

CERS Working Paper

Racialization in Sweden

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Introduction

Sweden is not universally regarded as a country where indigenous or foreign groups are discriminated against racially due to its seemingly neutral stance in world history and its unified values in society. Never in history has there been a revolution against the leading political power which has maintained a close bond with the church, leaving outsiders to believe that Sweden has been a peaceful, cooperative nation not dented by the what is now “structural racism: the invisible evil” (De Vos, 2013) like other countries in the world. However reports such as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) have uncovered racist tendencies for example in housing, employment and health dominantly against vulnerable groups such as Muslims, Sami, and the Roma (COE, 2012).

This essay will look at although Sweden is viewed as tolerant; there is in fact a history of racial discrimination which will be investigated in terms of the Saami, politics and Islamophobia. The long term evolution of racist discrimination against the Sami natives who were made a powerless group due to the colonisation of Sweden and the competition for land in Europe and how they are still not equal in the Swedish society today. Furthermore how there is an exploitation of racism in Swedish politics and consequently how the radical right is increasing thanks to anti-immigration policies and remnant anti-Semitic attitudes from post-World War II and Hitler’s influence on Europe. Finally the focus will turn to a more recent phenomenon of Islamophobia due to high numbers of migration and how this results in effecting Swedish society.

The Saami

The Saami are of Finno-Ugric descent and reside in lands known as Sápmi that are parts of Sweden, Norway, Russia and Finland. They are classed as an indigenous group, defined by their lifestyle and profession. There are many arguments that suggest the Saami have been racially discriminated against as early as the 16th century by the ruling party of power in Sweden at the time. However some actions that have disadvantaged the Saami have been a cause of ulterior and nationalistic reasons not necessarily due to race.

There are two main periods of time to examine; the Swedish nation state rule (1500-1800) where colonial expansionism motives and nationalism resulted in unequal treatment and when “the Swedish nation state (1846-1971) [in practice] created a system of institutionalized racism towards the nomadic Saami” (Kvist, 1994).

In the 1500s the Saami were used to benefit the monarchy as their produce such as fur and fish allowed taxes to be increased and further enlarged the royal revenue. Apart from this they were mainly left alone to live their traditional way of life off the land by reindeer herding, fishing and hunting whether by the coastline or in mountainous terrain. It has been debated that the Sápmi land was actually protected by the Swedish King until 1673 when colonisation of the land to prevent the occupation by Denmark and Russia led to a loss of land rights as well as life as the Saami were accustomed (Kvist, 1992). The King encouraged Swedish citizens to relocate to Sápmi land by offering appealing rewards such as being exempt from taxes for 15 years (so the Saami were in fact paying more tax to the Swedish government than the Swedish themselves) and immunity from military service. The Swedish did not consult the Saami before dominating their land which

obstructed the Saami tradition of living naturally off the land's resources. This could be argued to be seen as the start of Saami discrimination by the Swedes as being neglected and overruled as an indigenous group. However it is important to note that Sweden grew into a vast colonial power in the 17th century. Taking Sápmi land was a way to "convert its northern sphere of influence into a fixed part of their nation" (Lehtola, 2002: 30) and by taking over this land they could finance their imperial conquests.

