

2 How Sweden Became a Multilingual and Multicultural Country

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In this chapter, we will outline a concise but possibly comprehensive historical overview of how Sweden became a multicultural and postmigrant society. With a critical look at the past, we discuss the socio-historical factors that triggered the shifts thanks to which, in turn, we can conceptualise Sweden as a postmigrant society. Before delving into the contents of this chapter, it is important to define multiculturalism as a concept and as a phenomenon as applied to Swedish society. As defined by Harold Runblom,

Multiculturalism is often used to describe a situation characterized by a multitude of ethnic groups, cultures, religion and languages. But the term also [...] refers to an ideal situation of peaceful coexistence between individuals or groups of diverse origin. In the Swedish debate, this concept [...] generally has a positive connotation. (Runblom 1994, 624)

Among several critical perspectives from which the history of Sweden in the last century can be approached, this study will draw on the framework proposed by Paulina De los Reyes in her article from 2000 entitled *Folkhemmets paradoxer. Genus och etnicitet i den svenska modellen* (Folkhem's Paradoxes. Gender and Ethnicity in the Swedish Model), in which she identifies specific periods characterised by crucial events and episodes: the Swedish political openness, industrial expansion and the first labour migration (1946-55); the launch of the *Miljonprogram* and the peak of labour flows during the record years (1956-72); the humanitarian solidarity years, the immigration of refugees, Olof Palme's death and the decay of the multicultural myth (1973-89); the progressive restrictions on immigration policies, economic crises, power shifts into government and issues of intolerance towards diversity (1990-2000) (De los Reyes 2000, 35).

Furthermore, another interesting contribution to outline a defined timeframe comes from Harald Runblom's article "Swedish Multiculturalism in a Comparative European Perspective" (1994), where he finds five different phases:

1. the period of free movement (1948-64);
2. the guest-worker period with heavy migration flows from Southern Europe (1965-72);
3. stop to economic immigration as a reaction to the so-called energy crisis (1973-82);
4. new form of immigration, mainly for humanitarian reasons (1983-88);
5. the end of cold war, geopolitical destabilisations due to the fall of the Iron Curtain (1989-93).

2.1 The End of the War, the First Refugees and *Gästarbetare*: The Foundations for a Multicultural Country and a National Identity Between *Folkhem* and *Välfärd*

Unlike Denmark and Norway, who were invaded by the the German Reich, during Second World War Sweden kept a position of neutrality, remaining essentially unaffected by conflict and violence. Ruled by the Social Democratic government led by Per Albin Hansson,¹ Sweden encouraged the development of a key role in humanitarian aid in Northern Europe, becoming a shelter for thousands of Jews from Denmark, Norway, Germany, Poland, and the Baltic countries, as well as for anti-Nazi political opponents, and nearly 70,000 Finnish children fleeing from the Winter War (1939-40).

¹ Hansson was Prime Minister of Sweden from 1932 to 1946 (with a brief interruption in office from 19 June to 28 September 1936).

As noted by Charles Westin, “[t]he modern era of immigration to Sweden started during World War II, in the early 1940s” (Westin 2000, 2), because, after peace was restored in Europe, Sweden found favourable conditions for rapid and efficient industrial growth, which significantly increased labour demand. Therefore, Sweden stipulated the first bilateral agreements to recruit new labour force as early as 1947, finding Italy as the first country of cooperation (Danielsson 2017).

Signed by the Social Democratic Prime Minister Tage Erlander and pursued individually by the main Swedish industries (ASEA, AGA, Atlas Copco, SKF, Volvo, and others), the bilateral agreements concerned the recruitment of skilled (and unskilled) workforce in the main export sectors. Apart from Italy, the main source countries were Austria, Yugoslavia, Greece, Portugal, Turkey and Hungary (Abrahamsson 1999, 52).² The steady inflows gave rise to the historical phenomenon of the so-called *gästarbetare* (guest workers), which further improved the industrial sector (De los Reyes 2000, 30; Slavnic 2006, 100). In 1969-70 alone, at the peak of its economic boom, Sweden set an inflow record, with 77,326 new arrivals.³

Compared to other countries, the arrival of foreign labour in Sweden was based on the need to implement production in sectors that were already growing and not affected by wartime devastation. Therefore, the guest workers had no particular obstacles in settling permanently in Sweden (Johansson 2008, 194). Mobility from abroad tended to mainly affect the largest cities of the country, i.e. Stockholm, Göteborg, Malmö, and leading industrial towns (Westin 2000, 31) such as Norrköping and Västerås. However, migration from abroad was also combined with massive internal migrations from the countryside to the cities.

