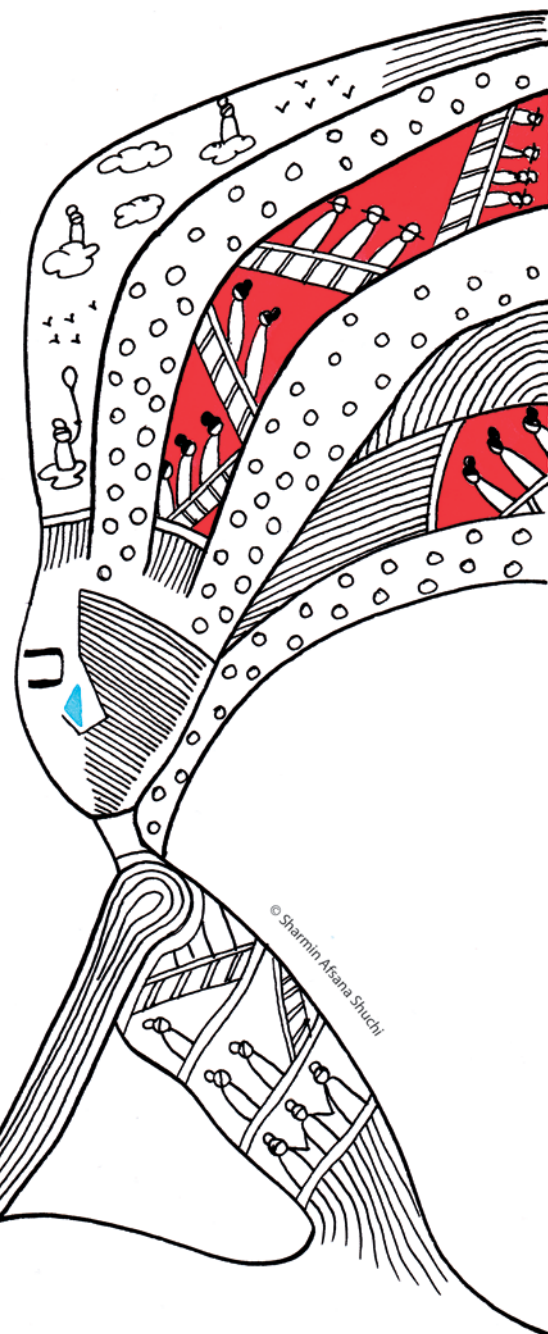


# WOMEN STORIES

100 YEARS OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S  
LIFE AND WORK IN MALMÖ



A report from the workshop at  
Mötesplatsen Seved, Feb 11, 2014



# Life in Movement

**Your Story Belongs to the Story of the City**

*“The solutions are with us. We are expert immigrants.”*

*“A play would explore examples of discrimination.”*

*“It could be important to exhibit what a person has left behind, what has been brought along, and what has been shared with the city of Malmö.”*

*100 Years of Immigrant Women's Life and Work in Malmö* is a project run by Malmö Museum and the network Feminist Dialog, in cooperation with ABF and Malmö University.



**KULTURRÅDET**

# 100 Years of Immigrant Women's Life and Work in Malmö

*Malmö Museum, Feminist Dialog, ABF, and Malmö University*

Introductory talks: by the project group.

Moderators and note takers: Mamak Babak-Rad, Jila Moradi, Rasha Nasr, Isabella Z. Tuysuz, Zeinab Ismail, and Anders Hög Hansen.

Newsletter editorial group: Parvin Ardalan (project initiator), researchers Erling Björgvinsson and Anders Hög Hansen; with contributions from and special thanks to IDM students Sonja Rattay, Luisa Fabrizi, Marianne Larsen, and Amy Novak.

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## Why do we need to rewrite the history?

*Every immigrant has an experience of migration. Since one hundred years until now, many people have immigrated to Malmö, in different periods and for different reasons. Almost half of the immigrants in Malmö were (are) women who have been unseen in the written history. Some of them identify themselves as immigrants and some not. Regardless of identification, they have experiences of life and work in this city, experiences that have not yet been written in the history of the city.*



The effort of Malmö Museum and the network Feminist Dialog—in cooperation with Malmö University and ABF—is one small step towards re-writing the history, under the name of 100 Years of Immigrant

Women's Life and Work in Malmö.



The first seminar was held on June 11, 2013, in Malmö at the city library. With more than 50 people from 16 countries, we talked about invisibility of immigrant women's work in Swedish history-writing. The first workshop took place

at Garaget in Malmö on December 2, 2013.

More than 40 women discussed ideas for the project in general and they expressed their experiences for each other. It is reported in News-

letter # 1 which is also available on the Feminist Dialog website.

