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# CREATING A SWEDISH FRANKENSTEIN: THE FAILURE OF THE MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION EXPERIMENT

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## **Abstract**

Sweden has been a haven for people fleeing oppression in their countries of origin. Historically, people fleeing prosecution were offered asylum but were expected to “fit into”, or assimilate, into the Swedish society. Learning the Swedish language as well as Swedish mores and customs was mandatory for anyone intending to reside in this Scandinavian country. Nevertheless, in the 1980s the idea of “multiculturalism” was introduced by Ms. Barbro Holmberg, a social worker who would become migration minister. Under the new immigration policy, assimilation was substituted for by “integration” and learning the language became a right instead of an obligation. In the decades to come, it would be possible for immigrants to obtain Swedish citizenship even without speaking the language or adapting to their host country in any way. The consequences of this policy have been very dire for the Swedish society, one of the most segregated in Europe, and devastating for schools, since students do not know whose values count. Schools reflect the segregation, increasing violence and new problems that affect the new Swedish society, which by no means has become better.

Keywords: Migration, multiculturalism, integration, assimilation, segregation.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The migration policy introduced in Sweden by the Social Democratic party in the 1980s has radically changed the Swedish society from being a small homogeneous nation with clearly defined values to a country characterized by spatial segregation, social exclusion and gang violence. Instead of the “multicultural paradise” envisioned by the Social Democrats, in which totally different cultures could live in tolerance and harmony, the result has been a country of parallel societies. The project of multiculturalism has hit schools in a very negative way: The academic results have deteriorated markedly, reflecting the segregation which has become typical of Sweden. Moreover, schools have been assigned new tasks, like preventing forced marriages and honour killings, making sure that small immigrant girls are not subjected to female genital mutilation and preventing radicalization of youth who do not have a clear national identity [1].

### **1.1 Aims of this paper**

The aims of this study are: 1. to prove how multiculturalism has failed both as a migration policy as well as an educational experiment in Sweden; 2. To show how independently of how many extra economic resources are poured into schools, results will not improve if the policy of multiculturalism is not revised, and to propose possible solutions to the great challenges facing education in Sweden, even if this means leaving political correctness by side. Although it is beyond the aims of this paper to suggest a radical change in migration policy, the effects of it must be addressed since migration policy has a great impact on education.

### **1.2 Methodology**

The methodology employed in this paper includes analyses of school achievement in different municipalities; a meta-analysis of the latest OECD report on Sweden’s education as well as analyses of reports from teachers’ unions. The results of the great investments in multicultural education, specifically earmarked for development of “disadvantaged” schools and their results will be critically analysed and discussed. Qualitative research methods will include an interview with the manager of one of the major providers of native language lessons, interviews with teachers, with politicians who are aware of the dire situation of education in Sweden, as well as relevant newspaper articles. The conclusion analyses critically the effects of the Swedish migration policy and provides possible solutions in the educational realm.

## **2 A “HUMANITARIAN SUPERPOWER” IN CRISIS**

As stated in the introduction of this paper, Sweden has historically been a haven for people prosecuted in other countries, including extremists and terrorists from different regions of the world. The situation was aggravated after the introduction of “multiculturalism”, since the requisites for obtaining permanent residence and citizenship, namely, learning the Swedish language and the host country’s mores and customs, ceased to be mandatory and became optional. The result of this policy has been an ever more segregated country, in which parallel societies hardly coexist.

The educational sector has been severely hit by the policy of multiculturalism: A country which used to be homogenous, peaceful, which had attained a high degree of equality between male and female citizens, and whose values were clear for pupils and students has become a split society. In the name of “tolerance” for other cultures, schools have been forced to accept fully veiled female students [2]; have had to yield to intolerant parents who oppose that their daughters participate in sports and other activities together with boys due to religious reasons; have had to earmark resources for programs like preventing forced marriages and female genital mutilation; and in some cases, been forced to close down due to violence among gangs and due to the radicalization of the “new citizens” [3].

The response of the government has usually been limited to increasing resources for disadvantaged schools, but this policy has hardly made any difference. Forced marriages and female genital mutilation, abhorrent practices imported together with refugees from the Middle East and North Africa continue, and the formation of gangs in the suburbs of big cities has become such a serious problem that the Swedish Parliament held a special meeting in September of 2019 to address this issue.

## **3 THE EFFECTS OF MASSIVE IMMIGRATION ON EDUCATION**

Due to the civil war in Syria, as well as war in Iraq and violence in Afghanistan, most of the refugees who came to Sweden were nationals from these countries. One of the biggest problems with these immigrants is that they come from countries with very high gender inequality indexes: According to the 2018 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme, Afghanistan ranks 168, Iraq 120 and Syria 155 in gender equality, while Sweden ranks 7th [4]. The implications of this difference in gender equality are the totally different perceptions of the role of women held by the newcomers. Another major problem is that, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 58% of the more than 1 million migrants who landed in Europe in 2015 (a peak migration year) were adult men, while 17% were women and the rest were children.