The industrial and economic growth between the 1950s and 1970s is known by the symbolic name of *rekordåren* (the record years), during which the concepts of *folkhem* and *välfärd* found their fullest expression as tenets of a social democratic ideal, based on welfare guarantees that fostered the consolidation of what is now globally known as the ‘Swedish model’. For the sake of clarity, it is appropriate to provide a brief description of the concepts of *folkhem* and *välfärd*.

Folkhem was used publicly as a socialist political term on the 18th of January 1928 by Social Democratic Party leader Per Albin Hansson, who in a parliamentary speech known as *folkhemstal* (*folkhem* speech) introduced it as a metaphor which encompassed, in one image, both

² In detail, by the late 1950s, Swedish companies turned to Yugoslavia and Greece for manpower, while during the 1960s the dominant flows came from Turkey (Westin 2000, 4).

³ For data about new arrivals in Sweden between 1969 and 1970, cf. <http://share.scb.se>.

society, State and urban development, referring to it as *det goda hemmet* (the good home) for the people and the single citizen. Thanks to Hansson's politics, the Swedish model was formally born, whereby *folkhem* was configured as a complex system of universal care and material support "from cradle to grave" (Hilson 2020, 75). By bringing both vision and stability to the country, Hansson opened a long Social Democratic governmental age that lasted almost uninterruptedly from 1932 to 1976. Even in the inter-war period, Sweden consolidated its democratic structures, based on political strength and a broad consensus towards social democracy.

Välfärd, on the other hand, is a metaphorical concept to frame the citizen's life as a journey (*väl-färd*: good-journey) that the state must take care of. Today, Sweden can to all intents and purposes define itself a welfare state and, specifically, it belongs to the category of countries with a social-democratic or universal welfare, in which social security is guaranteed by citizens' high tax contributions and is extended to every individual (Esping-Andersen 1990).

2.2 Demographic Growth: The Launch of the *Miljonprogram*

In this section we examine one of the main events of the so-called *rekordåren*: the realisation of *Miljonprogram*, the housing project created to cope with Sweden's rapid and extensive demographic growth.

The record years were characterised by important social reforms, including the extension of holidays from 15 to 30 days, universal health insurance, sick leave, improved parental benefits and other reforms that considerably improved the citizens' standard of living. High prosperity sustained industrial production and migration from the countryside stimulated a demographic development that caught the country's infrastructure unprepared. While Sweden had a population of just over five million in 1900, by 1960 this had already exceeded seven million (SCB 1969). The demographic growth resulted in a serious shortage of urban housing for new working-class families. Stockholm, for example, had to deal since the early twentieth century with a large number of people moving from rural areas to residential facilities that, due to overcrowding, did not meet minimum hygiene requirements (Hall 1999, 853, 857).

Supported by the largest national industries to solve overcrowding issues, the Swedish government implemented a housing system which could live up to the level of its welfare: the *Miljonprogram*, a project which envisaged the construction of one million new housing units over a ten-year period (1965-75) in suburban and green areas placed in the major cities, to provide high-standard housing to the growing population at affordable prices for all (Högberg 1999).

Rooted in the 1930s Funkis architectural style (Scandinavian Functionalism), this modernist design aimed to fulfil the social democratic vision of providing citizens with a structured existential model (Sernhede, Johansson 2006, 112). The *Miljonprogram* sought to address social integration, economic dependency, and unemployment by developing suburban areas with cutting-edge services while upholding social equality (Sejersted 2011).

Miljonprogram's early years were marked by the arrival of Swedish families from the countryside as well as guest workers and, later, non-European refugees. Lower housing prices were logically a favourable factor for immigrants and poorest people, especially in Stockholm.⁴ The new suburbs became places of multicultural encounters and language mixing, of which now public discourse emphasises more the effects of marginality than integration (Ciaravolo 2019, 887-99).