Racist tendencies can also be seen through education, drastically changing accordingly with the two main time periods mentioned earlier. Research has found that Saami students did not and still do not have equal education opportunities today. In the 17th century the Saami were viewed as uncivilised, uneducated, lesser beings and education was a necessity to bring them up to an acceptable standard of society in order to be associated within the Swedish Empire. Saami pupils went to school earlier than those who were Swedish and were singled out as a race by having forced education. The education provided by missionaries was dominantly religious based and avoided assimilation so the students would go home and further spread their new found Christianity to their communities, to help this "the clergy were required to learn the Saami language" (Kvist, 1992). "The missionaries managed to convert many Saami" (Ruong 73) to Christianity as they disapproved of the native religion where all things living or inanimate were believed to have a soul. From this it becomes apparent that education was basic and focused on "making the Saami literate and giving them a religious focus rather than an all-around education" (Cohen 39). The Swedish missionaries had a superior attitude over the Saami which could be viewed as prejudiced by changing their indigenous beliefs to one they saw to be better. Education discrimination towards the Saami changed almost completely from the 19th century onwards. Whereas before it was believed Saami's needed extra education to make them more 'civilized' like the Swedish, a new conviction was created that they had been born inferior and it was impossible and useless to teach them the same topics. All they would ever be good at was activities such as reindeer hunting thus their education should be to maintain their traditional lives. Saami were denied any access to public schools and hunted by the police to maintain regular attendance to these nomad schools (Lehtola, 2002). Their depiction of undesirable traits and primitive existence was due to the Social Darwinism thought, which will be discussed in context later on. Following World War II it was impossible for Europe particularly to keep any obvious policies towards discrimination against other indigenous groups thus change in protocol once again occurred. Nowadays schooling in Sweden is still unequal for the Saami, they can only be taught in their native tongue if they have a background in speaking it. Additionally less funding is put into their school amenities which are less developed and arguably neglected yet this could be accounted to the poorer economic situation in the North, which is dominantly Saami habited, compared to that in the south.

The Social Darwinism ideology had an immense impact on Europe and in particular on Swedish society's thoughts and beliefs even at government level and resulted in new racist Swedish policies (Lundmark, 2002). During the early 20th century segregation between the Swedish and Saami was politically established as shown by the Reindeer Pasture Act. This act further minimized the Saami population by stating one was only Saami if reindeer herding was their primary source of income and their parent or grandparents were of Saami descent. It could be debated that by strengthening their definition as a group they had a further sense of identity, yet being defined as Saami actually meant that their life opportunities became extremely restricted. By pursuing another career outside of reindeer herding the Saami were stripped of their belonging by the government and prohibited to return and even though they had to apply for authorization to buy land like the Swedish (Nesheim, 1960; 28) they were also denied any Swedish citizenship rights. This created a significant problem when the economy was low as the Saami needed to take on extra work to generate enough profit to survive and to make their living conditions better and instead were denied identity by belonging to a group in society. By enforcing such an extreme law based on a person's vocation, it is clear how there were high levels inequity and distinction within Swedish society. Limiting the Saami in their lives with the penalty of becoming an outsider could be seen as an act of the state to gradually remove the Saami existence in society and thus has deep racial implications of eliminating those not deemed 'good enough' or 'different'.

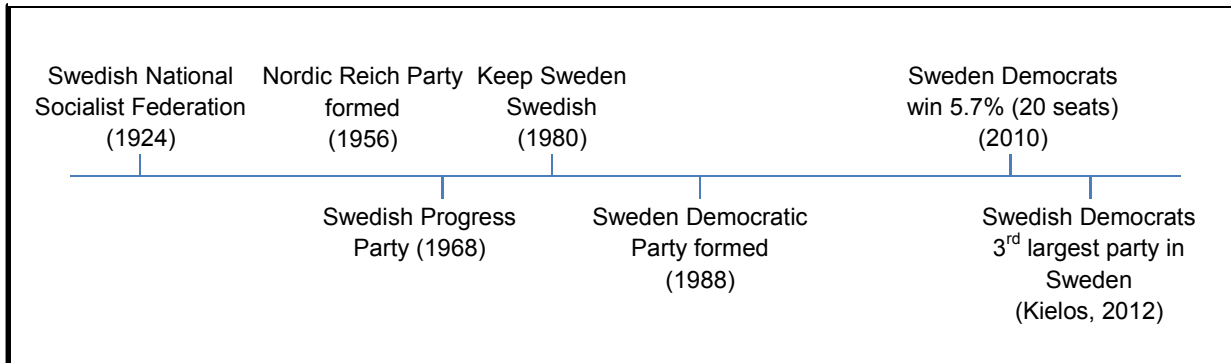
Although Sweden thinks of itself as pure, peaceful and neutral there are many instances of genetic superiority and alterations through the 20th century that shocked the rest of the world. The creation of The Swedish State-Institute of Race-biology in Uppsala in 1922 was supported the public and by all major political parties (Drouard, 2006). It was led by Lundborg, who would be certainly classed as a racist today as shown in his statement “a race that continuously degenerates, cannot in the end survive the struggle for existence, however well-armed they appear to be in a military sense” (Lundborg, 1904). He ranked human genetics on their accomplishments in life, with Saami at the bottom, and drove his research to be a justification in the prevention of interracial marriages which would contaminate the Swedish race. His successor Dahlberg in 1936 changed the focus of the institute into biologically advanced sterilization. “Perfection of the Nordic race through sterilization isn’t new” (Nelson, R. 2013) and “It is an established fact that Sweden and other Nordic countries had friendly relations with Nazi Germany up until and even after the outbreak of WW II. Many of the nationalistic and racist thoughts and programs that Hitler’s Germany stood for were also popular in Sweden. For example, it was at the request of Swedish immigration authorities that German authorities stamped the letter "J" (for Jew) in the passports of Jews” (Radska, 1997). Sterilization of disabled people and those deemed not worthy to have children took place from the late 1930s, cases doubled in the 1950s when child allowances were introduced. In the 1970s transgender hopefuls were required to be sterilized before their sex change and were banned from marriage. The harsh conformity that the Swedish implicated to keep their Nordic race ‘pure’ highlights their racist intolerance to others. Many find it surprising as Sweden is “considered extremely gay-friendly, with one of the highest rates of popular support for same-sex marriage, and more than half the population supports gay adoption” (Pasulka, 2012). Yet there was a belief that they were better than other groups in society and therefore their actions against these groups can be partially classified as racism dependent or not on the other factors that may have influenced the incident.

