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# Suitable, Exploitable or Undesirable: Employer Perceptions and Categorisations of Migrant Workers in the Manufacturing Industries of Post-War Central Sweden

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores how social status and the exploitability of ethnic groups interplays with how employers ascribe skills and suitability to different nationalities through a historical case study of a regional two-tier segment of the Swedish post-war labour market. Drawing on previous research on the connections between social status, skills perceptions and labour market outcomes, the article argues for a more nuanced view where the specific economic and political circumstances play an important part in making employers perceive ethnic groups to be suitable for unskilled or skilled industrial work. The results show that nationalities that initially had a comparatively high social status could quickly lose any labour market privilege in a labour market segment if circumstances made them exploitable at the same time as employers perceived them to lack skills suitable for skilled industrial work.

**KEYWORDS** Ethnicity; discrimination; segmented labour markets; labour history; Sweden

## Introduction

The categorisation of ethnic groups, employer preferences for or against specific ethnicities, and the existence of immigrant, or ethnic, employment hierarchies, and how such phenomena contribute to discrimination and an ethnic division of labour, is widely debated in previous research.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on theoretical concepts of skills perception, categorical inequality as well as suitability and exploitability, this article contributes to the debate on the processes which bring into being ethnic divisions of labour through an historical case study on the emergence and dynamics of how perceptions of skill and job suitability become ascribed to different nationalities within a specific two-tier segment of the Swedish post-war labour market.

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A reoccurring topic on the categorisation of ethnic groups by employers, as well as other key actors in the labour market, is how categorical distinctions with regard to different ethnicities are formed or transformed within a given context.<sup>2</sup> Previous research often argues that the status of any group in the labour market can be derived from the political or social context and that the perception of skills and traits is often a reflection of the social status of a particular nationality or ethnic group. For example, sociologists Waldinger and Lichter argue that 'any national or local economy bears the imprint of the social structure in which it is embedded. While natives are often (implicitly) considered to have the highest status, some nationalities are considered better than others.'<sup>3</sup> What seems to give such perceptions or 'gut feelings', and the ethnic division of labour that follows from it, is thus, according to several researchers, the connection between an ethnic group's social status and the labour market.<sup>4</sup> Other researchers tend to focus on the uneven distribution of access to or lack of different forms of resources and power, including access to education and training, which leads to concentration of certain categories of employees in a secondary labour market; dead-end jobs with less than desirable working conditions and little in the form of remuneration or social status.<sup>5</sup> In many cases, these two explanations are closely intertwined and reinforce each other, leading to a durable form of inequality in the labour market and elsewhere.

The aim of the article is to study how employers in the manufacturing industries of Västmanland County perceived workers with different nationalities (in the article ethnicity will be used as a theoretical concept while nationality is the term usually used in the discourse of the empirical study), established preferences between different alternatives based on their perceptions, which in turn shaped the ethnic division of labour during the first decades after the end of the Second World War. In the words of sociologist Robert Miles, certain, often biological, characteristics are attributed with meaning in order to differentiate, exclude and dominate in 'certain historical conjunctures'.<sup>6</sup> Sweden at the end of the Second World War is arguably a case of such a historical conjuncture as foreign workers were few in number in Sweden before the 1940.<sup>7</sup> This empirical case enables us to disentangle these drivers and study the forming of ethnic categorisations in a particular labour market.

The main conclusion is that the preferences and skills perceptions that were expressed by employers with regard to different nationalities could best be understood as a result of the degree to which employers perceived

the first new arrivals as having suitable skills for the jobs for which they needed workers, and specific circumstances that made some groups more exploitable than others. Initial social status of different nationalities occasionally played a role, but less so than could be anticipated.

## Theoretical Framework

Several researchers have argued that employers form perceptions of skills (broadly defined) with regard to different groups on the labour market, such as ethnicities, that are linked to their social standing in society as a whole.<sup>8</sup> Perceptions that then, in turn, create and legitimise ethnic categorisation in the labour market and an ethnic division of labour.<sup>9</sup>

Social anthropologist Richard Jenkins has in his works on discrimination argued that employers have two forms of criteria, the first being suitability, which referred to functionally specific traits.<sup>10</sup> Suitability thus refers to skills and traits that have a bearing on the job at hand, ranging from a college degree, having the training and experience to use a lathe or welding tools, to more 'soft' skills, such as being service-minded. The other is acceptability, which is a non-specific trait that refers to manageability and pliability. Jenkins mainly focused on the latter as the main cause of disadvantages for certain groups in the labour market. However, as has been pointed by others, skills perception is often subjective and is also affected by categorical thinking that associates groups of people with specific abilities.<sup>11</sup> This is especially the case with regard to 'soft skills', such as character or personality traits, attitudes, and social skills, that are less easy to define but have been shown to be important for employers, particularly when hiring for less qualified positions.<sup>12</sup> Skill is therefore in this article defined as a broader spectrum of abilities, including non-formalised 'soft skills' such as attitudes, behaviour and work ethic.

