On the role of religious expression in the Swedish Public School System.
Dedication

To My Children, The Light of My Life...
Acknowledgement

I would like to first and foremost thank The Department of Theology at Uppsala University, and in particular, the Faculty and Administrators who have been part of my educational and research experience. Thank you for your kind guidance and generous support.

I would also like to give a great big ‘thank you’ to my beloved family and friends who are forever patient with me, as I have been occupied with studies.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to myself for getting my degree completed and being the kind of adult woman who dares to live and never stops learning. I carry a hope that my example serve as an inspiration to others.
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Abstract
This paper is a case study in Religion in Peace and Conflict, in which the role of religion and religious expression in Swedish education is examined. The focus of this case study is on Swedish public schools. It begins with a literature review into the role of multiculturalism and cosmopolitan theories in Swedish government and policies with a discussion of how this extends into education. This is followed by an overview of the history of religion in Sweden and Swedish schools. The impact that different stakeholders, including teachers, students, administrators, and parents, might have within the Swedish school systems is excavated as well as the impact that the school space might have on integration. A field study in three different Swedish schools was conducted and is described in this paper. The results of the data suggest that there is a clear distinction between non-religious students and the religious students. The case study points to the overall finding that practicing religious students in the Swedish public school does not have the same freedom of conscience as the majority of students and that Swedish religion education is not neutral, as is the state intends. Some objections in regards to rights claims and majority-minority group dynamics are also explored and discussed.

Keywords
Chapter 1

Introduction

The demographics of religion are changing in Europe and this affects education. There are at least two major factors that play a role in this changing landscape. One is secularization and another is immigration and emigration. As the population in Europe is becoming more secularized, Christianity is declining. Christianity is still, by far, the major religion in Europe and almost three-quarters of all Europeans are registered Christians (globalreligiousfutures.org, 2019), but only about 22 percent of Europeans says they attend Church at least once a month. Sweden and Finland has the lowest Church attendance in Europe (Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, 2018). “Non-practicing Christians outnumber the religiously unaffiliated population...and, even after a recent surge in immigration from the Middle East and North Africa, there are many more non-practicing Christians in Western Europe than people of all other religions combined” (Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, 2018). Religiously unaffiliated adults, as well as a small number of church-attending Christians and a quarter of non-practicing Christians agree with the statement that “There are no spiritual forces in the universe, only the laws of nature” and “Science makes religion unnecessary in my life” indicating that Europeans are becoming more secular as the role of science is becoming more prevalent in the life of humans (Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, 2018).

Around 6 percent of the European population is made up of “Muslims. Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, followers of folk or traditional religions, and adherents of other religions each make up less than 1% of Europe’s total population” (globalreligiousfutures.org, 2019). Islam is the fastest growing Religion, largely due to immigration from North and East Africa and the Middle East. “Approximately 20 million non-EU nationals reside in the EU, making up 4% of its total population, and further flows of migration will be a feature of the 21st century” (data.europa.eu, 2019).

Europe is a continent of many religions and this causes conflict. Europe struggles with peacefully coming to terms with religion in the public sphere and this has given rise to harassment and violence. The relevant emigration factor of religious representation in Europe
comes from Jewish emigration. The Jewish population is on the decline in Europe, as many Jews have begun to leave Europe, primarily, in favor of Israel and the United States. “A recent survey conducted by the EU agency for fundamental rights (FRA), reports that close to 40% of European Jews had considered emigration prompted by anti-semitism. … Almost 90% of respondents in the poll reported that anti-semitism has increased in the last few years” (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018). According to a recent FRA poll involving the 12 counties that are home to almost all of European Jews, “80 percent of French Jews told pollsters that anti-Semitism in the country had “increased a lot” and in Germany 44 percent of Jews said they had thought about emigrating, up from 25 per cent five years ago” (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018; Buck, 2018). Anti-semitism is also on the rise in Sweden, particularly in south Sweden where there has been a great rise of physical attacks on Jews and the Jews community (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 2010). Jews are warned against travelling to Sweden and many Jews are either leaving or considering leaving south Sweden or Sweden all together (Wiesenthal.com, 2010). These changing demographics affects everyone on Europe. In this writing, the area of education in the context of this changing religious landscape will be examined.

1.1 Religion in Sweden’s schools

In 2007, the Swedish government announced that religious activities in schools should be banned with exemption of those activities relating directly to religion classes (Melin, 2015; Flensner Kittelmann, 2015). This came as an outcome of growing secularization in Sweden and Europe. The government posited that religious ideas should not be taught as truth in the Swedish school system. Since 2007 the move towards removing religious sentiment and religious expression in the Swedish School has hardened (Berglund, 2010). This thesis will show that the Swedish news are ripe with debates about students’ right to express themselves religiously in school or the right to have freedom from religion in education. There are arguments about symbols of religion in the form of jewelry and clothing and headwear. There are long conversations about the right of Swedish students to pray in school. In many schools, teachers teach either only a very
rudimentary form of religious education, based on religion history, as topic description, or with the implicit position that religion is outdated and obsolete.

More conversation and research is needed to aid in the national understanding of the role of religion in the Swedish school system.

The topic of this thesis is, specifically, on the role of religious expression in the Swedish school. This investigation is done through understanding religion education in Sweden. The topic is relevant in that the public debate seems to be missing enough scholarly research to develop a proper strategy for policymakers and school administrators on how religious students ought to be expressing themselves in the school building. What is more, it is unclear that teachers are getting the appropriate professional development to ensure that they can teach Religion in the school under the proper conditions for all students in the classroom. This thesis is intended to support and bring forward the public debate in Sweden and Europe.

1.2 Research Question, Aim, Method and Material
In this master’s thesis, I investigate the case of religion and religious expression in the Swedish public school system. I will consider a specific ‘social cohesion’ question that runs the entire spectrum of Ager and Strang’s framework (explored in Chapter 2), namely a students’ right and access to religious expression in school. I will ask if the Swedish public school system allows for a person to live in accordance to her or his own conscience, or if it may be a system in which one must render one’s personal beliefs to accommodate the will of the majority? I will ask what is means to live in a pluralistic democracy that embraces multiculturalism and, in that context, consider the renaissance of a Swedish nationalist love of homogeneity that is now more commonly reflected in the public forum in debates on the role of religion in Swedish society. This research is relevant to the study of Peace and Conflict in relation to Religion because it allows for a better understanding of the factors that play a role as religions students settle into the Swedish school systems.
The aim of this paper is to highlight the role of religion and religious expression in the Swedish school system, and the students’ lived experiences as a contribution to collective research in Religion in Peace and Conflict. Sweden is an interesting case because the country recently experienced a large influx in immigration that, by many accounts, Sweden is ill equipped to manage, in a variety of ways (Arnett, 2015). Many of the recent immigrants are children or have children. This has increased the number of challenges that schools face and ignited an ongoing national debate. Many of the students who have moved to Sweden are religious students who have to navigate living in a secular nation and secular classrooms with a majority population of non-religious or non-practicing and non-churchgoing Christians. In addition, more and more ethnic Swedes who are religious are experiencing less tolerance in the classroom setting (Arnett, 2015). This has led to conflicts within the Swedish school system and highlights the relevance of this research. We need to better understand all the dynamics of the student experiences in the Swedish classroom. As such, the contribution to future research with this thesis is a better understanding of how religious students may feel in the Swedish secular classroom.

The method with which I will examine this question is through both qualitative and quantitative research. I will conduct an extensive literature review, as well as conduct a triangulated research study involving field research with semi-structured interviews and student questionnaires. With the assistance of existing research and the findings of my own study, it should lead to a conclusion to my research question. I will also use Inductive Content Analysis to understand the Swedish debate from the opposition to religion in the Swedish school. Previous research has shown that choosing a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, when data mining and data analysis is conducted well, will lead to a productive synergy between both methods, which in turn will lead to a greater and more nuanced insight into the subject of research (White, 2002). Therefore, in choosing this method, it is expected that it will yield a more thorough answer to the guiding research question.
1.3 Hypothesis
Informed by public narratives and stories that I have heard from students (in my role as an educator), as well as two years of living in an immigrant community in Sweden, I hypothesize that the Swedish school system may be simultaneously disenfranchising religious minorities while using the existing school system to endorse the religious majority and the anti-religious faction. This happens because the Swedish school has a preference for one world religion which means that students from minority religions are forced to subordinate their conscientious commitment to the majority. Because most students from minority religions are also immigrants, this leads to a system in which the majority (which also consists primarily of ethnic Swedes) rules and the immigrant is subordinate.