Overall it could be argued that the racial discrimination against the Saami began as a result of colonisation. Sweden as an expanding empire saw it necessary to conquest their land and thus their people too. In this sense one can see where the superior Swedish attitude of control and power arrived from after taking over land as is seen with colonies of Britain is India, South Africa and Australia. The Saami are notably discriminated due to their lifestyle not physical appearance yet this has still caused significant difficulties in attaining equal rights and way of life to the Swedish. It seems apparent that as global social attitudes change so did those against the Saami consequently leaving them as the focus of Swedish racism in their national lands before the phenomenon migration brought in foreigners.

Racism in Swedish Politics

The Swedish Democratic Party has seen a notable increase in government influence in the recent past years as their support has increased and consequently have their seats. The Democratic Party is viewed as the ‘radical right’ as they promote xenophobia, anti-immigration and traditionally contain members who are conservative, traditionalists, capitalists and nationalists. Unlike other parties in Sweden in the Democrats were not formed as a populist group but instead as a corollary with deep

Figure 2.1: ‘Radical right’ parties evolvement through the 20th and 21st Century



roots into neo-Nazi circles and are viewed as political violent thugs (Kielos, 2012). Furthermore reflecting on history in the 20th century, the term radical right seemingly “reflects the conscious transformation of a number of Swedish extreme right [groups] from violent skin-heads to suit wearing politicians” (Ralph, 2012:6; Norris, 2005:45).

Right wing extremist professional, Larsson (1991) states that there was a “strong Nazi undercurrent in the ‘Golden Age of Fascism’ in the 1930s” present in Sweden and that it would have expanded to follow the reign of Hitler in Germany 1933 had there not been a rise in the labour movement. As Figure 2.1 shows the Nazi attitude was underlying until the 1960s in which issues such as immigration began to affect Swedish Society in aspects such as housing, employment and education became a national problem creating a supportive gap for parties such as the Sweden Democrats.