Through a broader definition of skill, these can also include such behavioural traits that in Jenkins' terms would fall under the label of acceptability. In other words, to be pliable or manageable could also be portrayed as a skill: reliable, trustworthy, hard-working. I would, furthermore, argue that such skills' perceptions could be associated with what I would call exploitability. Exploitability is here understood as a function of the possibilities that members of a group have to say no. People with fewer options will accept and stick with jobs that those with a wider range of possibilities would shun. Exploitability expresses itself as a trait for employers, who perceive them as hard-working. Refugees could, for

example, be easier to exploit as they often lack resources and connections within their host society that give them access to the primary labour market and they have few options for moving elsewhere. This often makes them more manageable and perceived as hard-working while also not being considered suitable for more attractive, well paid, jobs. The sum of such skills' perceptions can be thought of as the basis for an ethnic hierarchy in the labour market, expressing itself in the division of labour between different ethnicities at the workplace.<sup>13</sup> Thus ethnic groups with higher social status will be associated with skills suitable for more attractive jobs in the division of labour, while those with lower social status, but who are deemed exploitable, are found to be suitable for less attractive positions within the organisation.

The overarching problem this article addresses is the establishment of conditions where different nationalities become associated with certain skills (including characteristics, traits, attitudes) that make them (unsuitable for specific jobs in the eyes of employers, which in turn decides their role in the division of labour.<sup>14</sup> In order to investigate how ethnic employment hierarchies in the labour market are formed, it is essential to explore the intersection of skills' perceptions associated with different nationalities and groups, i.e., exploitability, and how this relates to social status. In this study skills' perceptions will be assumed to be the outcome of both the social status as well as the relative exploitability of different nationalities. Social status is thought to be associated with skills that are closely related to Jenkins' term suitability; skills and traits that have a bearing on the job at hand. Exploitability is expected to be more closely related to manageability or pliability, made evident through the use of such terms as reliable or hard-working with regard to any specific nationality.

## **Case Study Background and Methods**

The post-war period heralded the start of an era of rapid economic growth and prosperity in Sweden. Migrant workers became essential for this development, particularly in the manufacturing industries. The case study for this article, Västmanland County, is a region in central Sweden that was (and to a certain extent still is) dominated by large industrial companies. Approximately fifty per cent of employees in the county were employed in the industrial sector, and most of these worked in the metal- and engineering industries; in ironworks, steel mills and at the electro-technical company Asea (the largest company in Sweden at the time). During the

post-war period, economic prosperity opened up a range of opportunities for employers and industrial work was not the most popular option.<sup>15</sup>

Due to increased competition for employees as well as greater domestic and international demand for manufactured products, the industries of the region suffered from near chronic labour shortages during the decades after the war. Employers were looking for both unskilled workers, particularly for less attractive and heavy work tasks, as well as skilled, experienced and qualified workers.<sup>16</sup> Employers were thus looking to recruit to two tiers within this low-segment labour market: skilled workers who were associated with a certain level of skills, wages and social status within the local community, and unskilled workers, where skills in the form of training and experience for the job at hand often were not required but where the ability to handle an often tough working environment was a premium.

This study enables us to see how employers perceived these groups of migrant workers, who they deemed to be suitable for skilled work and which groups should be recruited in order to fill the need for unskilled work. In the theoretical framework, I hypothesised that categorical ethnic skill perceptions with regard to skilled and unskilled industrial work could be thought of as a result of the social status and exploitability of a specific group at a certain point in time. Considering that the labour demand, in this case, concerns industrial workers, not bankers or senior executives, a certain level of exploitability is probably necessary for a nationality to be perceived as acceptable (manageable, pliable) for industrial work, but in order to be of interest for skilled work employers are expected to prefer employees of a nationality with a higher social status that are consequently associated with skills.

Nationalities with higher social status are thought to be perceived as competent and suitable for skilled work but they need also to be reliable and manageable. High-status nationalities that are hard to exploit are mostly unattainable as a source of labour as they have alternatives (i.e., young Swedes that could elect for further schooling and choose from a broader pallet of non-industrial work). Nationalities with low social status are thought to be suitable for unskilled work but they need to be exploitable in order to be acceptable. Considering that low social status often is correlated with a lack of power and resources, this is often thought to be the case.