If my hypothesis is supported by my research, I will argue that the system causes religious minority students in Sweden to internalize a dislike for themselves. This happens because students from minority religions are forced to subordinate their conscientious commitment to the majority. Because most students from minority religions are also immigrants, this leads to a system in which the majority rules and the immigrant is subordinate. If this is the case, I will argue that the Swedish state does not have a compelling interest in discouraging or preventing any individual student from religious expression in the public school. This is particular the case of the Swedish government wishes to endorse a policy of multiculturalism. If immigrant children are raised by the state to understand themselves as inferior, this causes harm to the individual child, as well at the formation of cohesion in the state. What is more, it is unconstitutional.

1.4 Previous Research
There has been some notable research done about religion in the Swedish school system. Many researchers have been prompted by the rise in immigration which has made the question of Religion in Peace and Conflict very relevant in contemporary society. We need to understand what role religion plays in Swedish society and in the Swedish school. One researcher has investigated what he calls ‘diversity transition’ in a paper where he argues that societies will come to depend on children who have been reared by immigrant parents; wherefore we need to
work on minimizing the performance gaps between immigrant children and native children (Alba, 2011). He speculates that one of the ways to do this is to implement ‘modest’ policies of inclusion. This is discussed in a book, which considers education in Sweden and Turkey, as well as the role of inclusion and diversity training policies for teachers (Carlson et al, 2007). Another research team has looked at the role of social dominance and shown that those who are socially dominant are more likely to show aggression towards immigrants (Guimond et al, 201). This plays a role in school when the socially dominant group shows more aggression to the inferior group. If the dominant group is non-religious ethnic Swedes and the inferior group is religious immigrants, then Sweden is facing a serious discrimination issue in the schools. We can learn more about this dominant/non-dominant dynamic from a large research project on how students talk about religion and the effects that this has on them, education, and society. In this study, the researcher concludes that Sweden is a country in which the “social and cultural settings are characterized by Swedish Christian traditions” and that other religions or faith communities “are still not much recognized in schools, which gives the impression that other faiths or festivals are not part of Swedish society” (von Brömssen, 2007, pp 146). In her study, she looks as how the language that students use give an indication of these factors. The findings in this research is backed up by another researcher who studied three Swedish different schools and found how teachers and students use language to talk about religion, where they tend to refer to the practice of religion as “something outdated and strange” (Flensner Kittelmann, 2015). In the important book “Language and Minority Rights”, Stephen May also discusses the role of language in how we educate for the majority and educate for the minority. He gives practical advice for how institutions can bridge the gap between policy and the day to day operations (May, 2012). Such information may help schools understand and learn to use a more inclusive language in the narratives about religion.

In 2009, the Network of European Foundations published a large scale study that has been conducted on religion education throughout Europe. They found that religion education vary widely from country to country. Some common challenges were about how to make education and the teaching of religion ‘neutral’ and have a classroom setting conducive to children
developing an “open and critical mind where religions and other philosophies of life are concerned” (Pepin, 2009, pp 42). The study narrowed the teaching of religion into three main focus areas: improve quality of teaching; reinforce intercultural understanding and human rights; and enhance capacity to embrace diversity (Pepin, 2009, pp 43). One researcher found the Swedish approach to religion education lacking in that it is saturated in Lutheran Protestantism (Berglund, 2013). She concludes that the Swedish teacher training and student education is far from neutral and that this has social consequences. To that end, she finds that it is important to discuss objectivity in teaching and help teachers understand non-denominational teaching practices (Berglund, 2015).

1.5 Structure of Thesis

The path through the thesis will proceed as follows: In Chapter 2, I will discuss integration, as well as two major theories that are prevalent in Swedish Law and Policies - the theory of Multiculturalism and the Theory of Cosmopolitanism. I will also consider the role that the physical space has on integration. I will then consider the Swedish model of immigration and integration and well as consider the current goal of the state and the trends in public policy. In Chapter 3, I will explore the history of religion in Sweden and the Swedish classroom. I will explore the current curriculum, facts and figures, and religious education rights and law in Sweden and the EU. In Chapter 4, I will examine the role of various stakeholders in the school, including teachers, administrators, parents, students, and the state. This chapter will help answer the leading research question about the limits of a students right and access to religious expression in school. In Chapter 5, I will present my own field study with data and discussion of results. In Chapter 6, I will consider objections to my work, through Inductive Content Analysis of the public debate. This ICA will part into four primary themes, which includes but is not limited to separation of church and state, religion as a matter of the private sphere, freedom from religion, and religion as an undue burden for children. Finally, I will present my conclusions and evaluation, along with suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2

Introduction

In this chapter, I will look at existing research and examine the role of integration, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism in Sweden. Doing so will allow me to show how the Swedish state approaches integration. This is important to understand in order to properly examine the approach that the school takes on integrating religious youth into the school systems.

2.1 Integration

The concept of integration can justifiably be labelled as complex. Researchers struggle to find a common ground from which integration can be described and operationally defined. There is a broad variety of reasons why this is complicated. First and foremost, is is necessary to consider whether the integration in question is understood as a matter of the state or a matter of the immigrant. In other words, is it the immigrant that is responsible for the integration or is it the state that is responsible for the integration? Because these are very different objectives, the understanding of the term ‘integration’ is varied among researchers. An immigrant, for example, might understand integration as something that is part of the immediate social community, where as the state might understand integration as how well a large groups of immigrants have become part of the broad identity of the state. Secondly, the term integration is often confused, or used interchangeably, with the term ‘assimilation’ both in political debates and in the larger public forum. To that end, it is important for researchers to keep definitions of terms exceptionally clear.

There are other factors that make a uniform understanding of integration unclear. Some researchers have asked questions about the abstract character of integration to try and understand what it is the the immigrant is expected to integrate into. They have considered how one can understand the host community and what comprises the values of that community (Threadgold and Court, 2005). One way to productively have a conversation about integration would be to
understand what it means to integrate. Additionally, it is important to make a proper distinction between integration and assimilation where one might be “becoming part of the receiving society” and the other is a “one-way adaptation to the dominant culture” (Threadgold and Court, 2005)

An integration study ordered by the UK Home Office became the beginning of the development of a now commonly known conceptual framework of integration by Ager and Strang (2004). The framework is a four tiered basis from which empirical studies can be conducted. The base tier is the ‘foundation’ which consists of factors around Rights and Citizenship. Tier two are ‘facilitators’ such as language and cultural knowledge and safety and stability. Tier three are ‘social connections’ such as social bridges, social bonds, and social links. The final tier is ‘markers and means’ which includes factors to integration such and employment, housing, education, and health (Ager and Strang, 2008). The framework has been used in many comparative studies on integration.

(Image Source: Ager and Strang, 2008)
The framework is particularly useful for policy makers and state legislators as they work on structures to assist with integration of the immigrant community. The framework considers not only markers and means (the four markers that are most often used in the public debates to measure ‘success’ is integration are employment, housing, education, and health). It understands integration as a ‘flow’ that begins with rights and citizenship and the spreads into other aspects of what it means to live as a human in a nation. This structure of the framework ‘reminds’ the user to consider not just the objectionable and measurable but also the social connections and facilitators, such as feeling safe in one’s community and being able to understand and communicate comfortably in the primary language of the state. Such connections could be, for example, the connections that students make in the school setting and how their connection to the school is facilitated through access to home language, acceptance and encouragement of diversity, and new language skills.

Ager and Strang’s work is widely used today. A literature review of the current debate in integration research ordered by the Scottish Refugee Council, largely finds that the framework is used in most aspects of such research in Europe - a finding which supports its utility. The report concludes that even “some of the theoretical work uses the framework as a benchmark. This [vast use of the model] would imply that the choice of framework for the research being undertaken [on behalf of the council] is a sensible one” (www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk, 2010). The literature review includes work from more than thirty (30) of the most prominent researchers in integration, as well as contributions from the European Commission’s *Handbook on Integration*.

In following the model from Ager and Strang, a researcher (Heckman, 2006) has expanded the concepts. In leading a large scale study for the *European forum for Migration Studies*, he considers research about four forms of integration - structural identification; cultural integration; interactive integration; and identificational integration. It is clear that this model largely resembles the Ager and Strang model. He too emphasises the importance of considering
2.2 Theory of Multiculturalism

Another aspect that arises in the integration and assimilation debate is the topic of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is a term that is often used to describe diversity in a society or community. There are many strands that followers of multiculturalism prescribe to, each requiring various degrees of integration. There is, however, one major common position. Proponents of multiculturalism largely reject the idea of a “melting pot” in which minority groups must completely assimilate into the majority group (plato.stanford.edu, 2018). The main reason for this is the risk that a demand for complete assimilation of a minority group will mean that the group will never have any opportunity to reclaim any remedy for disadvantages that have arisen as a consequence of being the marginalized group (plato.stanford.edu, 2018). Certain groups lay claim against the majority for certain accommodations. Some religious exemptions, for instance, can be made from certain laws. For example, certain Native American tribes have been granted the right by the federal government to smoke peyote as a ceremonial component during rituals, whereas the psychedelic drugs is not legal for recreational drug use in the United States (peyote.net, 2018).