The Swedish Democrats were formed in 1988 from the previous parties of the Swedish Progress Party and the Keep Sweden Swedish Party. It can be argued to have already begun as a racist based party due to obviously the racist group Keep Sweden Swedish and also due to one of the chairmen previously being a member of the Nordic Reich Party (an extremist party with the goal of reviving Nazism). It wasn’t until the late 20th century that the party was reformed to be more respectable and influential by adapting more nationalistic policies and by banning uniforms which had been associated with the Nazi’s and Hitler. ECRI (ECO, 2012) affirms that in September 2010 the Democrats won 5.7% of the vote allowing them to attain 20 seats in council for the first time in history, after increasing support in the 2002 municipal elections. Their policies focus on: immigration - the social and economic strain it has had on Sweden itself as many have congregated into segregated Swedish communities; the elderly – supporting their life after work, creating a judge ruling of a life sentence without the chance of parole and the nuclear family, of two parents, a mother and a father and rejecting the idea of same sex marriage, adoption or impregnation of lesbian couples. The racial problem has arisen through anti-immigration policies which create disputes and feelings of hatred towards the Saami as well as the underlying issue of anti-Semitism.

Immigration has become an increasing problem for Sweden in the 21st century as indicated by the rise of the Democrats who focus assertively on a reduction of migrants to protect the people of Sweden. Immigrants have been relocating to Sweden due to the high taxes which results in a very generous benefit system that allow families to have little to no work and maintain a higher standard of living then they would back home. “It [Sweden] is home to almost 20,000 immigrants, overwhelmingly Muslim, almost half of them jobless” (Traynor, 2010), it is estimated over 15% of the population is foreign born – a high number compared to other countries – creating strong opinions against

immigrants "from Asia, Africa, and Arab countries. There's a problem with the Somalis, the Lebanese, the Palestinians. They have difficulty integrating. And there are no jobs." (Becirov: Traynor, 2010). According to Johnson and Scrutton (2013) "Some 43,900 asylum seekers arrived in 2012, a nearly 50 percent jump from 2011 and the second highest on record. Nearly half were from Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia and will get at least temporary residency." It seems reasonable that with heavy unemployment in the country that Akesson, the leader of the Democratic Party calling for a ninety percent decrease in immigration, attracts supporters and increases the appeal of voting for the party (Castle, 2010). The shooting of a 69 year old man in a largely immigrant territory by police sparked riots in 2013 as hooded youths took to the street damaging cars and setting fires, protesting ignorance from the government and segregation from the locals due to the welfare system of dependency being gradually dismantled. This has furthermore deteriorated public opinion of the foreign settlers in Sweden. For example "If you don't like the colour of our flag, I say, I'll help you pack your bags." (Maria: Traynor, 2010) signifying the attitude that if immigrants have a problem with their lives in Sweden due to the policies introduced by the government they should leave instead of causing havoc among the streets in Swedish society. Many also believe that migrants are taking what is rightfully Swedish, such as employment, housing and benefits. The Democrat party's campaign featured advertisements of "burka-clad Muslim women shoving aside white Swedish pensioners in order to take away their benefits" (Harman, 2010) which from their success shows that there is a growing unrest in Sweden against other intruding races. It appears to be an unfixable situation where the financial and social situations within Sweden are being negatively affected as a result of migrants claiming off Swedish economy therefore leading the Swedish to become furthermore hostile to foreigners in their country; a result of extreme damaged attitudes.

The Swedish Democrats also have an underlying anti-Semitic issue as mentioned earlier in this essay when discussing their gradually declining, yet still slight, heritage of Hitler's Nazi Party in Germany. The "radical right" reflects the conscious transformation of a number of Swedish extreme right groups from violent skin-heads to suit wearing politicians" (Norris 2005:45) and concern has been raised over neo-Nazi demonstrations from white supremacy groups as well as anti-Semitism arising from the Israeli-Palestine conflict which is an important issue to some in Sweden due to the large numbers of Muslim migrants. "A government study in 2006 estimated that 15% of Swedes agree with the statement: 'The Jews have too much influence in the world today' 5% of the entire adult population and 39% of the Muslim population, harbour strong and consistent anti-Semitic views" (Choudhury and Uddin, 2010). Additionally "in March, the Swedish newspaper *Skånska Dagbladet* reported that attacks on Jews in Malmo totalled 79 in 2009, about twice as many, according to police statistics, as the previous year." (Choudhury and Uddin, 2010) thus justifying the statement that "Sweden has the highest rate of anti-Semitic incidents in Europe after Germany and Austria" (Choudhury and Uddin, 2010). However from the Social Democrat aspect the party has never actually enforced any anti-Semitic measures or voiced any opinion on the matter. Writer of the Stockholm Online Paper Landes believes that they are "that Swedish brand of Nazism which is more about preserving the traditions and strength of the white Nordic race than about wanting to crack the skulls of Jews" (Harman, 2010) in spite of acknowledging the obvious neo Nazi roots of party.