2.3 The End of the Record Years

Between the 1970s and 1980s, the population in the *Miljonprogram* neighbourhoods soon faced social and infrastructural issues, which made them unattractive to middle-class Swedes because of a lack of services, workplaces, cultural activities and public transport connections. As early as the 1970s, Swedes who could afford better housing began to move out (Dahlstedt, Eliassi 2018, 28), leaving space to non-native and multilingual citizens who would subsequently become predominant in these neighbourhoods.

During this period, many guest workers were joined by their families and settled for life in Sweden (Slavnic 2006, 99), where they found housing in *Miljonprogram* areas. However, during the 1970s, Sweden tried to stop large-scale workforce immigration, but "this 'stop' had limited effects. Immigration based on family reunion was allowed, and refugee immigration, which was not affected by the immigration stop, escalated in the 1970s and 1980s" (Runblom 1994, 634). Thus, while on the one hand Sweden put a brake on labour migration, on the other hand it strengthened its role as a beacon of hospitality and human rights activism, by keeping its borders open to refugees fleeing from crisis-torn countries in – and outside Europe, especially during Olof Palme's terms as Social Democratic Prime Minister, as he gave Swedish foreign policy an internationalist tone with a high moral profile. The migratory season that unfolded with the political upheavals in Uganda, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Greece,

⁴ Through the years, *Miljonprogram* did not remain limited to Sweden's major cities, but rather was extended to several minor industrial cities too.

Iran and Afghanistan in the 1970s, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kurdistan, Iran, Lebanon and Syria in the 1980s (Westin 2000, 5), and in Somalia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in the 1990s, led to increased immigration flows that resulted much larger than the previous workforce flows. This period proved crucial for Sweden's recent history, as what is termed as the introduction of multiculturalist policies "has been much in contrast to Swedish historical tradition" (Runblom 1994, 639), but nevertheless necessary, given the size of migration flows and the rapidly changing demographic (and thus cultural, linguistic and social) conformation of Sweden. To give an example, in 1980 the total number of citizens born in Africa, Asia and South America living in Sweden was about 60,000 (SCB 2017), i.e. less than 1% of the total population. In the two decades 1980-2000 alone, increased migration led to a representation of non-European citizens up to 10%, of the total population (Corman 2008).

2.3.1 The Institutionalisation of Sweden as a Multicultural Country

The idea that guest-workers and refugees would soon return to their country of origin was widespread, which might have initially slowed down their integration process, as Sweden was still seen as a country of transit, where the main acculturation process adopted in governmental policies was assimilation. The fact that a large proportion of immigrants not only stayed, but also reunified with their families, led to a radical break with the traditional and unreflected policy of assimilation, which made it possible for integration processes to take place.⁵ As noted by Runblom, on a governmental level, a certain "awareness was growing that the state had moral responsibility for the well-being of people who had come to Sweden to work and who had decided to stay in the country" (1994, 630).

In 1975, the Social Democratic government then run by Palme issued a constitutional reform (*Regeringens Proposition* 1975, 26), which established a new migration and minority policy. This policy explicitly rejected the previous principles of assimilation and ethno-cultural homogeneity in favour of multiculturalism. This event is today known as "multiculturalist turn" (Wickström 2015), which proved to be nearly revolutionary, considering Sweden's background as an old and consolidated nation which has not based its identity

⁵ The definition of integration involves the choice to embrace and recognize the culture of the host or dominant society while simultaneously preserving a strong connection to one's cultural roots, including the traditions and values of one's minority background or parental heritage. Through integration, individuals can navigate and contribute to both cultural spheres.

as a state on different linguistic groups. Groups who immigrated assimilated rather quickly. However, as a young multicultural(ist) country, Sweden had “[a]s a consequence, no experience in minority legislation, and [...] no positive tradition of treating minorities” (Runblom 1994, 632-3).

In details, the proposal *Om riktlinjer för invandrar – och minoritets politiken m.m.* (On Guidelines for Immigration Policy, Minorities, etc.), contained in the reform 1975:26, became a constitutional law on equal opportunities for ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities (see Johansson 2008, 198; Milani 2008; Wickström 2013, 25). As the legislative proposal 1975:26 states, Sweden was dealing with a “fortsatt relativt stor invandring” (relatively large continued immigration), establishing the legal-political recognition of migration as a fundamental prerequisite to any political and social intervention.