Professor Valerie Hudson from Texas A & M University specialises in gender studies. For her, Sweden was of particular interest since it received the second highest number of asylum applications relative to its population. The figures published by the Swedish government show that 71% of the migrants who obtained asylum were men. But even more concerning was the fact that in the age group 16-17 years old, 90% were males. According to Professor Hudson, regardless of where there is gender imbalance, the consequences are always the same: “...a rise in crime, particularly violent crime, property crime, crime against women.” [5]

### **3.1 Increasing segregation**

Most newcomers to Sweden concentrate in certain areas to the point that nowadays there are hardly any native Swedes living in those areas, especially in suburbs of the three major cities. The effects of residential segregation have caused segregation in schools as well, despite the educational reform of 1992 which allowed charter schools and other specialised schools to compete with public schools. Parents were offered a choice when it came to the education they desired for their children. Nonetheless, according to the OECD’s 2019 report on Sweden, school choice policy has not favoured the integration of immigrant students. According to this report: “there is evidence that many native Swedish students change schools when the proportion of immigrant students in their school reaches a certain level... Furthermore, researchers found the existence of so-called ‘tipping points,’ where native Swedes will leave a neighbourhood or school after the minority or migrant population exceeds a certain percentage.” [6]

The situation has become so severe that some schools in mainly immigrant neighbourhoods have been forced to close down, like was the case of the Rosengård school in Malmö in 2013. After all, highly educated Swedish parents decided to take their children out of that school, only children with very low cultural capital and immigrants remained. The result was that only a third of the students who graduated from secondary school had the grade point average required to enter high school.

The gap between the better and the worse schools has been widening: According to the 2013 statistics of the Swedish National Agency for Education, the proportion of pupils attending schools with at least 20% of failed students had increased to 17%, whereas the proportion of pupils attending schools with at most 1% of failed students was 7.8%. [7]

### **3.2 Increasing violence in disadvantaged schools**

According to the Teachers' Newspaper of Sweden, there have been over 3000 reports of violence in schools from kindergarten to high school since 2014. In the last 5 years, there have been 224 incidents involving knives or similar objects. [8] Violence and threats of violence have been directed to both pupils and school staff. In one school in the municipality of Ronneby, there was a big fight involving between 100 and 150 students from two schools. The municipal councilman of Ronneby has pointed out that the fight was a feud between two ethnic groups, Arabs and Afghans. The councilman said that although open fights did not occur regularly, the ethnic conflict was latent. [9]

### **3.3 Imported oppression against women**

Another major imported problem brought by the newcomers was the so-called "culture of honour". Cultures of honour are linked to controlling women's sexuality and are the root of the traditions of female genital mutilation, forced marriages and honour killings. With the massive arrival of immigrants from countries with cultures of honour came the above-mentioned traditions. Immigrant girls as young as 12 years old are often sent back from the countries they came from (which proves that the families were not prosecuted in the countries of origin) and married to older men. They come back with their spouses and are expected to live like husband and wife, even though marriages involving minors are illegal in Sweden. Many of them become mothers even before reaching adulthood. Although school counsellors know about girls in danger of being forcefully married, they can seldom do anything to help them. Furthermore, they are often labelled as "racists" because they do not accept the culture of the newcomer families. A study from the University of Örebro shows that one out of every six ninth-grader in Swedish cities lives under the norms of cultures of honour; in the city of Malmö 18% of ninth graders have stated that they may not choose their boyfriend or girlfriend, and 24% of them state that it is expected of them to marry as virgins [10].

The Swedish Department of Welfare estimates that there are about 7000 girls in Sweden who have been sexually mutilated. Female genital mutilation is forbidden by law in Sweden since 1982- nonetheless, there have been very few convictions for this crime.

Nowadays, it is expected of schoolteachers and other staff to contact the police, the department of Welfare or healthcare if they suspect that girls are in danger of being sent to their home countries to be forcefully married or mutilated. This means that schools have less time and resources to dedicate to teaching and learning and academic matters because of the imported cultures of honour.

### **3.4 Imported intolerance against sexual minorities and Jews**

In Islamic tradition, homosexuality is seen as *haram* (forbidden by Shari'a law). In many Islamic countries where there is no separation between religion and politics, homosexuality is punished with imprisonment, flogging or even death. When the author asked a student from Iraq what the attitude to homosexuals and lesbians in his country of origin was, he said that due to family honour, it was expected of the relatives to kill the homosexual or lesbian because that person brought disgrace to the family.