All in all one political party gaining seats on a council does not necessarily mean that the majority of Swedes have the same attitudes on immigration and anti-Semitic policies. Not all of Sweden has racist beliefs but it is interesting to look at the increase of support for the Democrats and to assume that there is a changing era within the country due to several reasons.

“Sweden experienced a deep economic recession in 1991, and its economic troubles were exacerbated by a banking-sector crisis” and as a result they “...reduced the level of welfare benefits such as unemployment payments and health provisions” (Fredlund-Blomst, 2014) to repair the economy. When the second global economic crisis hit in 2008, Sweden was prepared and the government managed to salvage the banks leaving them not as affected as other countries in Europe. Looking at

Figure 2.2 the “Percent of Population in Sweden with a Foreign Background, 1970-2012” (Fredlund-Blomst, 2014)

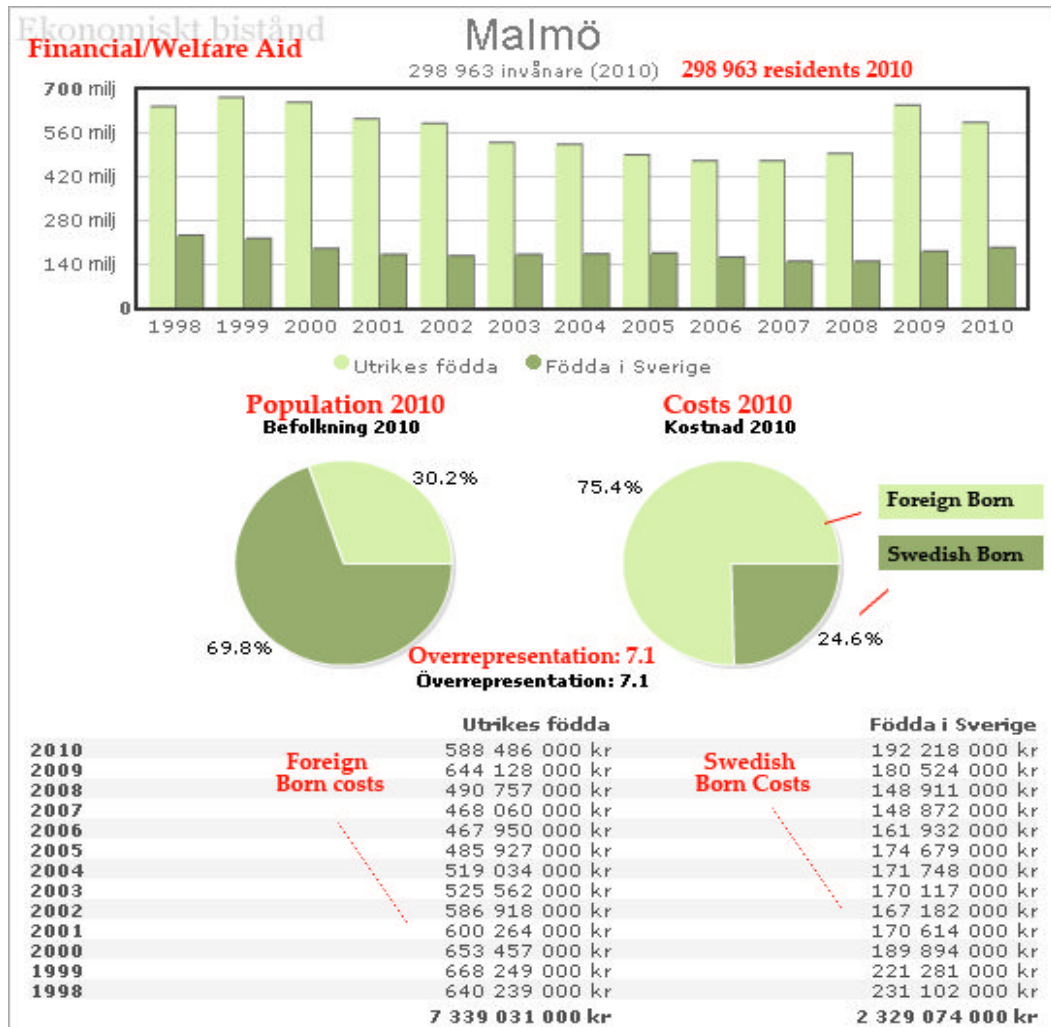


Figure 2.2 it is clear that following the recovery of the economy post 1991 and 2008 there was a significant increase in immigration as many moved to a country where they believed they could live a better life. However although Sweden learnt a lesson from 1991, they still suffer long term unemployment. Particularly in 2008, unemployment fell as Sweden relies on a dependant export trade of automobiles and telecommunications and due to a reduction in global demand the government had to take risks to save the banks. With this in mind, many racist attitudes could be argued to have been created or further developed and manipulated by the Democratic Party in Sweden. People become desperate in the time of crisis and specifically concerning the economy look for a scapegoat, someone to take the blame and the Democrats’ strong anti-immigration, nationalistic policies provide just that to be focused on vulnerable indigenous groups living in Sweden such as the Roma, Jews and Muslims. All in all after researching the racist background of the Democratic Party it seems that they would have nationalist, patriotic views which have come into play in the late 20th century as a result of globalization and increasing immigration. Nonetheless this does not mean that the entire Swedish population has the same beliefs and to the same extent. While negative attitudes towards outsiders may be slightly increasing it does not depict a nation of building racists. The anti-Semitic attitudes