To understand multiculturalism, it is imperative to understand culture. Language and religion are essential in many claims for cultural accommodation (plato.stanford.edu, 2018). Other claims may be about the right to self government. Certain religious groups wants to use their own justice system. One example are Hasidic communities who claim the right to self govern justice, before the civil or criminal court. Other examples are Islamic communities who want to use Sharia law to resolve disputes between community members. These claims are challenging societies and remain contested. Race, on the other hand, have a more moderate role in multiculturalism narratives because the claim is not from race alone but the history of the group, its subordination, in addition to its culture (Gooding-Williams, 1998).
The justification for multiculturalism is a liberalist account that individuals have the freedom to choose their own conception of the good life. Charles Taylor argues that we do not become ‘full human agents’ in isolation from other persons. Rather we ‘define our identity in dialogue’ and we are therefore dependent on others for recognition (Taylor, 1994). In this perspective, multiculturalism is essential to forming identity because the group around a person mirrors back an either admirable or contemptible imagine of him or herself. If the majority group mirrors back contempt for the minority group, the minority will internatize this contempt and “can suffer real damage” (Taylor, 1994, pp 25). To that end, Taylor argues that multicultural policies that actively attempt to preserve minority culture also seek to create members of the larger society and that different languages, cultures, and religions are goods that would need to be preserved (plato.stanford.edu, 2018).

Another justification for multiculturalism comes from Kymlicka who argues that culture is instrumentally valuable to persons. Firstly, because it is a “condition of personal autonomy” and secondly because “cultural membership plays an important role in people’s self-identity” (plato.stanford.edu, 2018). This position would achor the immigrant in the community and provide him with a sense of safety and social connection (one of the key features in Ager and Strang model to integration). In this understanding it is not simply the immigrant himself that needs to feel a sense of social connection but he also needs to feel that his culture is connected and accepted. Kymlicka, and others who hold this position, goes on to say that the immigrant is in a position to lay a claim on the receiving nations. Although some countries have instituted anti-discrimination laws, they are not enough to ensure that minority groups are treated as equals “because states are not neutral in respect to culture” (plato.stanford.edu, 2018). Even in diverse societies, we can find examples of the state favoring one cultural group over another. Such is the case in the schools of France, were some minority group religious girls are prohibited by law from wearing religious clothing, or the United States were one religious minority from certain nations are banned from coming into the country (even if they have previously been permitted in), exemplifying a state sanctioned preference for one culture over another.
2.3 Theory of Cosmopolitanism

Other perspectives on immigration comes from cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitans are largely informed by the same view that many anthropologist hold, namely that migration has always been part of the human reality. To understand the immigration debate, it is helpful to understand both the cosmopolitan perspective and the work undertaken by anthropologists. Our understanding in any civilization has always been informed by migration in some form. It is for this reason that the study of migration is central to the development of social anthropology (Vertovec, 2007). In some form or another migration has an impact on societies. Caroline Brettell describes anthropology's particular set of approaches in the following manner:

...the articulation between the place whence a migrant originates and the place or places to which he or she goes. This includes how people in local places respond to global processes. … Anthropology’s focus on cultures, has resulted in an emphasis in migration studies on matters of adaptation and culture change, or forms of social organization that are characteristic of both the migration process and the immigrant community, and on question of identity and ethnicity (Brettell, 2000; Vertovec, 2007, pp 963).

One shift in anthropology that is directly shaped by globalization, is new understanding of diversity. With the word ‘new’ what is meant that there is a shift in the methods, concepts, issues, or cases that is being looked at in the field (Vertovec, 2007). As we encounter mass migration and migration to and from places at a much faster pace, we are better helped in understanding that social spaces are less defined as definite and much more fluid. One way to do this is to conceptualise a framework of ethnic pluralism from which to understand migration and diversity (Vertovec, 2007). This could be more helpful than to continue with the sort of multiculturalism that has been traditionally examined from the position of it being a political movement or ideology. One recommendation following the ‘new’ approach is to take account of a range of contextual constraints (public discourse, policies, etc), individual as well as collective
actions, and understand how these influence each other (Vertovec, 2007, pp 969). This will result in better theory and in understanding the issues in diversity.

Cosmopolitans would follow this train of thought. Martha Nussbaum (ibid.) tells a story about a walk in Jerusalem. As she walks, she comes upon an avenue of trees. These trees represent a person who risked his or her life to save the life of a Jew. These people were not Jews and had their own identities, cultures, and religions. Nussbaum tells us that these people all had the imagination, and the courage, to help another person, regardless of the difference in culture, and regardless of the danger. She asks us:

Would one, in similar circumstances, have the moral courage to risk one’s life to save a human being, simply because he or she is human? More generally, would one, in similar circumstances have the moral courage to recognize humanity and respond to its claim, even if the powers that be denied its presence? That recognition, wherever it is made, is the basis act of world citizenship (Nussbaum, ibid., pp 132).

Nussbaum goes on to engage with the issue of world citizenship and what is means to carry humanity with us in our hearts, wherever we may go and in whatever context we set up societies. To be a world citizen, to be a cosmopolitan, we must count people as moral equals, she says. In doing so, we “treat nationality, ethnicity, religion, class, race, and gender as ‘morally irrelevant’ (Nussbaum, ibid., pp 133). Accident of birth should never be taken as a determinant of moral worth. To do this well, Nussbaum says, we must learn to recognize humanity in ourselves. This learning begins at home where families raise their children not to see themselves and their family first, but to see themselves as a art of a larger human community first and foremost. By implication, it can also be taught in schools. If Nussbaum is correct, children can be taught to see themselves as cosmopolitans. This learning can take place in schools.
Nussbaum points to fellow cosmopolitan philosopher Kwame Appiah who says that the “cosmopolitan ideal includes a positive delight in the diversity of human cultures, languages, and forms of life” (Nussbaum, ibid., pp 137). This understanding is a prompt to create institutional structures that make priority of the ‘good’, in this case protecting equal liberty. “Liberty of choice should be the benchmark of any just constitutional order” ((Nussbaum, ibid., pp 137) and a refusal of government and citizens to compromise on this principle. To Nussbaum, for instance, public funding for religious education is contrary to the goal of the cosmopolitan state because such funding detracts from valuing a shared public culture (that values diversity) and places too much focus on one diverse group. It would be better, in Nussbaum’s perspective to fund a public education that teaches diversity in culture and religion.

It is a challenge, Nussbaum, admits, to promote a diverse culture without creating a hierarchy. A state would need to promote diversity without promoting a preference for one culture, one language, or one religion. To do this well, world citizens must work towards a state of things “in which all of the differences will be nonhierarchical understood” (Nussbaum, ibid., pp 138). This demands us to use our imagination. We must begin to imagine what that world would look like so that we can create the structures we need to get there. But imagination won’t be enough for us. “We must cultivate world citizenship in our hearts and minds as well as our codes of law” (Nussbaum, ibid., pp 139). Nussbaum doesn't consider this homogenic or even boring. She feels that there is plenty of opportunity within a world community to enjoy the difference and the diverse. She says that children who are raised to think of themselves in terms of a shared humanity will begin to understand the world as a place where many people can be the givers of comfort, not just parents. These children will grow with the moral thinking that all humans are part of their concerns and when in need, the child will consider itself as part of one person among others. Nussbaum think of this is terms of circles where the circles - like circles that form when a pebble is thrown into a lake - will form outwards from the child to the world. Nussbaum sees a world in which the circles flow the other way, from the world and to the child’s moral understanding. She believes that the people who saved Jews did so because their circles flowed
inward and because they had “not allowed themselves to become encrusted over by the demands of local ideology” (Nussbaum, ibid., pp 144) but instead saw the human face and responded to it.