How then is social status and exploitability to be operationalised in the study? There are a couple of studies in previous research that give a

picture of how different nationalities were perceived in the mid-1940s, at the start of the period studied in this article, that can be used to assess their relative status in a broader context.<sup>17</sup> These studies will help to ascertain the relative (and initial) social and political status of different nationalities in Sweden during this time.

Exploitability, on the other hand, is the result of a lack of options that makes individuals accept jobs many others avoid. This is partly a result of social status, but in this case, it could also be derived from the possibility of returning to country of origin and the conditions and labour market regulations operating there. Immigrants in post-war Sweden consisted of both refugees and labour migrants. Refugees are often not able or willing to return to their country of origin and are therefore more exploitable than labour migrants who usually can return to their country of origin. Of course, that option is less desirable if wages are much lower and unemployment much higher there. Furthermore, labour market regulations in Sweden at the time differentiated between Nordic and non-Nordic citizens. A number of regulatory changes during the latter half of the 1940s and early 1950s meant that Nordic citizens did not need a work permit in Sweden. Citizens from other countries needed a work permit and these were restricted to a specific occupation. The Labour Market Board did not usually give work permits for occupations for which there was not a labour shortage.<sup>18</sup> In this regard, non-Nordic citizens were, at least on paper, more exploitable than Nordic citizens as they were to a lesser extent allowed to shift between different economic sectors, occupations or move in or out of the country at will.

The empirical study relies mainly on archival material collected from the archives of the County Labour Market Board of Västmanland (*Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län*, LVL), from the Regional State Archives in Uppsala; from the company archives for Bultfabriks AB in Hallstahammar (BFAB); from the archives of the National Labour Market Board in Söderhamn (AMS); and from the archives of the Government Commission for foreign workers (BUA, *Beredningen för utländsk arbetskraft*) at the National Archives in Marieberg, Stockholm. The material is supplemented with newspaper articles and the aforementioned studies that are used to ascertain the relative social and political status of different nationalities in the 1940s.

The analysed material consists of more than two hundred letters and reports for the period from the end of the Second World War until the latter half of the 1960s. Due to the importance and role of the public

employment services and its agencies, especially in issues concerning labour migration, employers who want to hire foreign workers have to justify this in order to obtain work permits for non-Nordic workers. Furthermore, the public officers of the employment agencies and the county labour market board wrote regular reports concerning the situation on the local and regional labour market, often describing the opinions and preferences of CEOs and others representing the larger companies in the region. In these letters and reports migrant works were often mentioned, their suitability for industrial work, or lack thereof, was often discussed. This material thus contains arguments and descriptions of different groups of workers, employer preferences, arguments for these preferences, and what jobs different groups of people were considered suitable for (or not) and why, over a long period of time. It is consequently possible to study changes in ethnic categorisations and perceptions of skills associated with these nationalities.

It should at this stage be noted that the article will not take account of the issue of gender as the material is not suitable for a study of how skill perceptions with regard to nationality intersected with gender. When employers in the manufacturing industries considered solutions to their labour shortages they typically talked about workers, foreign workers, or female workers. Workers were in other words implicitly Swedish men unless otherwise mentioned, foreign workers usually did not have any gender and female workers did not have any nationality. This is unfortunate as other sources indicate that a significant part of the female workforce in the manufacturing industries of Västmanland County was in fact composed of immigrants during this time period

The results of the study are divided into four sections, each covering different nationalities that present in significant numbers in Västmanland County and who from a theoretical perspective are expected to be treated differently based on the social status of the different nationalities within Sweden.

### ***Baltic and Polish Refugees***

Refugees were one of the few untapped labour resources available for employers at the end of the Second World War. From their point of view, there were both advantages and disadvantages of hiring refugees – mostly Estonians, but also from the other Baltic countries and Poland. Refugees had few alternatives and connections and returning home was often not an



alternative. A commonly held perception, or suspicion, of Baltic refugees as Nazi sympathisers,<sup>19</sup> might not have been a direct concern for employers but arguably made refugee employees from the Baltics even more exploitable.<sup>20</sup> The downside, at least from the employer's point of view, was that many of them were formerly sailors and fishermen, or from the middle-classes, and so did not have any background as industrial workers.

