized, underpin the struggles over policy formulation and at the centre of contention is the scope of social citizenship.

Finally, I want to make some brief remarks about the conclusions of this study in relation to the wider discussion about how the relationship between migration and the welfare state is articulated in discourse. My analysis has shown that while the need to safeguard the welfare state has remained a key point to reference in justifications of migration control the idea of why this should be done has shifted in tandem with a shift in meaning of the welfare state as such. I have argued that the scope of social citizenship, following welfare restructuring, has eroded as there has been a shift in emphasis from rights to obligations. More precisely, the obligation to engage in paid work; i.e. ensure that one is ‘included’ in the narrow sense of integrated in the labour market and self-supporting. This tendency is in no way unique for Sweden but rather, as emphasized by Jessop, part of a general trend in the Western world.

Likewise, the recent renewal of interest for labour migration, conceived as a solution to a demographic challenge and key to future economic growth, which I have identified in the Swedish debate has an equivalent in many other European countries. Furthermore, as in most countries, this partial opening is conditioned on a continued tough stance towards ‘illegal’ migration and continued restrictiveness towards asylum seekers (cf. Hansen & Hager 2010:141:145). That is, by a ‘managed’ approach to migration, entailing the imposition of policies that distinguish between different categories of migrants, to ensure that only those migrants that are deemed productive and desirable are welcomed while others become subject to restrictive controls (Squire 2009:23-25). This is in accordance with a continuous concern with particular categories of migrants and fears that these might end up a burden on the
welfare state. Numerous scholars have identified welfare state concerns to be key to the
securitization of migration (Huysmans 2006; Guild 2009; Triandafyllidou 2010) and such
concerns are being voiced in the Swedish debate as well. The explicit articulation of migration
as a threat is however, as shown by my analysis, less prevalent in the Swedish context. To
conclude, I contend that my analysis shows the importance of considering the more precise
understanding of what the ‘threat’ consist in since this is dependent on discursive frameworks
that are historically and contextually specific and, furthermore, often differ between different
political camps.

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