This civic turn makes Sweden, in line with the theoretical framework discussed in the previous chapter, a true prototype of a postmigrant country, as it features in its recent past both political, social and cultural transformations that intersect with histories of post-colonial migration and guest-workers (Karakayalı, Tsianos 2014, 34). Summarised in Westin’s words,

Essentially, immigrants residing in Sweden on a permanent basis enjoy the same rights as Swedes. They may wish to assimilate into Swedish ways of life or maintain their distinctive native cultures. Whatever preference this is a personal matter and of no concern to the authorities, except for the requirement that their integration model should not conflict with essential Swedish values and norms. (2000, 6)

With this reform, Sweden became one of the first countries in Europe to guarantee a multiculturalist legal framework, which is embodied in three basic principles: *jämlikhet* (equality), *valfrihet* (freedom of choice) and *samverkan* (cooperation).

The first principle, *jämlikhet*, indicates the attainment of equal opportunities for immigrants, so that they were to enjoy the same social and economic rights as Swedes. The second principle, *valfrihet*, stated that all citizens had the right to speak their own language, to profess their own religious faith and to live in Sweden in accordance with their own cultural customs insofar as these coincided with Swedish laws. In particular, the freedom to speak one’s mother tongue also resulted in the right to learn it at school. This was made possible by the program *Hemspråksundervisning* (Home Language Teaching), which officially came into force in 1977 (cf. Ålund, Schierup 1991, 2), then replaced in 1997 by a new reform called *Modersmålsundervisning* (Mother Language Teaching) (Milani 2008, 30). Thanks to this program, the Swedish school system introduced norms according to

which pupils with migration background could receive teaching and tutoring in their (and/or their parents') mother tongue (if a competent teacher was available).⁶ Although the program is still active today,

[i]n time, however, the ethnic and cultural composition of the immigrant communities changed in such a way that mother tongue instruction in the schools became increasingly difficult to organise for economic and political reasons. (Westin 2000, 6)⁷

Finally, the third principle, *samverkan*, emphasises the need for mutual tolerance and solidarity between immigrants and native Swedes, producing a shared effort in the rejection of social exclusion, racism and discrimination. With this law, Sweden established specific rights to provide immigrant minorities with the opportunity to express their identity without coming into conflict with political, cultural and religious institutions. Moreover, this new legislative framework played an important role in a new “national mythmaking” (Keskinen, Skaptadóttir, Toivanen 2019, 47), which is defined as a storytelling process introduced when cultural diversity took place in the 1960s, and became both a structured and normed element of Swedish society.

2.3.2 Towards the Slow Decay of *Folkhem* in Multicultural Sweden

At the end of the *rekordåren*, socio-economic problems were soon to appear, and the contiguous arrival of refugees exposed the welfare state to new challenges. For example, in December 1989 the then Social Democratic government led by Ingvar Carlsson introduced restrictions by ruling that applications for political asylum would be treated strictly in accordance with the Geneva convention. This decision resulted in an apparent decrease in the number of asylum seekers. However, the new political directions triggered a wave of attacks against refugee camps and centres provoked by far-right

⁶ Actually, mother tongue teaching was introduced in Sweden as early as 1966 but was initially a voluntary commitment by the municipalities and only applied to Finnish-speaking pupils. For further details on mother tongue teaching in Sweden, see ISOF 2020.

⁷ Over the past five years, the proportion of pupils in Sweden entitled to mother tongue teaching has increased, but at the same time fewer are choosing to study it at school. The fact that the subject is optional makes it a secondary activity at school, as the mother tongue is usually kept alive at home. Political trends naturally play a role, as do social pressure (the importance of only learning Swedish vis-à-vis the presumed ‘pointlessness’ of learning the mother-tongue) and ignorance about the positive effects of mother tongue teaching (Helsingborgs Dagblad 2024).