of the Party are arguably even existent. The economic and financial situation at the time is also a major contributor to damaging attitudes as the Party plays on those feelings of loathing to win support. So whereas people may not fully agree with their policies they may approve slightly of a few and thus vote for the Democrats, still not a dominant voice in the political party in Sweden.

Islamophobia and the Muslim Influence

The term Islamophobia was first used in the early 1990s and defined in the Runnymede Trust Report (1997) as an ‘unfounded hostility towards Muslims, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims,’ and referred to Britain and Europe. There are two arguments of racism that arise in relation to Muslims in Sweden. One is that of racist attitudes from the Swedish against the increasing Muslim immigrants due to social costs and violent crimes, and the other is of the Muslim settlers in Sweden against the local population.

Table 3.1 Total Foreign Born (Muslim) in Malmo compared to Swedish Born (Anon, 2012)



The Swedish population believe that immigrants and in particular Muslims

are draining the welfare system by claiming benefits and taking social amenities such as housing, education and jobs. As Spencer (2006) discloses “estimates indicate that immigration costs Sweden at least 40 to 50 billion Swedish kroner every year, probably several hundred billions, and has greatly contributed to bringing the Swedish welfare state to the brink of bankruptcy.”

Table 3.1 (Anon, 2012) has been created to show the total costs in 2010 that the foreign born in Sweden have cost in the southern city of Malmo alone. It goes on to say the figures could be even higher if including those born in Sweden but to foreign parents. The table is statistically created using the SCB report which is done annually each June and published by The National Board of Health and Statistics. As discussed by Euro-Islam (n.d.) there is a great matter of segregation in the major and smaller cities in housing due to limited financial ability which as a result creates employment and education disadvantages. Although there are many Muslim schools in Sweden, many of which teach in Arabic, Euro-Islam (n.d.) also states that not many foreign students progress to University level education. (Neuding, 2013) found that “immigrants who complete their Swedish language studies (which are, of course, free) are awarded a government bonus of about \$1,000” indicating the