**2.4 Integration and the role of the Physical Space**

The idea that we must rethink our humanity and the space in which we move together is explored in social and cultural geography that also investigates the impact of immigration and the integration. One researcher looks specifically at the physically spaces in which we move. He sees us moving away from municipal multiculturalism and towards community cohesion. He examines his ideas in a study of inter-ethnic relationships in a British community. Here he looks at the physical boundaries and the role that they play in identity, integration, diversity, and cohesion (Clayton, 2009). Clayton argues that “everyday solidarities” that are essential to successful cohesion of a community arises from intersecting spatial influences “which do not equate to abstract or fixed version of national belonging” (Clayton, 2009). Such examples may be from a mixed local economy (stores and restaurants that represents many cultures) as well as religious centers or culture specific spaces. Clayton proposes that understanding the spatial impact on the community can help pull the immigration debate out of the political multiculturalism that often circles around race and nationality and instead focus on community cohesion. Multiculturalists have supported and politically allowed for the establishment of immigrant communities. Immigrant communities, however, appear to have had a damaging effect in immigration and has caused a negative debate in the public forum. It has ignited nationalist narratives and fueled an anti-immigrant base. By engaging with and supporting highly diverse community spaces, such as cities where the public spaces are truly mixed, we are in a better position to weave a cohesive community. In Clayton’s research, and drawing upon field research from others, he finds that people in the very diverse physical spaces report a great sense of wellbeing and safety. They live with everyday experiences that require a level of inter-cultural openness. This supports the idea that we need to shift our attention from understanding identifies on a national scale and instead consider those experienced through the everyday and the variously fluid and fortified boundaries of urban space” (Clayton, 2009, pp 494), including the school space.
2.5 History of Sweden on immigration matters

Before the Second World War, Sweden was primarily a country from which people emigrated.\(^1\) The history of measurable immigration into Sweden begins in the 1950s and 1960s when refugees from Germany and the Baltics turn the Swedish trend of emigration around. Laborers after the Second World War arrived in Sweden from countries in Europe and Turkey. In 1969, Sweden formed a new government authority called “The Swedish Immigration Board” which was mandated to work with immigration related matters. This meant that immigration became government regulated and immigration conditions were placed on would be immigrants. Sweden sent a message to the world that work permits would only be granted if there were no qualified people in Sweden able to perform the labor. This regulation system worked with some modifications, until the 1980s when Sweden began to see a great rise in asylum seekers. They came from countries outside of Europe, primarily Iran and Iraq, as well as other countries in the Middle East. Towards the early 1990s, asylum seekers also arrived from Eastern Africa and Eastern Europe (former Eastern Bloc Countries). More than 100,000 persons from former Yugoslavia found shelter in Sweden and more than 3,600 Albanians arrived.

When Sweden joined the EU in 1995, the country became part of the EU policies and regulations on immigration and EU laws were domesticated into Swedish law. In early 1990s another 84,000 people from former Yugoslavia arrives for refuge in Sweden. This number lowered again towards the end of the 90s and Sweden did not experience another big spike until the 2000s. Over the years, more restrictions came in regards to family reunifications and approvals on residence permits. When Sweden joined Schengen in 2001, it lead to an influx of EU workers who sought employment in Sweden. There was a loosening of immigration restrictions. Following the Syrian conflict in the mid 2010s, however, this changed again. After first granting permanent residence permits to all Syrian and stateless persons arriving from Syria, Sweden closed its borders in 2015 after 162,877 persons had arrived from Syria within one year. By 2016, Sweden introduced identify checks in order to further reduce the flow of asylum seekers.

\(^1\) The information in this paragraph comes from: Migrationsverket.se. (2019). History. [online] Available at: https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/About-the-Migration-Agency/Migration-to-Sweden/History.html.
By 2016 “Sweden goes from having EU’s most generous asylum laws to the minimum EU level” (Migrationsverket.se, 2019).

2.6 The Swedish Immigration Model

In 1975, Sveriges Riksdag (Sweden’s Parliament) adopted a policy of Multiculturalism. The goal of this policy was to make immigrants and Swedes equal - and to set down in law that everyone should be free to choose whether to embrace their own cultural identity or the Swedish cultural identity. Sweden is renowned as one of the countries that most prominently represent a theory of multiculturalism (Castles and Miller, 1993; Borevi, 2013). Although the theory of multiculturalism has been the subject of great debate, particularly over the last two decades, Sweden has remained committed to “prioritizing the maintenance of collective group identities” (Borevi, 2013).

2.7 Facts and Figures

Due to its policies on immigration and multicultural inclusion, Sweden has become a country in which there are many ethnic and religious backgrounds and many different languages are spoken in Sweden in a daily basis. “In 2015, almost 163 000 people sought asylum in Sweden. The measures subsequently taken by the Swedish Government, including temporary identity checks and border controls, and the new temporary asylum legislation, have led to fewer asylum seekers in Sweden. The corresponding figures for asylum seekers in Sweden in 2016, 2017 and 2018 were 28 939, 25 666 and 21 502, respectively” (Regeringskansliet, 2017).

The population makeup of Sweden breaks down as follows: Population: 10,255,102 (as of March 2019). By the end of 2018 (time of last count) there were 9,297,919 Swedish citizens and 932,266 foreign citizen permanently residing in Sweden. Of the total amount of Swedish citizens in 2018, 1,110,727 were foreign born of which a little more than 50% were males (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2019).
2.8 Current social trends related to immigration

In Sweden, there are detectable changes in society as an outcome of the influx of immigration. One major contemporary change as been a rise of nationalism. Another has been the level of Jewish emigration and/or relocation from South of Sweden to Middle or North Sweden.

2.8.1 Rise of Nationalism

Nationalism is on the rise all over the world and Sweden is no exception. In the 2018 election, the political party Sverigedemokraterna (SD) substantially increased its position in the Swedish political landscape. Voters turned out in high numbers, many to support the SD party, which has a strong platform of nationalism (Statistics Sweden, 2018). SD is critical of Sweden’s current immigration policies, which SD finds too inclusive and a threat to traditional Swedish values and the welfare state. Immigration is a major political issue throughout Europe, but particularly a concern in Sweden, which received the largest group of asylum seekers in proportion to the population (Arnett, 2015).

One researcher finds that Europe is at a disadvantage because it has been coping with diversity (including religious difference) for a shorter time that the USA, for instance, and, therefore, lacks the political and legal instruments to manage it (Nussbaum, 2007). This lack of guidance has led to a drift towards nationalism where uncertainty and fear of the new has been resolved by a firmer commitment to the national majority culture. The rise of nationalism plays a role in the Swedish classroom as children of nationalistic parents and students with nationalistic ideals are more commonly expressing themselves in terms of glorifying the values of Sweden and Swedes. This causes conflict with minorities - in particular minorities who also follow a minority religion - and, therefore, affects the day to day school environment.

2.8.2 The leaving of Jews - A rise in anti-semitism

Sweden has had a complicated relationship with the Jewish populations. Jews were allowed to settle in Sweden during the 18th and 19th centuries in a raised position and were given the right to settle in cities and own property in the late 1800s. During this time they were also slowly given the right to become Swedish citizens, inter-marry with Swedes, and run for office.
(Otterbeck, 2003). This was followed by a long period of gradual increase in rights and equal status within Sweden until today where Jews are well assimilated. Sweden became a protective haven for many, primarily Danish Jews, during the Second World War (Folkedrab.dk, 2019). And despite some setbacks after the war, Jews continued to find equal footing in Sweden. In contemporary Sweden, however, Jews have begun leaving because a rise of anti-semitism within the Swedish state. This speaks to the less than successful integration when it comes to religious and ethnic groups. (See more details on this in Chapter 1 - Introduction).

2.9 Summary
To summarize, there are many angles one could take when considering issues in integration and assimilation. First, one must be clear on the definitions, concepts, and operational definitions that one will work with. Secondly, it is important to consider if the perspective is that of the immigrant or that of the state. Third, it is essential to consider multiculturalism and its impact on current immigration narratives. This policy plays an important role in Swedish education. It is also essential to consider the work from anthropologists and the cosmopolitan narrative. Finally, the physical space itself plays a role in how well immigrants might merge into a community, wherefore the physical school facility is an important factor in student integration.
Chapter 3

Introduction - The Study of Religion - Sweden as a case

Sweden is a special case when considering the role of religion and religious education in the classroom for a variety of reasons. First of all, Sweden is a part of a coalition of nations through its membership in the EU. These nations all have very different historical relationships with religion. Sweden is also part of the immigration debate and the changing landscape of religion that is currently forming in Europe. As an outcome of immigration and the influx of more cultural and religion traditions, Sweden is considering proper policies and strategies in different cases relevant to religion, such as marriages, rituals, religious gatherings and buildings, and religious clothing and expression. Sweden has also signed and ratified the UN Children’s Rights, which is a universal right decree document that has been domesticated into Swedish law. The law includes certain policies around religion in the life of children. Sweden is a welfare state in an socialized democracy that has moved from being ruled by religious monarchs, to having an official and mandatory state church, to having a large population of self-proclaimed atheists, many of whom are not members of any religious organization or church. Mixed into this is a growing segment of the population who is Muslim, either by conversion or immigration. Because Islam has historically largely been unknown in the public sphere in Sweden, the sight of Muslims in religious clothing, mosques, and public prayer has caused great debate within the Swedish population. There is also a large community of Jews in Sweden with whom Sweden has a complicated history. These issues will be explored in this chapter.