A particular aspect of refugees in the Swedish labour market in the post-War period that arguably contributed to their exploitability was the way they were handled by the National Labour Market Board in Söderhamn (AMS).<sup>21</sup> In order to shift refugees from camps to productive work government representatives often worked in bulk rather than with individuals. While AMS, for the most part, had the interests of employers in mind,<sup>22</sup> AMS was on occasion accused by employers of mixing in persons unsuitable for employment together with workers who matched the job requirements. Polish nationality was furthermore also associated with survivors of the Holocaust, deemed to be of fragile health and so unsuitable for employment.<sup>23</sup> These were probably the underlying reasons behind why two employers in the small locality of Kolsva declined offers of Polish workers from the labour market board in 1951 despite both firms suffering from severe labour shortages.<sup>24</sup> Refugees were therefore often considered second-rate workers and such characteristics were soon associated with these nationalities.

In late 1949 there were 332 refugees from the Baltic countries working in twenty-one different companies in the region. Many of these had arrived at the region a couple of years earlier and had arguably been instrumental in maintaining production in sections with high rates of worker turnover.<sup>25</sup> They were thus considered as suitable replacement workers as they, unlike Swedes, had fewer options and a more limited knowledge of the labour market. Some companies, most notably Asea and Bultfabriks AB, also, for this reason, wanted to recruit more Baltic refugees from camps in England and Denmark.<sup>26</sup> It could therefore be argued that Baltic refugees were exploitable and therefore suitable, but were not found suitable for skilled work. Polish migrants were found to be unsuitable because they were associated with health problems.

### **Germans**

One nationality that transcended the weak position that is commonly attributed to refugees was Sudeten Germans. Unlike refugees from the

Baltic countries they had or were perceived to have, suitable skills for industrial work as well and a higher social standing. The positive perception of Sudeten Germans was linked to the active work of a small group of Social Democrats and trade union representatives from Sudetenland already living in exile in Sweden.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, strong business ties between Sweden and Germany most likely contributed to a positive view of Germans amongst industrialists in Sweden.<sup>28</sup>

Favourable views of Germans in general, early positive experiences, and social support meant that they were perceived as both skilled and as having characteristics that made them, unlike most other refugees, suitable for industrial work.<sup>29</sup> Sudeten Germans as a group could thus avoid some of the social stigma associated with being refugees and achieve a higher position in the stratified labour market.<sup>30</sup> It could also be argued that Sudeten Germans were associated with several positive traits that made employers perceive them as both suitable and even preferable workers compared to the alternatives. They were refugees, more or less, which made them exploitable but, significantly, they were not perceived as refugees and so were not associated with the lack of suitable skills for industrial work that employers normally associated with refugee status. On the contrary, early positive experiences of Sudeten Germans by employers elevated their social status.<sup>31</sup>

In 1950 a manager at Svenska Metallverken's production plant in Skultuna north of Västerås wrote a letter to AMS arguing that they wanted to recruit Sudeten Germans with the explicit goal of bringing down labour turnover.<sup>32</sup> They pointed at earlier positive experiences of Sudeten Germans as reliable workers from the 1940s and that such workers could, again, bring some much-needed stability to the workforce. The Iron Works in Hallstahammar made the same argument one year later, arguing for Sudeten Germans as a more preferable alternative to Finnish workers.<sup>33</sup> One year later the same company reported that only one in twenty Sudeten Germans hired the previous year had quit and that they, therefore, wanted to recruit more.

The reasons behind the positive perceptions of Sudeten Germans went beyond these few positive practical experiences. and, arguably, was a function of the positive view of Germans and German culture overall. However, due to Western Germany being occupied by the Allies during the 1940s the possibilities of hiring German workers were limited, as the post-war occupying government did not allow emigration in most cases. When such restrictions were lifted in 1949, many industrial companies

wanted to hire Germans and, later on, Austrians. While suitable skills were sometimes attributed to Germans and Austrians, the quality that was first and foremost associated with them was reliability. References to earlier experiences of Sudeten Germans were common in this regard. German-speaking workers were compared to nationalities considered as unreliable, particularly workers from Nordic countries (see below), and therefore preferable and more suitable, especially for skilled work.<sup>34</sup>