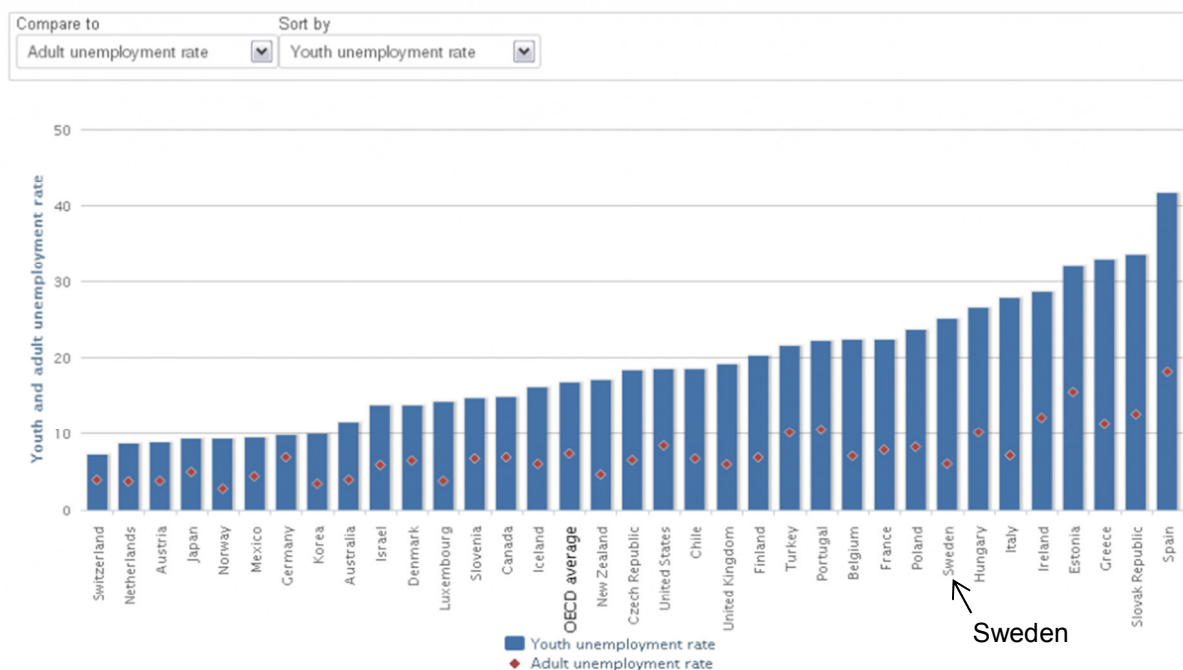
government endeavour to assimilate Muslims into Swedish society and reduce the mass segregation and potentially the prejudiced opinions of the Swedish public.

The issue of employment has also been a contributing factor to xenophobia and racial attitudes in Sweden especially after the global economic crises in 1991 and 2008 as mentioned earlier. Although Sweden recovered in 2008 quite positively in comparison to other European countries there was still a concern over long term unemployment and there was a reduction of jobs due to lack of external demand for goods which Sweden's exports favoured in. Because Sweden favoured well, that attracted numbers of migrants who in fact just added to higher numbers of unemployment.

Table 3.2 is used just to highlight how high the unemployment in Sweden actually is, in particular for youths, even in comparison to the United Kingdom. With unemployment so high it's expected that there would be high demand for jobs and areas of those unemployed citizens would decrease in value. "Sweden's Muslims have unemployment rates 4 to 10 times higher than non-Muslims, depending on ethnicity" (Euro-Islam, n.d.) evidently creating an atmosphere of distrust, despising and disliking between different racial groups. Muslim settlers may often feel like they have a job notably much under their education level and discrimination in the workplace is shown by "those with Arabic names are more often rejected by employers despite similar qualifications to native Swedes" (Euro-Islam,

Table 3.2 Youth Unemployment in OECD Countries, 2010 (Dewey, 2013)

Youth unemployment rate, and ratio of the unemployment rate of 15-24 year-olds to that of 25-64 year-olds