movements. On the other hand, from a social point of view, the sharpening of spatial boundaries between city centres and suburbs highlighted differentiations whereby somatic features, non-Swedish names and foreign accents became easy targets for stigmatisation, as well as verbal (when not physical) violence. Between suburban areas and city centres there were (and there still are) invisible cultural boundaries that make multiculturalism a relative and well delimited concept, as it is “geographically located to specific housing areas in the major cities” (Westin 2000, 36). With respect to the main subject of the present study, as noted by Ann Runfors, “the importance of speaking Swedish without a foreign accent [i]s an additional but crucial aspect for passing as Swedish, and hence for passing the norms of Swedish whiteness” (Runfors 2021, 70). This means that, as early as the 1980s, the emerging suburban varieties contributed strongly to the attribution of a new discriminatory meaning to the term *invandrare*. Following the multicultural turn, this term took on a pejorative tone, probably due to a changed perception towards diversity, followed by economic and generational changes, and less tolerance for increasing non-European flows (Hübinette 2019, 102). As a result, *invandrare* has become “[t]he main Swedish category of otherisation” (67), as it “lumps together people who only have their non-Swedishness in common, and also because it is used in connection with the children of international migrants who are born in Sweden” (Westin 2000, 61). According to Ann Runfors, the concept *invandrare*

embrace[s] people with similar features but with different ethnic affiliations. However, [...] the category ‘invandrare’ is used as a label for non-whiteness indirectly. This can be seen as an effect of a strong colour-blind ideology in Sweden [...] The label ‘invandrare’ furthermore differs by being constructed not only by means of skin colour, but also by other phenotypes such as hair and eye colour as well as what is perceived as a foreign accent. (2021, 67)

There was also a clear and unequivocal socioeconomic correlation between the figure of the immigrant and the *Miljonprogram*, in which the former was held responsible for the degradation and the failure of the latter.

An institutional investigation into the politicization of the concept *invandrare* was also carried out by a parliamentary commission for the Ministry of Culture (Kulturdepartementet), which in 2000 published a text titled *Begreppet invandrare – användningen i myndigheternas verksamhet* (The Concept of Immigrant – Usage in Governmental Activities), where the following is evidenced:

Det lämpliga i att kalla människor som har bott länge i Sverige för invandrare kan ifrågasättas. [...] Dessa personer har oftast en starkare anknytning till Sverige än till något annat land. (Kulturministeriet 2000, 22)

The appropriateness of calling people who have lived in Sweden for a long time 'immigrants' can be questioned. [...] These individuals often have a stronger connection to Sweden than to any other country.

In the suburbs, far from contact with the typically Swedish cultural and social life, not only did international hospitality take place, but also a rupture in the traditional image of the country, manifesting a discomfort that foreshadowed the failure of multiculturalism.

2.4 Political Changes and Crises in the 1990s

Through these historical developments, non-European migrations changed the overall perspective on diversity in Sweden, where over time, different socio-economic conditions have created two distinct ethno-social layers: the ethnic and socio-economic homogeneity of metropolitan centres, and the promiscuous heterogeneity of the suburban ethno-proletariat. If, as Gunnar Broberg and Mattias Tydén put it, *folkhem* was an ideology that permeated all societal structures to the point that it defined the identity of the nation (2005, 59) as a human consortium based on equality, and if the structure of the city as it was projected during the establishment of the *Miljonprogram* should mirror the *folkhem*, then it seems appropriate to explore how the new highly stratified ethno-social and residential structure undermines this idea of equality, where immigrants are often depicted as a potential threat (Keskinen, Skaptadóttir, Toivanen 2019, 2-3).

The representation of migrants as a threat led to the establishment of dichotomous oppositions. Unlike many Swedes who were able to find better job opportunities and housing elsewhere, the social ladder remained rather static for immigrants, making it impossible for them to improve their socio-economic and housing conditions. Among the reasons we certainly include linguistic issues, disparities in education, unequal power distribution, limited political involvement, significant income inequalities, and job insecurity. On an attitudinal level, negative stereotypes, prejudice, and biased social constructions further strengthened practices of ethnic and racial discrimination.

Consequently, during the 1980s, despite an economic upswing, many refugees found it difficult to get into the labour market, so they sustained themselves with state aids which, however, proved insufficient to avoid their 'relegation' into the *Miljonprogram* areas

(De los Reyes 2000, 39). Furthermore, the neoliberal legacy on the Swedish housing market, implemented by Carl Bildt's government in the 1990s, resulted in an intensified socio-economic inequality due to the institution of a needs-tested welfare system (Tunström, Wang 2019, 23) and an increased power for private real estate markets (Christophers 2013).