3.1 The history of religious traditions in Sweden

The history of organized Abrahamic religion in Sweden dates back as far as about Year 1000 when King Olof Skötkonung became the first Swedish king to be baptized. This was the beginning of a Christianized Sweden. With the establishment of an archbishop seat in Uppsala in 1164, Christianity inherited a larger following. With a bishop presiding over the crowning of King Erik Knutsson in 1210, the union of Church and State became official (svenskakyrkan.se, 2019). The Church and the State remained strongly connected for hundreds of years. In 1593, Lutheranism became the state religion and all Swedes were required by law to belong to the
Church. The law of mandatory membership was not changed until 1951, when citizens could legally withdraw as members of the Church of Sweden (svenskakyrkan.se, 2019). Since then, membership in the Swedish Church has dropped significantly. Meanwhile, the number of Muslims and Jews has increased substantially, primarily due to immigration. Still, the vast majority of people in Sweden are Christian. The Muslim community in Sweden consist of about 1.5% of Sweden’s population - roughly 170,000 members. Of the 10 million + people in Sweden, about 6 million people are members of the Swedish Church (Regeringskansliet, 2017).

3.2 History of religion in the Swedish classroom

For many years, the Swedish School system and the Church of Sweden were intertwined. Going to school also meant getting a Lutheran Christian education and learning the Christian traditions and sacraments. This slowly changed after the Second World War. The Swedish ‘Grundskolan’ (Primary to Middle School) was founded in 1962. After great debate, it was decided that all measures must be taken to ensure that the Swedish Public School would be a school for all children (Riksarkivet, 2018). On January 1, 2000 the State and the Swedish Church were officially separated (Jänterä-Jareborg, 2015). This separation had a large impact on the Swedish school, which no longer would be participating in school prayer events, or Confirmation teaching. While most children graduating from the Swedish school had undergone Confirmation during school hours, this changed and today only about 36 percent of young students are confirmed in the church (Pepin, 2009). Teaching of Confirmation and other religious sacraments now takes place outside of school hours and off school grounds. Although there are alternative means of education through the Swedish Friskolor (including religious friskolor) the majority of Swedes (+ 90%) attend state schools (Pepin, 2009). This means that most children follow the same curriculum and attend the same schools. Because the oversight of the schools has been decentralized, local authorities have a lot of say in how each school is administered and how the curriculum is being managed (Pepin, 2009). Nonetheless it is a national curriculum that guides religion education in the classroom. Religion today is taught in unison with a groups of other subjects, including Social Sciences, History, and Geography (Pepin, 2009). In the primary years, religion education is focused on life questions in ethics and traditions, while in the secondary
school years students broaden this to include more knowledge about differing perspective and life issues (Larsson, 2007; Pepin 2009).

Although Sweden is one of the more secularized countries in Europe (Sjöborg, 2013) religion in the classroom has become increasingly visible (Bäckström et al, 2011). This has lead to a questioning of the role of religion in a state institution and the relationship between the state and religion. Some groups believe that religion and religion education should be completely removed out of the school because it has no place in a science based education. Others feel that the current curriculum works but sees it as a historical exploration of ideas. Some groups feel that religion education in Sweden ought to better reflect the changing Swedish society and the diversity of religions within the classroom.

3.3 Current Religion Curriculum and approaches to religion teaching in Sweden

Some researchers have speculated that the model that is currently in use in Swedish school is missing what it set out to achieve. There are at least two factors in play that warrants consideration: 1) the role of Lutheran Protestant religion within the secular Swedish curriculum and identity and 2) the attitude of the classroom teachers who teach the course.

The Swedish curriculum for the teaching of religion is worded to emphasize the neutrality of education and the non-confessional status of religion classes in the Swedish system. It states that all education must be science based and grounded in “proven experience” (Skolverket, 2012). It also states that teachers should primarily focus on Christianity as “special importance since this tradition has nurtured the values underpinning the foundations of Swedish society”. Teachers should also teach “the other” world religions. In addition, they should be able to afford students with “the ability to examine and analyse ethical issues in relation to Christianity, other religions and outlooks on life (Skolverket, 2012). The chosen language of the curriculum, which makes all religions “The Other” in comparison to Christianity, makes it hard to argue that teachers could, reasonably, teach neutrally because they are essentially directed by the curriculum to teach a preference for one religion over others. The guidance in the curriculum all but ensures that
children will be taught to prefer one religious idea (Christianity) as the centering framework from which they evaluate all other ideas.

This is not the sole obstacle for children in Swedish education. It is the right of any child to feel welcome in the Swedish classroom and not to feel that one is being forced to engage with beliefs that are contrary to one’s personal convictions. To that end, teachers are expected to carry out their lessons in a neutral and objective manner. However, some researchers have found that the Swedish teachers are anything but neutral. Instead, teachers portray religion and religious faith as “incompatible with being a modern, rational and independently thinking human being” (Mellin, 2015). Teachers present the view that “a non-religious, atheistic position is articulated as a neutral and unbiased approach” (Flensner Kittelmann, 2015). Such perspective does not allow for the students to learn about all world religions, nor learn in a ‘neutral manner’. Instead, teachers can reject the religions that they do not want to know about and only teach a very rudimentary class about the history of religious ideas. Some research has suggested that a “lack of knowledge about religion may lead to anti-semitic and Islamophobic attitudes (Löwander and Lange 2011, National Agency for Education 2011b; Sjöborg 2013). If this is the case, this presents as a potential detriment for students who are religious, and for students who come from religious families. Others have suggested that the approach to teaching in Sweden is non-religious, yet deeply “marinated in Lutheranism” (Berglund, 2013). This research describes the “deeply puzzling” phenomenon that Swedish teaching and education is described as “objective”, yet finding a “Mecca of Lutheranism” when visiting Swedish schools (Berglund, 2013). This ‘Mecca’ consists, among other features, of schools that are planned around the Christian calendar; Lutheran holidays that are celebrated within the school; textbooks that speaks negatively of or minimizes the significance of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism; as well as a general lack of knowledge about religions around the world (Berglund, 2013). This teaching of religious ignorance to Swedish children has become part of the approaches to teaching in many Swedish schools. This approach, however, does not logically follow from a theory of multiculturalism.
3.4 Human Rights and Religion Education

It is important to also consider the role of human rights in the education of children.

“Discrimination laws state that no one shall be discriminated against because of faith (law: SFS 1999, 130) ... and Paragraph H of the UN’s Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (resolution 36/55 of November 25, 1981) ratified by both the EU and Sweden, [states] that religious groups are to be able to celebrate holidays and observe days of rest” (Otterbeck, 2003). This means that religious students who need to rest, fast, or observe religious holidays are allowed, under law, to have exam days moved and to have excused absence from the school day. Nonetheless, many schools do not have diversity plans in place, teachers are not asked to keep religious holidays in mind during planning, and, outside of Christian holidays that are celebrated in Sweden, religious holiday schedules are not habitually shared with teachers from Administrators.

3.5 Children’s Rights in Sweden

Children enjoy a privileged position in Sweden as the country is a cosigner to the UN Convention on Children’s Rights (In Swedish: Barnkonventionen). This convention frames all laws in Sweden pertaining to children and is taught to children from the time that they begin formal education at age 6. Swedish children are well aware that they have certain rights. In Sweden, children have a right to a home, food, clothes, medical care, safety, internet, sports, books, their own body, free school materials, free school lunches, free education for life, the right to be taught classes in their mother tongue, and much more. They also have the right to religion, or the right not to have religious beliefs. But, this right is under more pressure because it is often challenged and not clearly understood. Some understand the right to religion as the right to exercise their religious freedom and therefore claim some protections or accommodations under this right. Others understand the right as a freedom from religion so that children ought to be protected from religion as a basic universal child right. This debate often boils down to whether individual rights take precedence over group rights and what preference the state might have. One researcher on minority language rights has found that group rights are both “socially
and politically defensible” (May, 2012). It may be, under the same theory, that religious group rights are equally defensible.

3.6 Decision makers and stakeholders
Swedish schools have national oversight through Skolverket but are managed through Swedish municipalities. Friskolor are primarily managed by a School Board. This means that the decision makers for the schools are part of the relatively local community. It is the Head of the School who make decisions for the school (in accordance with Swedish school law). It is, therefore, up to the individual school administrator which policy approach they want to have in the matter of religion in the school and inclusiveness. Only the state curriculum is set by the state. The state law only states that the religion education and education in general must be non-confessional. It does not say whether religion or the exercise of religion must be banned from the school grounds or included.