Reliability was a highly valued trait for employers in the manufacturing industries in the region at the time. A common characteristic for many of the heavy industries was that many of the jobs with the least desirable work environments, such as three-shift work at furnaces and foundries, needed workers with a certain level of skill and experience.<sup>35</sup> This meant that work in this sector required both specific skills and reliability. Just as Sudeten Germans refugees, labour migrants from a West Germany that at the time still suffered from the destruction of the war and massive relocations of people, were more exploitable than Swedish workers, even as labour migrants.<sup>36</sup> Germans and Austrians fitted this need during the early 1950s and were often top of the list when employers were looking for workers for heavy and dirty jobs, due to their perceived lower labour turnover. However, by the mid-1950s immigration from Germany and Austria to Västmanland County ceased as the German 'economic miracle' considerably improved the social and economic conditions there and employers found they were no longer able to recruit from this labour supply.<sup>37</sup>

### ***Danish and Finnish Workers***

While Germans in general, and Sudeten Germans in particular, were perceived positively from the start and onwards in the 1950s and 1960s, the perception of Nordic migrants, and notably Finnish workers, had a more negative trajectory. The political landscape in Sweden at the time favoured Nordism, cooperation between the Nordic countries. The first decade after the end of the Second World War saw several examples of initiatives and intergovernmental bodies that favoured Nordic integration. A significant expression of this was the creation of a Nordic labour market, codified in 1954 but in practice established already by the late 1940s, where Nordic citizens needed neither work or habitual permits nor entry visas when moving between the Nordic countries.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Nordic refugees from occupied Denmark and Norway and those fleeing

from a war-torn Finland were often described as ‘brothers’ in public discourse during the war.<sup>39</sup> It might reasonably be expected that positive perceptions of them as brothers (or sisters), and political initiatives for Nordic integration in the post-war period, would mean that Nordic migrants would be perceived as desirable workers. The developments during the early post-war period show that this was not exactly the case. Workers from Finland and Denmark were not viewed positively by employers in the 1950s and 1960s. For Finnish migrants, this was instead the time for the establishment of their low social status in many parts of Swedish society for decades to come.

When the supply of refugees in Sweden ran out in the latter half of the 1940s, and the government barred the possibility of large-scale recruitment of displaced persons on the continent, workers from Denmark became an option. The County Labour Market Board helped several firms in endeavours to hire Danish workers for those jobs that had previously been offered to refugees – unskilled and less attractive work tasks.<sup>40</sup> The Danish experiment however turned out to be a disappointment for employers in Västmanland County. Fagersta AB claimed that Danish workers had severe problems adapting to the work environment in a steel mill. Asea had similar experiences and claimed that many of them quit within the first week.<sup>41</sup> In a matter of months, the attempts to hire workers from Denmark stopped – they had become undesirables. Not for the reason that they held a low social status in general – quite the opposite. They were hired for a specific function where skills associated with industrial work were not prioritised, but those Danish migrants that came to Västmanland County were not ready or willing to accept this role. Danish workers who were hired for jobs with lower wages or undesirable working conditions merely quit and moved somewhere else, or went back to Denmark. Danes as a nationality were thought to lack the grit needed for work at a steel mill.<sup>42</sup> These experiences then shaped employers perception of their (lack of) skills and reliability.

Whereas the perception of Danish workers as undesirables were probably highly localised to a specific context and the early 1950s, the often negative perceptions of Finnish workers were more durable and arguably existed throughout the society and labour market in post-war Sweden. The difference between Finnish migrants and other nationalities was that labour migration from Finland became a more permanent feature of the post-war labour market of Västmanland County and Sweden. Considering the positive views and solidarity towards neighbouring Finland during the

war and the inclusive rhetoric in political discourse,<sup>43</sup> it would be expected that Finnish workers should be highly ranked in the ethnic division of labour. This was not the case and they were generally perceived to be both unreliable and unskilled.

The main reason why Finnish workers were considered undesirable in the early 1950s arguably hinged on the fact that many Finns that came to Västmanland looking for work were seasonally un- or under-employed farmers and forest-workers with limited experience of work in the manufacturing sector. Many of them seem to have regarded work in the industries of Sweden as a seasonal job. Finnish migrants and other Nordic citizens, while in many regards exploitable because of poverty, were not as manageable as some of the other nationalities. They were labour migrants, not refugees, and the fact they did not need a work permit made them much less constrained by institutional factors. Unfortunately, this helped create a perception among employers that were not to their benefit. The turnover rates of Finnish workers were very high and the employers reacted accordingly. For example, Hans von Kantzow, CEO of Bultfabriks AB, argued that Finnish workers should be only employed if no one else could be found. Furthermore, if hired they should preferably be placed in dead end-jobs, as it would be a waste of time training them as it was thought they would leave by springtime anyhow.<sup>44</sup>

