



Sweden's Problem is Not Islam, It's Multiculturalism

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On May 13, the Stockholm police received calls from the blighted immigrant suburb of Husby. Residents were frightened by a 69-year-old man who was wielding a kitchen knife. Following a standoff that is currently under investigation, the elderly Portuguese immigrant was shot dead.

One week later, the police were called to Husby once more. This time, residents reported that masked men were torching cars with gasoline and Molotov cocktails. When the police and firefighters arrived, they were greeted with a barrage of rocks.

Each morning the following week, Sweden awoke to fresh images of arson and rioting. Rumors of racism and police brutality ignited riots in other immigrant suburbs already ripe with resentment toward Swedish society. The police managed to quell the riots only after calling in reinforcements from other Swedish cities.

The extent of the material damage was some 200 cars set on fire, in addition to a number of burned schools (including a nursery) and cultural centers. This toll does not include the psychological cost of a bruised Swedish self-image.

Not many years ago, Sweden was among the world's most ethnically homogeneous nations. Today, the country takes in more immigrants relative to its population than the U.S. did at the peak of the transatlantic migration. Sweden has about 9 million inhabitants and last year took in almost 90,000 immigrants, excluding Swedes returning from abroad. Non-Western immigrants were 1 percent of Sweden's population in 1980 and have since increased to 10 percent of the population.

Today, 60 percent of total welfare payouts in Sweden go to immigrants. Problems such as child poverty, which the welfare state was supposed to have solved, are reemerging as a consequence of immigration. Second-generation immigrants born in Sweden remain less likely to work or graduate from college than the children of natives are.

The only reason the welfare state remains solvent is that an astonishing 85 percent of working-age native Swedes work and pay taxes, far above the European average of 70 percent. By contrast, only half of non-Western immigrants work.

While immigrant unemployment is high, recent unrest can hardly be blamed on austerity. Successive governments have poured billions into problem areas in public investments, with limited success. In addition to free health care and other services, a family of four in Sweden is entitled to around \$3,000 in welfare benefits each month. Last year, every middle-school pupil in one of Husby's public schools received a brand-new iPad. (A total of 2,300 tablets have been distributed to local schools.)

Nor is Islam the cause of the riots. Radical Islamism is a problem, but it's not related to this unrest. Most rioters appeared to be secular, even atheist. Some were Christian Assyrians. Frankly, most young immigrants in Sweden today do not care much about Islam. A far more potent influence than Islam on the Swedish ghetto is American gangster rap.

So why has Sweden failed to integrate immigrants despite extraordinary tolerance and generosity? I suspect that the answer lies in unconditional tolerance itself.

Immigrants who have recently arrived lack country-specific human capital. This includes language skills, labor-market experience, and cultural knowledge. In the United States, recent immigrants typically earn less than natives do, but they experience faster wage growth as they accumulate work experience and skills. Immigrants eventually tend to catch up.

In the Swedish welfare state, people live comfortably even if they are unemployed. This means that few are willing to accept low-paying or disagreeable work, preferring to live on welfare until something better shows up. But immigrants who never enter the labor market rarely catch up to natives in skills.

Immigrants who do not enter the labor market remain isolated from Swedish society. Integration is not only a question of work. It is also about getting to know the natives and learning their customs. This is difficult for unemployed immigrants, who tend to live in segregated areas and often have not once set foot in the home of a native Swede. The generosity of Swedish welfare thus paradoxically traps many

immigrants in permanent exclusion from the labor market and, by extension, from society. In segregated neighborhoods, not working eventually becomes the norm through social osmosis, creating a vicious cycle that carries on into the next generation.

Economic factors tell only half the story, however. Multiculturalism itself is an even bigger impediment to integration. Multiculturalism teaches that natives have no moral right to impose their culture on immigrants. Instead, immigrants are encouraged to cling to the culture of their home country. This approach impedes integration into both the Swedish way of life and the Swedish economy. The Swedish establishment has embraced multiculturalism perhaps more wholeheartedly than any other country has.

Multiculturalism may be well-intentioned, but it has disastrous consequences. It is simply not true that Afghan culture equips one for success in the West as much as Swedish culture does. Some integration naturally occurs despite multiculturalism, but the overall failure is hard to deny. Even second-generation immigrants do not fully integrate, if we measure in terms of fundamental cultural traits such as interpersonal trust.

Making matters worse, multiculturalism morally privileges Third World cultures over Western culture. It preaches a modern version of original sin, damning Western civilization for historical crimes such as colonialism and racism. Much of public discourse today is devoted to endlessly reciting the historic crimes of the West. The problem with this discourse is not that the West is innocent of these crimes; it is not. The problem is that the blame-the-West interpretation of world history is one-sided. Endlessly recounting Western crimes against humanity while ignoring similar crimes committed by non-Westerners creates a dark and biased image of Western civilization. Meanwhile, the West's contributions to humanity such as democracy, the scientific revolution, human rights, and the industrial revolution are downplayed or falsely credited to other cultures.