Given this new, precarious situation, the utopian principle of *folkhem* began to wane, especially with the gradual transition to a globalised, individualistic and neoliberal economic system. In fact, shortly after Palme's death in 1986, the political climate changed irretrievably and the term *folkhem* lost its positive charge, taking on nostalgic overtones reminiscent of a community where solidarity was dissolving into an increasing individualist competitiveness. As mentioned above, in 1989 Ingvar Carlsson put a stop to refugees, although during the 1990s the influx of refugees soon started to rise again, causing political and social issues.

Global events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the USSR, the wars in the Balkans,⁸ Somalia and the Arab Gulf had very strong consequences on overall migration flows towards Sweden, which granted over 76,000 permanent residence permits in 1991-92, over 136,000 in 1993-94, and over 64,000 in 1995-96 (Westin 2000, 16).

1991 is recalled as a turning point also because, for the first time, violent racism reached Sweden, a country that had traditionally considered itself unaffected by this social issue. Violence was mainly identified with the figure of John Ausonius, better known as *Lasermannen* (The Laser Man), who between August 1991 and February 1992 committed no less than eleven individual attacks on non-white ethnic citizens with a red sighted firearm, spreading panic in Stockholm and Uppsala's streets.⁹

2.5 Austerity and Multiculturalism at Göran Persson's Turn

The imbalances, conflicts and political alternations of the 1990s show how an overt politically recognised multiculturalism is not sufficient to ensure that a society is multicultural and egalitarian in practice (Gokieli 2017). This is evidenced by the political developments after

⁸ In the years 1992-93, over 100,000 Yugoslav citizens found refuge in Sweden, the majority of whom, around 40,000, were Bosnians. Migration from the Balkans accounted for 21% of the total flows to Sweden in the 1990s alone (Westin 2000, 7; Migrationsverket 2021).

⁹ Alongside Ausonius, we also mention the rise of organised neo-Nazi movements responsible for violence against refugee dwellings (1990-92) and the proliferation of various extreme right-wing supremacist and independent movements such as *Vitt Ariskt Motstånd* (White Aryan Resistance) and *Nationell Ungdom* (National Youth).

Bildt's conservative term, when Social Democracy came back to government in 1994. With a cabinet headed by Ingvar Carlsson, later replaced in 1996 by Göran Persson (in charge between 1996 and 2006), Social Democracy guided Sweden to its official admission into the European Union (1995), working on the reduction of public debt and curbing unemployment caused, in part, by the financial crisis of the early 1990s (Chiesa Isnardi 2019, 1216).

Although Sweden in 1975 had embraced multiculturalism as a societal founding value, the shifts in socio-economic policy occurred in the following decades contrasted sharply with the ideal of hospitality, inclusion and celebration of diversity that continued to dominate also the first decade of the 2000s. Indeed, the establishment of the thematic year (*temaår*) of multiculturalism, *Mångkulturåret*, dates back to 2006.¹⁰ The Multicultural Year was designated by the Social Democratic government to better integrate Sweden's cultural and ethnic diversity into cultural institutions and to permanently increase opportunities for all citizens to participate in cultural life, as well as to connect different cultural traditions (Regeringen 2007). Through exhibitions, theatre performances, artistic productions, lectures, seminars and documentaries related to the representation of Sweden as a multicultural country, this multicultural portrayal of Sweden found expression in dance, music, literature and other contexts (both academic and non-academic), including a growing social interest in this phenomenon and a particular investigative attention from linguists in the multi-ethnic varieties that have developed in multicultural neighbourhoods.

Over the years, scholars and critics have analysed diversity in Sweden, seeking an answer as to whether the symbolic celebration of multiculturalism in those years matched a positive response in everyday coexistence practices against the portrayal of migrants as an alleged threat. It was precisely in that contradictory climate which arose during Persson's government (on the one hand, increasing neo-liberalism and welfare restriction, on the other hand the somewhat self-satisfied glorification of its own progressive multiculturalism), that a new intellectual critique took shape towards the concept of Swedishness and its progressive ideas, which would preface the developments of a postmigrant consciousness.