Early negative experiences thus placed Finnish workers at the bottom of the ethnic employment hierarchy, creating self-fulfilling prophecies in the process. In a candid 1957 report regarding Finnish workers from the Asea Staff office, it was noted that Finnish workers were deliberately placed at workstations with heavy jobs and dirty, smoky and smelly environments. These were jobs the Finnish workers performed laboriously, and, according to the report, with great resilience and without complaint. It was also noted that the turnover of Finnish workers was no higher than those of Swedes who were assigned the same jobs. The difference was, of course, that Swedes were rarely given such work assignments,<sup>45</sup> presumably because it was hard to find Swedes willing to accept such jobs. At about this time the more negative comments regarding Finnish workers started to subside. The resilience and hard work of Finnish workers were starting to be acknowledged by company officers and management. Perhaps this was because companies in Västmanland County now had a number of Finnish employees that had been at the firm for several years. By the early 1970s representatives of the Iron Works of Sweden thought of Finns as an essential and necessary

source of labour.<sup>46</sup> Such praise should not, however, diminish the fact that the key traits of Finnish workers, their resilience and hard work, rested on their exploitability as temporary unskilled labour due to low wages and consistent unemployment in several regions of Finland.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Industrial Workers from Italy***

Another almost permanent, albeit comparatively small, group in the labour market of post-war Västmanland County were the Italians. In the eyes of the employers, Italians were everything that Finns were not: skilled and reliable. Italians were thus at the top of the ethnic employment hierarchy in Västmanland. They were sometimes explicitly ranked higher than Swedes, especially Swedes that were internal migrants from the northern parts of the country (no better than Finns, according to some company representatives). The immediate reason for this was that the first Italians that came to Västmanland in the late 1940s were skilled and qualified industrial workers who had been hired through a government recruitment effort. As this operation was successful – the first Italians were perceived as well trained and reliable – Italian soon became synonymous with capable and skilful worker. The principal recipients of the first recruitments in Italy – Bultfabriks AB and Asea – thus had Italians as first on their list of preferences when it came to the nationality of new employees.<sup>48</sup> Unlike Germans, who were also considered good, reliable workers, for example, Italians were seldom hired for those jobs or sections that were known for poor working conditions and high labour turnover.<sup>49</sup> Thus, due to a couple of specific circumstances, a nationality from the south of Europe ended up close to the top of the ethnic hierarchy in this particular two-tier segment of a regional labour market.

### **Conclusions**

This study has shown how categorical ethnic distinction in the perception of skills by employers contributed to the creation of an ethnic division of labour in the manufacturing industries of Västmanland County in the early post-war period. The foundation for these perceptions amongst employers was formed in a process that involved social status, exploitability and past experiences of skills perception that determined their preferences for different nationalities for skilled and unskilled work within a two-tier labour market segment.

Previous studies have stressed the importance of the social status within which the labour market is embedded for the ethnic division of labour. Refugees from Poland and the Baltics fit this mould. These groups were exploitable, lacked in social status or political backing and were, on top of this, perceived amongst employers and representatives for the authorities to be missing the skills and physical stamina necessary for manufacturing jobs. These groups could be perceived as suitable for unskilled work when there were no other viable options at hand, but the perceptions of health problems led to them being thought of as unsuitable, confining them to more precarious employments.

However, in other cases, political and public discourse regarding different nationalities did not automatically transfer to employers' perception of their skills and suitability. People from Denmark and Finland arguably had a higher social status than other nationalities due to a perception of the peoples of the Nordic countries as 'Brothers.' This did however not lead to these nationalities being perceived as suitable and the opposite is the case. Initially this hinged on the fact that most of those immigrants lacked previous experience of working in the manufacturing industries. Furthermore, Danish workers simply left their employment as they could find better jobs elsewhere. The low opinion of employers of the Danes as a group meant they could consider other nationalities as suitable alternatives for unskilled work. Finns left their jobs as well, but many came back next season. Employers in time changed their perception of them as unreliable and undesirable and came to consider them suitable for unskilled work. The difference, in the long run, was that Finns were more exploitable than their Nordic brothers and sisters.

In the case of Italians, they acquired a high social status precisely because the first to arrive in the County were skilled industrial workers. This gave employers a perception of Italians as suitable for skilled work in the regional context. The same arguments could be made about Sudeten Germans, the difference being that they, as well as other German-speaking migrants, could fall back on a positive social standing. On the other hand, these groups were initially more exploitable, due to often being displaced persons, which made employers perceive them as a suitable and more preferable alternative for unskilled work than Nordic migrants.