3.7 Immigration, Religion, and Education
The 1975 proclamation in Riksdagen that Sweden was to be a multicultural society, changed things for religious minorities in Sweden. The intention of the proclamation was for all peoples in Sweden “to have full equality and freedom of cultural choice” and groups were expected to interact with “cooperation and solidarity” (Otterbeck, 2003). At the same time, the Swedish Council of Free Churches expanded to include immigrant places of worship. While the Swedish State Church at the time held a privileged position, it would, after 1975 be considered ‘equal’ to all other congregations within Sweden (Otterbeck, 2003). As this change occurred, it also shifted the role that religion played within the Swedish educational environment. Although the State Church rescinded its hold on the Swedish School, the remnants of the Swedish Church and Church traditions is still very much visible in the Swedish schools. This has led to problems with non-Christian student integration. The Swedish approach to teaching of religion could lead to greater problems. Religious illiteracy may be a contributing factor to a rise in hate crimes anti-semitism and Islamophobia in the US and there is no reason to think that Sweden would be any different (Lester and Roberts 2006; Haynes, 2012; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life,
One large scale European study suggests that to rectify these discrepancies within the educational system, it is necessary for schools to take account of religious diversity within the school (Pepin, 2009). Collecting such data would allow administrators to minimize the privileges enjoyed by the majority religion and to ensure that the teacher competency is in place to teach all students.

3.8 Religion education in the EU

Religion in classroom education take different approaches in countries around the EU. Some countries have a strong separation of religion and education (For example, France). Others have forfeited religion in favor of Ethics classes, with Religious Instruction classes as an option (For example, Spain, Germany, Ireland). And some, have religion education in school but take a ‘informational approach (For example, Sweden, Denmark, Norway). The teaching of religion can take a confessional or non-confessional approach. There are longitudinal studies underway that may give some insight into the long term success of either approach. One experiment is based on an “interreligious table” where Italian students meet students from various religious traditions (Pepin, 2009). Another is a test agreement between the Spanish State and the Islamic Commision of Spain, in which both parties agreed to have Islam taught in school as part of religious education (Pepin, 2009). Other nations, such as the Netherlands and Sweden, have set up Friskolor so that religious schools could be established. There is no clear directive for how religious education should be conducted in all of Europe and more research needs to be undertaken to understand how religious education ought to be managed with an increasingly diverse body of students.

3.9 Summary

In this chapter, I have excavated the history of religion and Sweden and its role in the Swedish classroom. I have considered the Swedish approach to the teaching of religion and I have shown how the Swedish curriculum can be contributory to the distance between the students of majority religion and the students of minority religions. I have also gone on to explicate
children’s rights in Sweden and the role of universal human rights in sorting out the proper policies for religion education in Sweden.
Chapter 4

In this chapter, I will consider the impact that different stakeholders within the school have on the day to day school experience and on the teaching and learning of the Swedish religion course. I will begin by considering the role of the teacher. I will then look at the conditions for students and the role of parents in the school system. I will also consider the physical space in which student live everyday, as well as the role of the state and administrators on the school environment.

4.1 Teachers of Religion

Although students under Swedish law are allowed to express themselves with clothing, one researcher has found that teachers often do not accept, and discriminates against, students who wear hijab because it is interpreted as anti-democratic and against Swedish values (Otterbeck, 2003). One study confirms that a person’s social dominance orientation would be strongly correlated with a general willingness to aggress against immigrants when given the choice between an immigrant who wants to assimilate and an immigrant who prefers cultural isolation (separation) from the main culture (Guimond et al, 2010). Swedish teachers, generally, only accept the presence of the hijab when it is seen as a ‘personal choice’. Such pressure from the teachers can be coercive and may perceived in such a manner that it may prevent a student from feeling free to engage with religious expression.

This example of Islamophobia in regards to students wearing hijab could be an outcome of poor teacher education. One large European study finds that the “level and quality of teacher training for those responsible for religious education is cause for concern” (Pepin, 2009, pp 29). In Sweden, teachers are required to be certified in their subject in order to set grades. To become certified in religion education, teachers must have a general knowledge background in world religions. It is costum for teachers to organize their classes around the goal of protecting the child’s right to a well rounded view of different ideas and perspectives (Pepin, 2009). Because of immigration, the teacher’s role has changed in the Swedish classroom as the group of students represented in each class has a greater diversity of cultural and religious backgrounds. In order to
continue to give students the education that they are legally entitled to and that is morally intended for them, it is imperative that teachers keep up with diversity training as part of professional development. Integration has become an “imperative that entail, in a broad sense, preparing newcomers for a robust membership in the host society” (Alba, 2011). Cultural and religious literacy only comes with studying. Without dedicated continued training in the form of professional development, teachers will not know how to integrate their diverse student group.

4.2 Learners of Religion

Student are, under Swedish law, entitled to and free to engage with religious activity and religious expression during their school day. The prohibition against particular denominational events in school is against the Head of School. There is nothing legally that can prevent students from “(Tr). ...engaging with religious activities during breaks, even if it happens during [their] education within the public school” (Ernfors, 2011). To that end, if a student wishes to wear certain religious clothing, or wishes to pray during the school day, there is nothing that the school or the state can legally do to prevent that student from doing so.

But, following a religion can be very difficult in a school system that does not protect or support non-Christian religion. Take the case of Padma, a student following the Hindu religion. She say that when she was growing up, she knew that she was different from the other students in school. She is required to fast one day a week, participate in *satsangs* one day a week, read from her holy book regularly and go to temple every Sunday. She describes that fasting has almost completely disappeared from her life because “it is hard to keep up the fasting tradition when you have to go to school and eat at dining halls” (Freitas, 2008, pp 6). Padma is a student in the United States, which is much more adjusted to diverse student population than in Sweden. Nonetheless, she finds it difficult to express herself religiously. Padma feels that she has to give up something that is essential to her life, in order to go to school, because the school is not set up to accommodate her religious traditions and rituals. Swedish religious students may feel the very same way.
Other students in the Swedish school environment may also have an effect on the religious student. In a study considering students’ language about religion, one researcher found that students created a negative narrative around religion and people who follow religion (Brömssen, 2007). For instance, although the Swedish school is a “meeting place for different cultures” Swedish students connect religion with “problems, especially war both in history and now” (Brömssen, 2007, pp 143 and 151), while other describes religion as “old-fashioned” and states that they don’t think they should continue to have this subject in school (Brömssen, 2007, pp 152). Swedish students also display a strong language about “us” (the sensible Swedes who do not believe in religion) and “them” (the people who are religious, and therefore have no sense). One boy in the study says that “religious people make a simple minded impression” and that science offers the only viable version of truth (Brömssen, 2007, pp 153). If the majority of students in a school feel one particularly negative way about religion, it is less likely that religious students would feel comfortable or free to practice their beliefs, because they might fear that the majority of students would begin to feel a particularly negative way about them. It can also be a cause of failed interaction as we know that ‘feeling safe in one's community’ is an essential ingredient in successful integration (Ager and Strang, 2004). To understand more about how students might feel about being in the Swedish school system, I conducted a field study, which is described in Chapter 5.

4.3 Parents’ involvement

Sweden does not have a culture of parental volunteerism in school, wherefore is it uncommon to see parents in the day to day environment in the school. Teachers generally do not work with parent volunteers on tasks related to teaching or improvements in the school. This means that the role of parents is largely narrowed down to email interactions, occasionally parent-teacher phone calls, and possibly a semi-annual parent-teacher meeting. Still, the influence of parents on religious education is worth mentioning. Whether parents are non-religious, religious, or non-practicing religious, the influence on the parents affect the educational environment of the child. The law states that each person have the right to freely exercise religion, as long as he does not disturb the calm of society or cause general outrage. Parents also have a right to give their
4.4 Physical space for learning about religion

The physical space for learning about religion plays a role in how well students learn and how well minority and majority religion students interact and integrate. One of the most controversial spaces in public debate is occasions when Swedish schools have their year ending ceremonies. These have, because of a former connection with the Swedish Church, traditionally been held in Swedish churches. Many schools have continued and insist on continuing this tradition. Because many students who are not Christian have objected to this practice, the issue has been part of a broad public and political debate. One writer argues that if the school has made plans as such them attending school events in church and singing Christmas songs in school should be mandatory for all students. Parents should no prevent their children from participating because “one does not become Christian from singing or hearing a song about Baby Jesus. The story of his birth is part of our cultural heritage and therefore part of our general knowledge [which is what should be taught in school]” (Magnusson, 2016). The Swedish school curriculum also seems to support the practice as, arguably a church visit and the traditions between school and church is part of the course core content. The curriculum states that part of the course is to
understand “Christianity, the other world religions and different outlooks on life, their characteristics and how they are expressed by individuals and groups in the present, in Sweden and the world” (Skolverket.se, 2012). If the schools, as institutions, support this use of ‘space’ as a part of Swedish education, it serves to help support the overarching idea that the majority religion and traditions are the preferred traditions by the state.