10 A thematic year consists of the proclamation and organization by the Swedish government of activities developed and carried out over the course of a year, dedicated to a specific purpose.

2.6 The Emergence of a (Post)migrant Consciousness

In this chapter, a synthetic overview of the historical and social events that characterised profound changes in Sweden in the last decades of the twentieth century and the very first years of the twenty-first century has been provided. In this final part of the chapter, we will focus on a fundamental aspect that has run through the events reconstructed so far: the advent of a new generation of writers of foreign origin, who narrate contemporary Sweden against the backdrop of *folkhem's* decay.

From the late 1980s onwards, there was a visible break in the country's recent history, mainly because, in these years, second-generation migrants developed their own consciousness and began to make their voices heard. It is often from the marginalised, stigmatised and often reinvented places of the suburbs that many second-generation writers grew up and then developed their own artistic projects, creatively addressing the challenges of multicultural society.

It is important to emphasise that, in this context, the role played by art in the rethinking process of identities and belonging is crucial (Calvani 2021, 194). In fact, a part of the Swedish cultural production at the wake of the twenty-first century contributed to unravelling identity binarisms between Swedish and foreign cultures, representing the ambivalences of national belonging, i.e. a concept that needed to be profoundly re-semanticised in relation to the past (Ghose 2008, 421, 422). In particular, second-generation writers in Sweden have developed perspectives in new literary forms and languages as a way to re-interpret the ideological closure of the 1990s and the all too enthusiastic celebrations of multiculturalism of the early 2000s, which contributed to a further migrantisation of second-generation citizens.¹¹ Although (often) born and raised in Sweden, this generation is still called 'guest', 'immigrant' and at any rate never or only reticently 'Swedish', inheriting the social segmentation experienced by their parents (Hübinette, Lundström 2014, 424) as a dominant pattern expanded to the domain of culture.

Out of such a context, a non-white Swedish consciousness arose in the 1990s (Hübinette 2019, 102-3), formed especially among those who, having grown up in Sweden since childhood, have received an education in Swedish culture and can speak about it from a critical perspective. Unlike the first generations, the younger generation

11 Migrantisation is a concept developed in postmigrant theory with regard to people born or raised in a society to which they formally belong, but which, due to external factors such as foreign appearance and name, they are constantly excluded from. Summarised in Schramm, Ring Petersen and Wiegand's words, it consists of "the ascription of migrant backgrounds to some citizens" (2019, 8).

feels the need to offer a point of view on the distinction between identity and otherness, proposing a new image of Swedish identity, in which privileged common means of expression are MS. Indeed, it should be noted that the development of *invandrarlitteratur* followed an important artistic and aesthetic fervour flowing from different directions, in particular from cinema and the emerging Swedish hip-hop scene, where linguistic creativity was one of the most innovative artistic outputs.

In the universe of cinematography, we mention movies such as *Före stormen* (Before the Storm) by Reza Parsa, *Det nya landet* (The New Country) by Geir Hansteen Jörgensen, *Vingar av glas* (Glass Wings) by Reza Bagher and *Jalla! Jalla!* by Josef Fares. All the movies mentioned were released in 2000, which is a very interesting and certainly not accidental timing. As for television, the Italian-Swedish director Peter Birro launched the series *Kniven i hjärtat* (The Knife in the Heart), released in 2004 and set in Bergsjön (Gothenburg), centred on the lives of second-generation youths from different ethnic backgrounds.

Turning to the field of music, the 1990s brought the advent of a hip-hop group of South American origin based in Botkyrka (Stockholm): The Latin Kings (TLK). This group had a very significant political, social and cultural impact on the conceptualisation of immigrant identity in Sweden. Known for being the first to have publicly used MS as a means of artistic expression, TLK made their debut in 1994 with the album *Välkommen till förorten* (Welcome to the Suburbs), emancipating suburban varieties from their previously ascribed marginalised features through deliberately provocative linguistic elements and narratives that simultaneously convey the precariousness and artistic power of *förort* life.

In a social climate of growing intolerance towards otherness, TLK testified to a new image of Sweden emerging from the amalgamation of the North and South. Thereby, the counterculture of the counterplaces, the heterotopic suburbs,¹² traditionally seen as ‘spaces for the Others’, begins to emerge in this period as an aesthetic and spatial *Leitmotiv* of the new, multicultural hip-hop scene (Gendolavigna 2021a), influencing identity – and suburb-interested artists such as Jacco, Mohammed Ali and Erik Lundin.