To conclude, the article illustrates the often complex interplay between the social status and exploitability of different groups in the labour market, on the one hand, and employers' perception of skills and suitability of these groups in the division of labour on the other. Groups that

are initially thought to have a comparatively high social status can quickly lose that if they are exploitable at the same time as employers perceived them as not having suitable skills for jobs associated with a higher status. The end result for the ethnic division of labour was that employers started to look for and hire some nationalities for skilled work (Italians, Austrians and occasionally Germans) and others for unskilled work (Finns, refugees, including Germans that were exploitable).

## Notes

1. Castles et al., *The Age of Migration*; Castles and Kosack, *Immigrant workers and class structure in western Europe*; Massey et al., 'Theories of International Migration'; Sassen, *Guests and aliens*; Tilly, *Durable inequality*; Waldinger, 'The Making of an Immigrant Niche'; and Waldinger and Lichter, *How the Other Half Works*.
2. Friberg, 'Culture at Work'; Friberg and Midtboen, 'Ethnicity as Skill'; Jenkins, *Racism and Recruitment*; and Tilly, *Durable inequality*.
3. Waldinger and Lichter, *How the Other Half Works*, 8.
4. McDowell et al., 'Division, Segmentation, and Interpellation'; Ruhs and Anderson, *Who Needs Migrant Workers?*; Waldinger and Lichter, *How the Other Half Works*; and Wills et al., 'London's Migrant Division of Labour.'
5. Castles and Kosack, *Immigrant Workers and class Structure in western Europe*; and Piore, *Birds of passage*.
6. Miles, *Racism After "Race Relations"*, 44.
7. Jansson, *Industriell Invandring*; and Lundh and Ohlsson, *Från arbetskraftsimpport till flyktinginvandring*. It should be noted that there is a post-colonial tradition that argues that racism in Sweden has a long historical roots that are arguably marked by continuity rather than changes and shifts at 'historical junctions', cf. Mulinari and Neergaard, 'Theorising racism: Exploring the Swedish racial regime.' I would argue that at the end of the day this is an empirical question that have still not been answered.
8. Friberg and Midtboen, 'Ethnicity as Skill'; and Moss and Tilly, *Stories Employers Tell*.
9. Massey, *Categorically Unequal*; Sassen, *Guests and Aliens*; and Tilly, *Durable inequality*.
10. Jenkins, *Racism and Recruitment*.
11. Friberg, 'Culture at Work'; Friberg and Midtboen, 'Ethnicity as Skill'; Maldonado, "It is Their Nature to do Menial Labour"; and Shih, " ... Yeah, I could Hire This One, but I Know it's Gonna be a Problem."
12. Moss and Tilly, *Stories Employers Tell*.
13. Doeringer and Piore, *Internal Labor Markets and Manpower Analysis*; Piore, *Birds of Passage*; and Thurow, *Generating Inequality*.
14. Waldinger and Lichter, *How the Other Half Works*; and Wills et al., 'London's Migrant Division of Labour.'



15. Jansson, *Industriell Invandring*; Lundh and Ohlsson, *Från arbetskraftsimport till flyktinginvandring*; and Waara, *Svenska arbetsgivareföreningen och arbetskraftsinvandringen 1945–1972*.
16. Jansson, *Industriell invandring*.
17. Byström, *En broder, gäst och parasit*; Olsson, *På tröskeln till folkhemmet*; Swanberg, *Arbetets relationer och etniska dimensioner*; Tempsch, *Från Centraleuropa till folkhemmet*; and Waara, *Svenska arbetsgivareföreningen och arbetskraftsinvandringen 1945–1972*.
18. Nelhans, *Utlänningen på arbetsmarknaden*.
19. Byström, *En broder, gäst och parasit*; and Horgby, *Dom där*.
20. See Swanberg, *Arbetets relationer och etniska dimensioner*.
21. Olsson, *På tröskeln till folkhemmet*.
22. See Thor, 'Det är billigare att bota ett TBC-fall än att uppfostra en svensk'; and Thor, 'Kvoten fylldes av blonda och nyttiga.'
23. 'Vila, vila' hören wir ringsum", Heraus vom Lager!, appendix to *Betr. artikel*, Letter from Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län to SAK, 4/1 1946: LVL, EIV:11.
24. Letter from Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län to AMS, 2/8 1951: LVL, B1a:1; Letter from Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län to SAK, 1/6 1946: LVL, EIV:11; and *Översikt över arbetsmarknadsläget för februari månad 1949*, letter from AF Kolsva to Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län, 15/2 1949: LVL, F11b:4.
25. Letter from Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län to AMS, 28/11 1949: LVL, EIV:13.
26. Letter from Asea to statssekreterare Folke Thunborg, 4/7 1947; and Letter from Folke Thunborg to Kapten Axel Edström, Asea, 7/7 1947: BUA, vol.3.
27. Tempsch, *Från Centraleuropa till folkhemmet*.
28. Waara, *Svenska arbetsgivareföreningen och arbetskraftsinvandringen 1945–1972*, 117.
29. See note 27 above.
30. See Rauhut, *I moder Sveas ömma famn*.
31. *Ibid.*, 73-74.
32. *Betr. utländsk arbetskraft till AB Svenska Metallverken, (Skultunaverken) Skultuna*, letter from Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län to AMS, 6/12 1950: LVL, B1a:1; *Betr. utländsk arbetskraft*, letter from Skultunaverken to AMS, 4/9 1951; Letter from AMS to Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län, 7/9 1951; *Ang, utländsk arbetskraft till Skultunaverken*, letter from Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län to AMS, 8/9 1951; and Letter from AMS to Landesarbeitsamt Südbayern, 1/10 1951: LVL, EIV:18.
33. Letter from Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län to AMS, 25/7 1951: LVL, EIV:18.
34. *Betr. utländsk arbetskraft*, letter from Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län to AMS, 9/11 1951: LVL, B1a:1.
35. Jansson, *Industriell invandring*, 91-97.
36. See Swanberg, 'The Contrasts of Migration Narratives.'
37. Letter from AMS to Surahammars Bruk AB, 6/5 1961: LVL EIV:22 Letter from AMS to Surahammars Bruk AB, 17/8 1961: LVL E1a:36.