Another issue of ‘space’ that arises within the Swedish schools in light of immigration and an increase in religious student is the question of a religious place to pray during school hours. Because many students in the Swedish school are Muslim, who are required to pray five times a day, they find it difficult to find places to pray within the school building. Some attempts to request prayer space for students have fallen flat. But, not all think that this is an unreasonable request. In his book “The legal revolution against the place of religion”, B.W. Bussey argues that “religious freedom is a foundational principle...in the democratic state” and that “religion is special and should be accomodated” (Bussey, 2016). He says that in the tension between religion and the law, it is necessary for the law to protects religion’s special legal status. To fail to do so “denies the historical lessons that we have learned” and put minorities at risk for harm or persecution (Bussey, 2016, pp 1149). He argues that religion ought to have a special place in the school because, just as science, it is “part of the search for truth” about what it means to be human (Bussey, 2016, pp 1150). If this is the case, that may be a very compelling reason for further studies into the overall benefits or deficits of having a non-denominational prayer room on a school campus. It is possible that it may serve as more than space for prayer. It may also serve to uphold a protection for religious students and give them a meaningful manner in which to exercise and express their religious beliefs in peace and as part of an inclusive and diverse school community. This would allow immigrants “an important symbolic and emotional bonding to a new physical space...loaded with meanings, such as perceptions of national belonging” (Minganti, 2004, pp 135). This is particularly important in light of the fact that immigrants parents are often less likely to advocate as much or very efficiently for their children (Alba, 2011, pp 1622). By giving the children a space in school, the school becomes an advocate for the minority group.
4.5 Administrators’ role on the religion course

Administrators are a student’s primary representatives of the national government in that they are the primary actors on behalf of the government in the school. They, in a sense, represent to vision and values of Sweden. When a school administrator celebrate Swedish traditions that are also religious, they show the children of the school that those are favored. When an administrator chooses not to recognize other religions and religious festivities, the administrator also shows by an act of omission that Swedish society does not value those religions. Nussbaum points out that religious liberty is important but that it is unequally distributed (Nussbaum, 2007). By prioritizing one religion, or no religion, in a school, one can also risk establishing a repressive orthodoxy. The risk is that the majority group will refuse to accept anyone that lives outside of the orthodoxy, which challenges a person's ability to live according to their own conscience. If religious diversity inspires fear, the Administrator ought to be the person who keep that fear in check by teaching students that religious diversity is part of a policy of multiculturalism. Instead, many minority students learn from the actions (or inaction) from their administrator that they should “assimilate, which means stopping any practice that draws attention to their difference from others” (Nussbaum, 2007).

4.5.1 The Christian School Calendar - Christian Holidays

Administrators also have the last word on the scheduling of the school year. All schools in Sweden revolve around the Christian Calendar in which schools close during the most holy Christian holidays. These include Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Ascension. There is some room to manoeuvre school start and end dates as well as how holidays are placed throughout the year, however, Swedish schools do not chose to close for religious holidays other than Christian. In addition, public schools generally do not provide world religion holiday schedules for teachers, wherefore test are not scheduled around religious holidays other than Christian days. Swedish schools do close for half of June, all of July and much of August, so on the years that Ramadan and Eid falls during the summer, Muslim students are able to have that time off. Because school administration is decentralized and it falls to the mandate of the municipalities
and the individual school leader, on the years that non-Christian religious holidays are during the school year, Administrators can design a more accommodating schedule. Yet, they commonly chose not to do so.

4.6 The state in the school system
The current policy on religion in the public school is that religion only has a role as part of a subject course that teaches about different religions in the world, as a representation of ideas. One political party expresses the general Swedish policy by saying that “(Tr.) …it is an important principle that the Swedish school must be free from religious influences and religious elements. … Religion class according to the lesson plan is … important to create understanding and knowledge about the world’s religions. It is a starting point for creating active citizens in a democratic society [to have a school] where students from different backgrounds can meet, learn together and get to know one another” (Lundgren, 2018).
Some researchers, however, finds that this policy can be problematic as it causes division within the group and prevents proper integration. Instead, they suggest that governments use ‘comparative integration context theory’, which argues that the sense of belonging to local communities (such as for instance, a school community) “is strongly dependent on the integration process” (Crul and Schneider, 2010). This means that when government focuses on forging a sense of cohesion between all members of a local community, including the cohesion between religious students and the non-religious school, this will cash out as a greater overall integration in society as a whole. What is more, they find that this pays dividends in future generations as high degrees of local involvement in first generations shows high degrees of local involvement in second generations (Crul and Schneider, 2010, Citation A).
They go on to find that a great deal of pragmatism colors the way that state agencies and institutions in Europe interact with and respond to the needs of immigrants (Crul and Schneider, 2010, Citation B). This pragmatism leads to less successful integration. In the school context, and in the integration of religious students into the whole school group, this means that the state must be much less pragmatic and endorse inclusive policies, even if they have not tried this approach before.
There are other considerations on the role of the state. Nussbaum has called for national governments to design and endorse what she calls a policy of “Liberty of Conscience” in which citizens have “ample space to pursue their conscientious commitments” (Nussbaum, 2007). Such a policy would potentially be an improvement in circumstance for religious children in a non-religious public school. But, Nussbaum points out, liberty of conscience is not equal if the state displays a preferences or says that it is a certain “religious view that defines us as a nation” (Nussbaum, 2007). This is because such a preference creates an in-group out-group that means “we do not all enter the public square on equal conditions; that one religion is the nation’s true religion and others are not” (Nussbaum, 2007). Therefore, the state must make a conscientious effort not to endorse one religion over another. By creating a policy of liberty of conscience, the state ensures that children do no grow up to feel that there are two forms of citizenships, one for ‘real’ Swedes (who belong to one religion), and one for ‘the others’(who belong to another religion).

4.7 Summary
In this chapter, I have looked at several conditions and issues around the stakeholders in the question of religion education in the Swedish school system. Some of these stakeholders were identified as teachers, students, parents, administrators, and the state. This investigation has lead me to conclude that religious children might very possibly grow up in a Swedish school system in which they come to feel that they do not belong to Sweden or the majority culture. There are several stakeholders considered when making this conclusion. In the next chapter, I will present the results of a field study that was conducted to excavate more information about how minority students may feel in the Swedish school, and whether they are free to express themselves religiously.
Chapter 5

5.1 Field Study

The overall study is a country specific case study. The country under investigation is Sweden. The literature review in Chapter 1-4 revealed that Sweden is a compelling place to investigate religion, religious expression, and education because of the many changes that have taken place in the role of religion in Swedish society over the last 100 years. The research found that Sweden was one of the last countries in Northern Europe to make a separation between the church and the state. It was, therefore, also one of the last to move the official state religion out of the public school classroom. Still, many elements of a deeply religious past remains in much of the public school system, including but not limited to religious holidays, religious songs, school graduations in churches, lean meals on Fridays during lint, and much more. Yet, there is a strong secular current that runs through Sweden, in which there is a high demand for evidence based education and a rejection of religion and religious faith. While Swedes have the lowest church attendance of any nation in the EU, and while many Swedes are non-religious, most describe themselves as non-practicing Christians. Added to this is a mix of immigrants who are mostly religious and have come to Sweden with different religious beliefs than Christianity. Many are Muslim and many are children, or have school aged children.

All of these changes within Sweden, have created a need to better understand the relationship between school, religion, religious expression and the children in the school. Schools are an important and relevant area of research because they hold the future of Swedish society. And, children are required by law to be in the school system for at least nine years. We need to understand the school, if we are to understand ourselves in the future, and if we are to say with conviction that schools are a safe and inclusive representation of the greater society. We want to ensure that the school is a safe and welcoming place for all children. One way to learn more about the schools in Sweden is to conduct field research in the school. The literature review has revealed that there may be a discrepancy in the school between the ‘Swedish’ students who are part of the majority religion or non-practicing majority, and the “un-Swedish” students who are
religious - many of whom are also immigrants. In order to understand the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of these students, a field study was conducted.

5.2 Method
The field research section of this case study was triangulated in the following manner: Questionnaire with students, semi-structured interviews with school teachers, and archival research. The reason for the triangulation was to help ensure better validity of the results. The aim of the field study was to collect data that was otherwise unavailable. The questionnaire was chosen for the student population because, logistically, it was a fast and efficient means of collecting a large amount of data. In addition, a questionnaire was less invasive in the school facility than setting up one-on-one interviews with a lot of students.