The second workshop was continued by 20 of the previous participants. The aim of the discussion was how to contribute to the Nordic Forum New Action on Women's Rights events and exhibition June 12-16, 2014.

To help discussion underway—and to provide materials and experiences for further ways of highlighting women's histories of immigration—a group of students from the interaction design masters programme at Malmö University had created



exercises and material (for example, theme cards/flashcards and posters) to stimulate debate. The theme cards were based on the outcome of the Garaget workshop, but there were also blank cards for participants to come up with their own ideas. The students had also created posters where participants were invited to fill in comments. However, the group discussions were the main activity. The small groups, led by a moderator, worked with the flashcards to develop ideas for the Nordic Forum. Each group were given time for individual presentations on the selection of themes and activities. This was followed by discussion in the group. Finally, all participants came together to present the work in the groups.

What follows in this newsletter are extracts from note takers in the three groups and some pictures from the event.

Finally, this newsletter includes a summary of the interaction design students' ideas on how women's experiences and ideas—for the project in general—can be publicly shared and communicated.

Yours sincerely,

The newsletter editorial group.









## Group 1—A Suitcase of Memories and Experiences

*“A play would explore examples of discrimination”*

*“War has travelled with me even though I had crossed borders and now lived in a new country”*

The participants looked at the cards and appeared to be a bit confused. They talked together about their backgrounds and their former countries. One of the issues was about war. One person was still thinking about war in her home country. As a mother she was often packing suitcases with all the children's clothes so they could run if the war got too close. She even continued doing it the first years after moving to Malmö. The experience of war had travelled with her even though she had crossed borders and now lived in a new country. It got very personal and emotional. It was important to just listen and observe. This group session and the workshop was a place where the women could tell their stories.

One thing to be highlighted was an interest in making a theater piece, a short play, about 10 minutes, based on their stories and experiences.

The group members expressed some concern with the posters the students had created and hung on the walls at Mötesplatsen. They were not so interested in writing their thoughts and statements on the posters. Some were not sure about the anonymity.

## Themes

War  
Family relations  
Statelessness  
Prison  
Difficulties  
Those who were left behind  
Discrimination

## Activities

Among the means of communicating the themes, there was an emphasis on theater and storytelling. For example, a play with a student or community theatre group that would explore examples of discrimination.

Another suggestion was an exhibition about war, family, and statelessness.

A third suggestion was a photo exhibition and a “suitcase” that shows how people are prepared to leave at any moment during war.

Finally, a chronology of the journey from country of origin to Sweden was suggested.







## Group 2—Positive Power Force

*“It could be important to exhibit what a person has left behind, what has been brought along, and what has been shared with the city of Malmö”*

*“To focus on what is harsh and difficult, but also to acknowledge the possibilities in Sweden”*

Group 2 started off with every participant picking three flashcards from the table that had in any way affected them. They discussed the various choices and the attached memories and experiences to the chosen flashcards.

One member thought it was important to show images of war and what people have went through before they came to Malmö. What one has left behind can stay strong inside and play a role in the future and affect family relations. To exhibit what a person has left behind and what one has taken with her could be interesting to capture.

Another aspect that is important is to show what a person has given to the society as a “city-history maker”. The group suggested that you could first demonstrate or exhibit how people who immigrated once lived. Then also what one has taken with her is important to show. In addition, the problems that arise in the new country are equally important.

## Themes

Sexuality  
Friendship  
Memory  
Education

## Activities

After discussing their common ground, they went on to talking about how the choices could be presented at a future public arena. The group agreed upon:

Photographs  
Cultural activities such as theater and dance  
Moviemaking (daughters and sons linking their mothers' memories by a short movie)  
Storytelling (in person and digitalized)

One very important issue was to highlight the “Positive Power Force” since no participant at the table wished to only focus on what is harsh and difficult about being an immigrant, but also to acknowledge the possibilities in Sweden, both in our everyday life and at work.





## Group 3—Future Dreams

*“The solutions are with us. We are expert immigrants”*

*“Racism is there, but it is a big taboo”*

The moderator introduces the card activity and mentions that there are pictures on the back of some of the cards. When the conversation begins, one of the first cards to be picked is “passport” and then, soon after, a theme that is not on the table is mentioned: “visa”. A passport is important, but—for many—visas are also needed.

A discussion on Swedish Teaching for Immigrants (SFI) and educational backgrounds followed. One group member said that “It doesn’t matter what you have done or what you can do, it wouldn’t help you even if you are educated”.