38. See note 18 above.
39. Byström, *En broder, gäst och parasit*.
40. *Ang. nordisk arbetsförmedlingssamverkan*, letter from Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län to AMS, 17/4 1950: LVL; Bla:1; *Betr. arbetsmarknadsläget under maj månad 1950*, 9/6 1950; *Betr. arbetsmarknadsläget 1–15 juni 1950*, 19/6 1950: LVL, Filb:4; and *Betr. arbetskraft till Kohlsva Jernverks AB, Kolsva*, letter from Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län to Amtarbejdsanvisningskontorer, Aalborg, 6/6 1950: LVL, EIV:16. That Danes should be hired for such jobs were not derived from the social status, but the fact that AMS usually did not give work permits for unskilled jobs to non-Nordic migrants.
41. *Betr. dansk arbetskraft till Fagersta Bruks AB*, letter from Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län to AMS, 12/6 1950: LVL, Bla:3; *Betr. arbetskraft till Fagersta Bruks AB*, letter from Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län to Arbejdsdirektoratet, Köpenhamn, 12/7 1950; and *Betr. arbetskraft till Asea i Västerås*, letter from Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län to Amtarbejdsanvisningskontoret, Randers, 20/10 1950: LVL, EIV:16.
42. *Betr. översikt över arbetsmarknadsläget under augusti 1950*, 9/9 1950: LVL, Filb:4.
43. Byström, *En broder, gäst och parasit*, 203–04.
44. *PM angående arbetskraftssituationen vid Bultfabriks Aktiebolaget, Hallstahammar*, 5/6 1951, Disponentens korrespondens, 1951: BFAB, 1DA.
45. *Finsk arbetskraft*, memorandum by B. Juhlin, Asea, 13/5 1957: LVL, EIV:16.
46. Järnbruksförbundet, 'Järnverkens arbetskraftsproblem inför 1970-talet.'
47. See Svanlund, *Svensk och finsk upphinnartillväxt*.
48. Letter from AMS to Bultfabriks AB, 25/4 1955: AMS; *Betr. Import av arbetskraft*, letter from Bultfabriks AB to AMS, 4/7 1955: AMS, EIIla:44; *Ang. överförande av italiensk arbetskraft*, letter from Länsarbetsnämnden i Västmanlands län to AMS, 19/10 1960: LVL, EIV:18; and Kvist, *Aseas i Västerås nuvarande italienska arbetskraft*.
49. Letter from Ing. Carlo M. Lericci to Disponent Hans von Kantzow, 7/7 1947, Disponentens korrespondens, 1947: BFAB, 1DA; Letter from Ing. Carlo M. Lericci to Hans von Kantzow, 12/7, 1947, Disponentens korrespondens, 1947: BFAB, 1DA. Interestingly, employers in the county at times stated preferences against Italians from the *Mezzogiorno* (i.e., southern Italy), often stating that they wanted workers from the northern parts of the country. A preference they probably had picked up from Italian business contracts.

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