Another consequence of the multicultural educational experiment is imported antisemitism: Most Jewish students and teachers in Malmö state that they feel threatened, and that they are afraid to wear Jewish symbols to school. Thirty years ago, the Jewish community of Malmö felt safe. With the arrival of thousands of immigrants from the Middle East, people who in most cases can not differentiate between Israeli occupation policies and the Jews of Sweden, the community feels threatened to the degree that many of them have decided to leave the city. According to a Jewish high school student, Jews in Malmö have three choices when it comes to choosing schools, since all others are seen unsafe for them. One Jewish middle school student from Stockholm stated in an interview that her classmates from the Middle East blamed her systematically for Israel's policies [11].

It has become common for immigrants to threaten and harass Jewish students. But the main problem is the double standard of the Swedish government when it comes to attacks against the Jewish community: When the attacks come from the extreme right, ultranationalist groups, they are

unanimously condemned. But when the attacks come from immigrants from the Middle East, the government rarely condemns them.

### **3.5 Invoking “religious freedom” as an excuse to circumvent educational laws**

It is common for immigrant girls to go to school wearing hijabs or veils, and even burkas to school. It is dramatic that in a country like Sweden, which was looked upon by the international community with great admiration for the advances made in precisely gender equality, such a retrogression has occurred.

Another major problem faced by Swedish schools are parents who, for religious reasons, do not let their daughters participate in swimming lessons and sex education lessons, which are mandatory in the Swedish school curriculum. Since parents are adamant in their insistence that their daughters be wavered from swimming and physical education because participation in these activities stride against the tenets of Islam, schools have in many instances adapted to the parents and compromised, letting the young girls wear “burkinis”, that is, bathing suits that cover the whole body, from head to heels. Of course, the young girls do not shower before going into the swimming pool, which is mandatory for everybody else.

After the 1992 school reforms there are numerous charter schools of different orientations, e.g. Montessori schools, Waldorf schools, and religious schools. The problem with the latter is that boys and girls are treated differently, and that they do not impart important components of school curricula like sex education, science (specifically the theory of evolution), and that boys and girls are segregated. The most extreme example was a school in Gothenburg in which most teachers lacked the knowledge and the skills needed for their profession, where elementary pupils were given lessons about Islam, and which became a recruitment centre for ISIS [12].

## **4 EXTRA RESOURCES HAVE NOT IMPROVED INTEGRATION IN SWEDEN**

All pupils in Sweden at the preschool, elementary and secondary level have a right to native language instruction if the language in question is regularly used in the pupil’s home or if the student has basic knowledge of the language in question. Normally, native language instruction takes place if there are at least five pupils in the school who speak it, but many exceptions are made, and immigrant pupils can have native language instruction even if there are only two in a school.

According to some estimates, native language instruction costs around 8000 Swedish Krona per pupil per year. In the 2015/16 academic year, 151 languages were available for study through mother tongue instruction, giving a fair representation of languages other than Swedish spoken in Sweden [13]. Pupils who lack proficiency in Swedish are also offered study guidance in their native language.

The advantages that native language instruction is supposed to have are that native language instruction facilitates learning across disciplines as well as learning the Swedish language. Other pedagogues claim that it is important for pupils to learn their native language in order to boost their self-esteem and their sense of belonging to an ethnic or cultural group.

Native language instruction poses many problems the way it is offered in Sweden nowadays: According to the manager of Omniglot, an enterprise which offers native language instruction to private schools in the Stockholm region, native language instruction is not mandatory and is usually offered after classes. Pupils are tired and many of them are not interested in participating, since they see these lessons as extra work. Furthermore, there are no guidelines as to what the content of these lessons should be. While some native language teachers give guidance to their pupils in other subjects, others limit the lessons to singing songs in the native language or doing activities which do not help improve the students’ performance [14].

The manager said that many of her teachers had complained that their pupils were not motivated, that there was a general lack of discipline and that they were often disrespectful to them because “they didn’t know what rules apply.”

It is doubtful whether native language instruction- which costs taxpayers millions of krona every year- help integrate the newcomers at all. Although, as stated above, some pedagogues claim that native language instruction boosts the self confidence of immigrant pupils and helps them understand other subjects, in practice it is a waste of resources in the absence of cultural capital and motivation. Moreover, it is dubitable whether teaching pupils who come from cultures of honour their language,

mores and customs helps them integrate, when their traditions, in fact, conflict directly with Swedish values.

## **5 IS IT POSSIBLE TO INTEGRATE CULTURES OF HONOUR WITH DEMOCRACY?**

“Integration” does not have the same meaning assimilation does. Integration implies that both the host country and the newcomers adapt to each other- in other words, that people can conserve their culture, mores, traditions, etc. Integration is a concept used in multinational states like Bolivia or Mexico, where there are several national minorities. Mainstream citizens see these minorities and their culture as part of the culture mosaic of their country. Assimilation, on the other hand, means that the newcomer does all in his or her capacity in order to adapt to the host country. Marriage with nationals of the host country is an example of assimilation.