Resentment toward the West makes integration harder. Immigrants learn and make use of the message of victimhood, which fosters hostility toward their host society. And claiming victim status is appealing from a psychological perspective, as it confers moral superiority. Immigrants who wish to integrate and adopt a Swedish identity are accused of "acting white" or being "an Uncle Tom." The latter is not a translation from Swedish; the American phrase "Uncle Tom" is the actual term of abuse.

In the face of this litany of crimes, Swedes have developed a deep sense of collective guilt and consequently lack the cultural self-confidence to integrate immigrants. The former leader of the Social Democratic opposition famously stated: "I believe that this is why Swedes are jealous of immigrants. You have a culture, an identity, a history, something that binds you together. What do we have? We have Midsummer's Eve and other lame things." Not to be outdone in the department of self-abasement, the current right-of-center prime minister added: "The fundamentally Swedish is merely barbarism. The rest of development has come from outside." Note that this fierce hostility toward Swedish culture does not originate with Muslim immigrants; it comes from Swedish elites, including liberals to the left and libertarians to the right (there are no conservatives in Sweden). Swedish libertarians are, if possible, even more militantly hostile toward Sweden as a nation-state and to the very notion of patriotism.

Cultural self-confidence is essential for integration, since integrating immigrants inevitably involves some willingness to assert majority culture. Furthermore, the gravitational force of a strong and identifiable national identity in fact facilitates integration, since no one can integrate into nothingness. In Sweden today, there is no roadmap to integration for immigrants, no social contract wherein Swedes accept immigrants as one of their own once certain obligations are fulfilled.Å

It is this contradiction between reality and elite ideology that is tearing Sweden apart. The political and media elites may love or at least pretend to love the new multiculturalist society, but polls show that the Swedish public was never particularly enthusiastic about it. A recent study found that most native Swedes never socialize with immigrants or do so only rarely. Elites can dictate policy, but they cannot force ordinary Swedes to accept immigrants who have not integrated into their culture.

From the point of view of immigrants, therefore, the Swedish state is warm and generous, but Swedish society is cold and distant. The more Sweden spends on "integrationspolitik," the worse things appear to become. Sweden takes in more immigrants than almost any other country, but immigrants do not feel welcome here. In response to failed integration, the establishment has redoubled its efforts to push multiculturalism down Sweden's throat, blaming the Swedish people for the failure of integrationist policies.

Keep in mind that Sweden was never an easy country to integrate into culturally. Swedes tend to be reticent, solitary, and reserved. Theirs is a complex culture, full of subtle rules and opaque codes of conduct. Lutheran Sweden is defined by strong behavioral norms enforced through social pressure. Swedes are conformist and quite intolerant of deviation from group norms, whether it's immigrants or Swedes who break with protocol. Immigrants who do not conform to expected behaviors are looked down upon and often sense low-level hostility in their private encounters with Swedes. Icy Scandinavia was never a particularly well-chosen testing ground for the multiculturalist experiment.

As a Kurd from Iran, I felt more accepted in American society as a foreign student in Chicago than I ever did growing up in Sweden from the age of nine. I quite enjoy being a Kurd and have little desire to become a Swede, so this was not a problem for me. But the feeling of

permanent exclusion can be a serious problem for those without the luxury of developing a more cosmopolitan identity. Many are born and raised in Sweden but lack a clear path to integrate into their new country. The resentment fueling the riots is not material poverty, which is limited in Sweden. The underlying cause is social inequality. Those who look distinctly foreign remain second-class citizens in Sweden, especially if they live in Husby and speak with a ghetto accent.

The state can hand out welfare benefits and iPads, but it cannot force Swedes to treat foreigners as equals in daily interaction. The rioting youths may not be able to articulate the cause of their anger, but no one is fooled about their place in the social hierarchy. Immigrants will never achieve social equality as long as official policy is based on cultural segregation, which means that the next round of riots is only a matter of time.Å

Conservative Americans might experience schadenfreude when they witness recent events in Sweden. Ever since the days of Gunnar Myrdal, Swedes have been lecturing Americans that social democracy offers the optimal path to integrating minorities (Sweden at the time conveniently had no minorities to integrate).

Swedish arrogance is temporarily checked, at least until the smoke over Stockholm clears. Still, Americans should temper their urge toward self-congratulation. The problems Sweden faces in trying to integrate immigrants also exist in the U.S. In both countries, the multicultural ethic means that people are scolded for highlighting any facts that might be perceived as unflattering to minorities.

When we look at the U.S, we see, for example, that many Hispanic immigrants are not integrating successfully. The income gap between whites and Hispanics has grown since the 1970s. According to the Census Bureau, 18 percent of Hispanics are long-term recipients of means-tested welfare programs, compared with 6 percent of whites. The 2009 book *Generations of Exclusion*, by researchers Edward Telles and Vilma Ortiz, found that even by the fourth generation, Mexican Americans have not integrated in terms of educational attainment. Worst of all, a significant share of Hispanics born in the U.S. do not identify with America. In 2003, Hamilton College conducted a poll to assess the patriotic sentiments of recently graduated high-school students and found that 61 percent of non-Hispanic white high-school seniors rated themselves extremely or very patriotic, but only 38 percent of Hispanics did so.

In the wake of the riots, Sweden is engaging in overdue self-examination about the problem of integrating immigrants. American conservatives are well advised to do the same.

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