It seems inevitable that if immigrant groups are largely segregated from society then gangs form. This can be argued sociologically to be for a number of reasons such as issues of race, income and access to amenities as well as poverty and the conditions of living. Many migrants may join gangs due to unemployment in Sweden as a way of attaining money to maintain a healthy way of living, seeing as many believe they do not get enough from the Swedish government and want more. These segregated groups driven to gangs may feel a strong sense of prejudice from the Swedish locals as an outsider, someone who does not belong and condemned for not being seen worthy to be holistically included into society. The procedure of "white flight" defined as white residents relocating from areas where immigrants are living is apparent in the main cities of Stockholm and Malmo and additionally enforces segregation and decreases the housing and living price of an area. In 2013 riots began in Stockholm involving the Muslim youth who took to the streets throwing items at the police, damaging

cars and setting fire to a petrol station resulting in an evacuation of a nearby building. It is believed to be caused by underlying issues such as government ignorance. For example “Somali Muslims protest against the generous Swedish welfare system which allows a free home with a separate room for each child in the highest living standard in Europe, free education, and free healthcare. Rarely do any of these people ever acquire a job” (Admin, 2012). Areas where Muslims are isolated together become ghettoized and groups with similar political protest values join together. This further divides the racial bridge as the Swedish believe they are being challenged in their own homes, demanded to provide for these non-contributing settlers who drain the economy.

It is important not to overlook the racist attacks that Muslims and other indigenous groups undertake whilst living in Sweden from the local population. “Seven out of ten reports of ethnic discrimination came from people with a Muslim background, and almost 40% of those questioned in the survey said they had witnessed verbal abuse directed at Muslims” (Rapacioli, 2005), correlation with the increasingly polarised opinion of immigration in Sweden. Following an attack on a pregnant Muslim woman, where her hijab was ripped off and she was pushed against her car, many women across Sweden have taken to wearing hijabs in protest (Ahmed, 2013). However some results from Nodeland’s (2013) work dispute racist views as “the annual “diversity barometer” conducted by researchers at Uppsala University indicates that nearly 74 percent of Swedes are currently positive towards the country’s mounting ethnic diversity” based on a questionnaire that was sent out to 762 randomly selected participants. According to Nodeland (2013) Swedish views on immigration are in fact increasingly positive as the year’s progress which correlates with Rapacioli (2005) who reading from a survey conducted by the Board of Interrogation deduces that “two thirds of those questioned rejected the notion that Sweden is a racist country.” From research this seems unlikely due to the large divide of racial groups and inevitable negative feelings that accompany.

Taking everything into consideration, there does appear to be degrees of racism in Sweden against Muslims as a result of high migrant numbers and the effect this has in society. The Swedish feel taken advantage of almost, that these people can come into their country, take their housing, jobs, money and then complain that it is not enough. Their religious or lifestyle beliefs are so conflicting it seems inevitable for segregation to begin. Sociologically one can then understand how feelings of isolation can quickly spiral to violence leaving a clear unsolvable divide between alternative racial groups.

In conclusion from extensive research it appears that Sweden is not the tolerant, all welcoming country it pronounces itself to be. Like all other countries there is conflict and feelings of contempt amongst the different racial settlers. Whereas once Sweden was a superior power in control of alternate lands such as the Sápmi, allowing them to be dominating over the life of the Saami, they are now powerless in the global picture as increasing globalization dissolves country borders. Racism in Sweden can be argued to be present throughout history although ulterior aspects such as the economy, social attitudes and political movements can be seen as contributing. One could argue that racism is inescapable in reality as long as there is a feeling of belonging to a certain group as evolutionary seen from tribes. Anybody seen as different is an outsider and is not treated like they fit in, even “when, for example, people criticise newcomers to the country for not speaking good Swedish they are sometimes carrying on the idea that they are somehow better than these people,” said (Björkroth, 2007). The debated assumption that there will once be a global race, not defined by skin colour or country of origin is futuristically plausible. However in the process towards this combination there are conflicting attitudes to others and their traditions. Differences in religion, behaviours and the lack of want to integrate creates an environment where dislike for a racial group can be viewed as racism. However then the argument arises that racial groups should be willingly abandoning their culture and identity, becoming similar to everyone else in the world, an action not many are willing to take.

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