In the case of foreigners, who share no culture, no history, no values, no language, no mores and customs with the host country the situation is quite different. No Swede would accept that female genital mutilation, practiced in many Islamic countries, could ever become part of the Swedish culture; or that killing homosexuals and lesbians for “honour” reasons could ever be tolerated in their country for “religious” reasons.

As stated at the beginning of this essay, Sweden historically has accepted refugees for humanitarian reasons. But there is a huge difference between the mores and customs brought by Norwegians, Danes and Finns who sought asylum during the World War II and the mores and customs from cultures of honour.

Another major problem is the educational level of the newcomers: While many Polish Jews who came to Sweden in the 1960s were highly educated professionals with a high cultural capital, that is hardly the case with the immigrants who came from the Middle East after 2014. Among the adult refugees who came to Sweden in 2014 (that is, 25 years of age or older), Syrians have an average education of 6.6 years; Somalis an average of 3.2 years and Iraqis an average of 5.6 years [15].

### **5.1 Frankenstein: Creating and uncontrollable monster**

In the novel *Frankenstein- or the Modern Prometheus* by Mary W. Shelley, Dr Victor Frankenstein, a Swiss scientist, wants to play Creator and reanimates a dead body using a combination of chemistry, alchemy and electricity. He is able to bring the corpse back to life, but his “creation” turns out to be a monster he greatly despises and flees from. The Monster, who discovers there is no place for him in the world, receives nothing but rejection, hostility and aggression. He becomes resentful and starts killing friends and relatives of his creator. Dr Frankenstein knows what he has caused, but neither accepts nor assumes responsibility for the monster he brought to life. The monster even kills the doctor’s fiancée the day of their wedding.

When the Swedish government decided to liberalize its migration policy and create a “multicultural society” in which different cultures would coexist peacefully, the individuals responsible for this policy never in their worst nightmares envisioned a dystopia like the one they created. They never thought that, inviting foreigners with totally alien mores and customs, not only different from, but totally conflicting with Swedish values, would have the consequences it has had: No consequence analysis of immigration has been done in Sweden since 2004. Neither have politicians responsible for the current situation have assumed any responsibility.

### **5.2 Multiculturalism is tantamount to passive racism and sexism**

Cultural relativism is basically accepting behaviour in others which is unacceptable for Swedes, both for ethical and juridical reasons. While ethnic Swedish parents have been harshly punished for abusing their daughters’ rights, like in the case of sect members, the situation that multiculturalism poses is quite different: Islam is an ideology in which women are subjected to the authority of men to the degree that male relatives are entitled to the “right” of killing them if women dare disobey traditions. Respecting the tenets of Islam is tantamount to respecting the oppression of women, respecting honour killings, forced marriages, female genital mutilation etc. For this reason, invoking “religious freedom” and not granting immigrant women and children the same rights as Swedish women and children is legitimizing inequality.

Women and children should be granted the same rights, irrespectively of what their ethnic background is. As human rights activist Azam Kamguian points out: "According to cultural relativism we must respect people's culture and religion, however despicable. This is absurd and calls for the respect of savagery. Human beings are worthy of respect but not all beliefs must be respected. If a culture allows women to be mutilated and killed to save the family's 'honor' it cannot be excused." [16]

## 6 CAN THE DAMAGE BE REVERSED? CONCLUDING REMARKS

Time and again it has been proven that multiculturalism, both at the social and at the educational level, have failed in Sweden. If a polyethnic state is to be functional in the absence of shared values, a shared identity, and commonality of language, history and maybe religion, there must be a certain social solidarity that binds its people. Sweden in the past was an example of a highly functional multiparty democracy, subjected to the rule of law, and where newcomers were expected to adapt to their host country.

Although it is beyond the aims of this paper to propose a new migration policy, it is inevitable to suggest the revision of educational multiculturalism since its adoption has affected schools in a very negative way. "Diversity" in classrooms has become an extra challenge that overworked and burned out Swedish teachers are forced to endure.

The author proposes a mandatory course on democracy, democratic values and behaviors for all adolescent and adult newcomers, as well as sanctions that could go from high fines for circumventing Swedish educational laws to deportation, in those cases where parents are unable or unwilling to conform to Swedish laws.

As stated above, most newcomers originate from countries with some of the highest gender inequality indexes of the world. Furthermore, the rule of law, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the separation of powers, the secular state and other basic democratic institutions are unknown to them. It is the obligation of the host state to protect all of its citizens. Therefore, it should clearly state what it expects of its new inhabitants, and what the sanctions for not respecting the law are, with the aim of protecting society and of giving the newcomers a fair start in the country they chose. The author is working on the curriculum of a course on education for democracy.

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