Delving deeper into this perspective, it is worth quoting the TLK frontman Douglas ‘Dogge Doggelito’ Leon, who in an interview released in 2014 for the Swedish Television SVT asserted his

12 The concept of heterotopia derives from the Greek *ἕτερος* (different, other) and *τόπος* (place) and is delineated as a place outside all other places, i.e. a place that, although localisable, remains different. For the French philosopher Michel Foucault, heterotopias are not utopias, as the latter present society in a perfected form, remaining essentially unreal, whereas heterotopias are real places (2011).

awareness of the social role his group played in the revolution of the multicultural and multilingual aesthetics of the period: “Vi blev de första som verkligen kom från förorten och visade vad förorten var och vi hade vårt egna språk” (Doggelito in SVT 2014).¹³ Quoting Lacatus,

Their rap becomes the medium for formulating a social message – by using violent imagery to depict their fictional rap world and a language drawing heavily on local slang that used to be almost inaccessible to people never exposed to it, TLK make their audience experience an uncanny linguistic and cultural alienation within their own language. (2008, 61)

2.6.1 The Ethnic Turn

In the early 2000s, the emergence of MS in literature marked a crucial step in the transition towards a postmigrant and postmonolingual aesthetic. Aleksandra Ålund highlights that, during this period, a significant shift occurred through a reflection on the cultural and linguistic repertoires that arose within the context of superdiversity, expressed through texts, sounds, and images (1997, 16). It is well known that after Alejandro Leiva Wenger’s *Till vår ära* in 2001, many writers introduced new linguistic tools to convey an image of Sweden that also included its peripheral spaces and previously untold experiences. Bodies, subjectivities, emotions, and new forms of expressivity took shape within the cultural context of a nation in constant transformation (Leonard 2011, 113).

In literature, the ethnic turn deeply explores the cracks opened by the first generations and the music of TLK, becoming a source of critical disruption by transcending old dichotomies and reimagining intercultural coexistence. Writing with a heterogeneous vocabulary and narrating suburban settings equips postmigrant artists with a tool of resistance that turns their presence in the literary and artistic field into a disruptive force. Particularly noteworthy are Alejandro Leiva Wenger’s words in an interview with Naima Chahboun from 2013, where he argues that the category *förortsförfattare* (suburban writer) can be used to challenge specific power structures that divide literary field and Swedish society into rigid categories:

jag kan fortfarande känna mig främmande inför hur mina texter blir lästa av vita medelklasskritiker. [...] Men ibland tänker jag

13 “We were the first who truly came from the suburbs and showed what the suburbs were and we had our own language”.

att man borde försöka vända kategoriseringen till något positivt. Säger 'ja, jag är förortsförfattare' som en strategi. (Leiva Wenger in Chahboun 2013)

I can still feel estranged by how my texts are read by white middle-class critics. [...] But sometimes I think one should try to turn the categorisation into something positive. Saying 'yes, I'm a suburban writer' as a strategy.

The postmigrant voices from *invandrarlitteratur* subvert the constructed image of the immigrant from being the cause of the *folkhem* collapse to a figure capable of radically rethinking him-/herself in opposition to the narrative of the immigrant as an exotic object of the literary landscape and, thus, of society (Heith 2004; Trotzig 2005; Lindholm 2019, 250).

Retaining its subversive character, in the last decades *invandrarlitteratur* has undergone a process of canonisation, which conveys the image that it is a unified and cohesive intellectual movement. Anyuru discussed this development in his essay from 2018 *Strömavbrottets barn* (The Power Cut's Children), attempting to historicise the postmigrant wave (ironically called by him *vågen*, 'the wave'), noticing that it appeared (and still does) quite fragmented, though what we today call *invandrarlitteratur* is now regularly consumed by the general public (Anyuru 2018, 88), who see the suburban setting and the stylised use of multilingualism as an unmistakable mark of authenticity. Drawing inspiration from this, the reflection on the importance of multilingualism as a literary element is the red thread that runs through the four selected works, analysed in the next four chapters.