When the focus turned towards the flashcards, the first participant selected discrimination, choices, who is an immigrant, and challenges. The second person picked marriage, difficulties, and loneliness. In the discussion after, one woman said that there is a cultural clash in the house.

One of the participants said that she would like to focus on how immigrants use memories to strengthen their identity. In the discussion about identity, it was argued that an education does not necessarily help. How to use education to go further is important, it was uttered. “It took me 10 years to get where I am now”, one also said.

Another woman picked the card “respect”. She told a story about a gift, a carpet, which she gave to a gallery, but they did not accept it. “It was a gift; it was a carpet from my home country!”.

This led another woman to introduce the theme card “acceptance” and she said that “racism is there, but it is a big taboo”. She

pointed out how England has a strategy with immigrants, but in Sweden, “of course, they say there is no discrimination”. She thought Sweden lacks a strategy.

The women continued elaborating on an idea of an immigrant women “train”; a metaphor explained as meaning “pulling the others”, or a line or unity between those that have come before and those that come after. But, “where does the train stop?”, and “when do you become Swedish?”. “We immigrant women have history, how we got in and so forth, but we are not included. Another person asked: “How can you integrate?”, while another women quickly added “and with whom?”. A third woman continued: “Who is an immigrant?” and they agreed on that the question “where are you from?” to children are the worst.



It was said that you have to start from the grassroots to find a solution, and that the solutions are with us: “We are the expert immigrants” and that “we need to be included in Swedish politics”.

Another woman mentioned the theme “diversity” and said that French companies have a quota, which some just use to “tick off”: “Quotas should be for real”, it was said.

The museum representative mentioned a former exhibition on immigrant memories, and the group continued with arguing that alternative places to exhibit at could be “places for transport and for crafts”—places of movement, creativity, and production.

The group noted that they would like to have a workshop on politics and integration.

## Themes

Education, Those who were left behind, Discrimination, Choices, Respect, War, Memory, Work, Loneliness, Difficulties, Reasons for Immigrating, Language, Rights, Legitimacy, Challenges, and Identity.

## Activities

Storytelling: for the themes of difficulties, choices, and equality—telling about the road to self-fulfillment, clashes with culture, and family expectations.

Photo exhibition: a collection of kids and women

Nordic Forum: storytelling with women with diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Feminism: City Archive, Historical Archive, Newspaper Articles, Photos, Sound Recordings, Fight For Equality









## Interaction Design students' ideas for communicating immigrant women's stories

*Four interaction design students, all studying at a 2-year masters programme at Malmö University, were involved in preparing the flashcard activity at this second workshop.*

They have been tutored by Erling Björgvinsson and others at the programme, and meetings with Parvin Ardalan have been held on several occasions. Researchers Erling Björgvinsson and Anders Høg Hansen also provided ideas on how workshop sessions could be set, including what kind of pedagogic and ethnographic techniques the students could apply.

The students contribute with design ideas and with workshop-facilitation means from January to March, and this second workshop was their first contribution to the project. They are all women and have a non-Swedish background.

### Timelines and the Rewriting of History

The students have suggested to focus, in particular, on an alternative *Timeline*—not just as *one* Timeline or a traditional Timeline with one “History” written by the powerful (men), but timelines which consist of multiple input or stories, pictures, and material from women. The material may be organized and “tagged” (that is, applied keywords to) by the editors. Some of the ideas are introduced here for further visualization and discussion at the next workshop.

The students developed their ideas after learning about the outcome of the first workshop at Garaget—thinking, for example, of how to take the issues raised by the participants further. The students argue that it is about finding a viable model and to have ideas adjusted and developed for immigrant women to be able to continue to work and add content.

Materials can easily be scanned and then uploaded or emailed to the editors, who make it available on a web platform. Various selections of this material can be printed for travelling exhibits around the city. And quite possibly, parts of it could be incorporated into the *Nordic Forum* June exhibition. These timelines should be a kind of “living archives” where women both add to and moderate the material. The printed “material” pieces of the timeline—or at least some of them—are envisioned to be small postcard-size pieces. These pieces could also include “maps of small businesses”, showing where and how women work, or cases (suitcases or containers) where things or ideas enter and which is from where they migrate.

When these postcards (which really are just a minor physical selection of a more expansive digital archive) are displayed in small businesses or clubs around the city, people are invited to add to the display-panel of the exhibit. But, they are also invited to “steal” pieces, which means to take pieces with them home or to distribute to others, or to mail them as real postcards. Thus, people visiting can in a way “take history with them”, that is, take history into possession and give to others. Consequently, fragments or pieces are always added to the collection.

History becomes histories. Our memories are not just “one collective” or one “History”. History is growing, it is plural, and it is constantly being rewritten.