5.3 Participants
There were two groups of participants:

- Public School Students (Questionnaire)
  - The groups of student were sampled from three (3) different school systems. 1) Public International School 2) English speaking Swedish school 3) Public Traditional Swedish School
- Teachers (Semi-structured interviews)
  - The participants were Teachers of Religion from the sampled schools.

Student participants were from a student population of seven hundred and forty  (N = 740). A total of seventy seven participants were in the sample (n = 77). Participants were selected using quota sampling. Primary Criteria: Access, Position, and Age. For student participants, access was the willingness of teachers and Administrators to allow access to students for the research. Position was the student participant’s position in a Swedish school. Age criteria was set from 16-22, with parental consent for students aged of 16 and 17. The actual ages of participants ranged from 16-19 years of age with 46.1% at the age of 16 and 46.1% at the age of 17. Sex, gender, and nationality was not accounted for. Students were mixed groups, in that there were
participants from the traditional Swedish Gymnasium, Swedish Gymnasium in English, and Swedish Gymnasium IB (which primarily consists of International Students from more than 35 countries, or Swedish nationals who have received their primary and middle school education abroad). Out of the participant group, 64% self-identified as “I am not religious”, 6% identified as Sunni Muslim, 29% as Christian (11.6% Catholic, 14.5% Lutheran Protestant, 2.6% Church of England). 1.45% of students were Jewish, 1.4% of the participants were Hindu and 4.3% self-identified as “Other”. A total of 93.8% of the respondents who identified as “I am not religious” were students from the traditional Swedish gymnasium. The remaining of 6.2% of that participant group identified as “Christian - Lutheran Protestant”.

5.4 Ethics

The following measures were taken to ensure that the research study aligned with ethical research guidelines for research with human participants.

- Informed Consent (Written and oral)
  - All participants signed an Informed Consent Form. Because most participants were over the age of 18, participants signed the forms themselves. In the event that a person in the quota sampling group was under the age of 18 and over the age of 16, the person signed for themselves, after which proper parental consent was obtained.

- Anonymity
  - All research participants have a right to anonymity and were given anonymity in this study. All results of the data was anonymized.

- Confidentiality
  - All participants have a right to confidentiality. In this study it was understood that it is the responsibility of the researcher to keep the data and signed Informed Consent forms confidential. To that end, a data storage plan was been designed and the data is stored in a locked office where it will be for 5 years after satisfactory completion of the master’s thesis. After this time, the data will be destroyed.
• No Harm
  ○ No harm is a right of all participants in this study.
  ○ Participants were assessed for any need of support at the end of the data collections.
  ○ Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time.
• Debrief
  ○ Upon completion of the research, all participants were debriefed. They were given contact information to the researcher and the researcher’s department head.

### 5.5 Field Study Data
The data for this study was collected between January 2019 and April 2019. The data was collected, in person, by the lead researcher. Surveys were conducted using an online questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews were conducted in an office with only the participants and the lead researcher present.

#### 5.5.1 Questionnaire
The questionnaire consisted of 42 questions. The questions were generally about student experiences in religion education and the student’s religious self identification and expression. There were also general questions about religious clothing and expression in the school system and the student’s opinion about and experiences with this. Some of the questions in the questionnaire were written to ensure that the students would not attempt to guess what the field study was about and these responses were not considered in the evaluation of the results.

In examining the data, there were some significant results that seem to lend some support to the overall research hypothesis. For instance, when the mixed group of students were asked “How comfortable would you be with a meditation room in your school building”, 4% replied that they would be “Very uncomfortable” and 11.8% replied that they would be “A little uncomfortable”.
Meditation room:

When asked “How comfortable would you be with a prayer room in your school building”, 10.7% replied that they would be “Very uncomfortable” and 5.3% responded that they would be “A little uncomfortable”

Prayer room:

Here the data reflects that the students would be more uncomfortable with a prayer room than a meditation room. In both forms of the question, the majority of the students (42-53% did not care).

These results changed significantly when when the response was filtered to only reflect students in a traditional Swedish gymnasium program. When asked “How comfortable would you be with a meditation room in your school building”, 4.9% replied that they would be “Very uncomfortable” and 5.9% replied that they would be “A little uncomfortable”.
When asked “How comfortable would you be with a prayer room in your school building”, 31.3% replied that they would be “Very uncomfortable” and no one responded that they would be “A little uncomfortable”.

Here, the data from the traditional Swedish gymnasium program, reflects a 26.4% increase in responses of feeling “Very Uncomfortable” with a prayer room in the school.

When students from the traditional Swedish gymnasium were asked in more detail “If you could decide, and cost was not a hindrance, would you want a non-denominational designated prayer room in your school”, only 20% of the students responded “yes” on the grounds that “it is important that students and teachers have a place to pray”. The remaining 80% of respondents did not feel that money should be allocated to a prayer space in schools.
The results of this response was different when filtered through the total number of participants. When all participants from all the schools were included in the response data, the number of people who would like a prayer room in school if money was not an issue increased to 35.6%.

In the traditional Swedish gymnasium, 81.3% of the respondents said that their teacher/s had spent the most time teaching Christianity.

In addition, student responded that the least time was spent on Sikhism and Islam.
43.8% of the students responded that the religion they were most interested in learning about before the religion class was Christianity.

When asked what religion they were least interested in learning about, 31.3% of the students responded “Islam”.

This group of students also had a preference for the study of religion, in that when they were asked “If you could only learn about one religion in school, which religion would you chose”, 56.3% of students responded “Christianity”:

![Religion Preference Chart]

When asked to respond to how they thought their teacher would describe the religion course, students broadly thought that their teacher/s would describe the course as either “History of” or “Knowledge of” Religion.

![Course Description Chart]

When students were asked about details of school holiday celebrations, 100% of students responded that their schools celebrate Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and St. Lucia. 100% of students responded that their schools (with the exceptions from St. Lucia) give them time off from school during those same holidays. 100% of the students who identifies with religions other than Christianity responded that their schools do not give them time off for religions celebrations. 100% of the students who identifies with religions other than Christianity responded that their
schools do not move tests or exams when students have to be absent for religious reasons. 100% of the students also reported that a member of the clergy on the form of a priest has come to the school to speak to students. No other religious leader had been to visit the schools.

When asked if students had noticed teachers or students wearing religious clothing or symbols, 79.4% had noticed people wearing a cross or crucifix jewelry, prayer beads 19%, 31% hijab, 4.8% had noticed a bindi. When asked whether students thought that religious clothing and symbols should be banned from school grounds, most students responded that it should not be banned, with the exception of head coverings, to which 11.8% of students should be banned. When looking at only the Swedish gymnasiets student responses, this number rose to 17.6%. In addition, in this group 11.8% of respondents felt that all religious clothing and symbols should be banned from school grounds -for a total of 29.4% of students who responded that religious clothing should either be partly or fully banned from school grounds.

Question: Should religious clothing and/or symbols be banned from the school grounds?

All student respondents:

Swedish Gymnasium respondents:
When asked to leave any final comments, there was a broad variety of responses. However, they generally fell into the following broad categories:

“Hijab is used as a tool to control people; People should have the same rights regardless of religion; Making special school rules for religious students leads to segregation; Religion is personal a choice so keep it private; Religion is outdated”.

5.5.2 Semi Structured Interview

In the semi structured interviews, three teachers were interviewed, each for 60 minutes. They were asked questions about their background in teaching, their approach to teaching, and their understanding of the curriculum. They were also asked about their personal beliefs in regards to religion and the teaching of religion in the school. They were asked about religious students and if they make accommodations for the religious students who are not following the Christian holidays.

The responses had some variation in terms of teacher background and experience. One teacher was raised Catholic but not practicing. The other teachers were both describing themselves as atheists, with one teacher adding “I believe in Evolution”. The teachers did generally share their approach to teaching the curriculum. They all felt that the curriculum says and that it is particularly important to teach Christianity. They said that they agree with this phrasing because “Sweden is Christian nation”. They also said that most of their time is spent teaching Christianity as opposed to other religions. They said that in teaching Science and Religion, they teach it as
Science vs Religion because, as one teacher said:”You cannot have both. Knowledge is based on Science, not Religion”. When asked which other World Religions they teach, they all said that they teach Buddhism and Hinduism with two teachers saying that they also teach “a little” Islam. One teacher did not teach Islam because “I just don’t like it. I don’t like the religion so I don’t want to teach it. And, I don’t have to because it does not say so in the curriculum. So, I don’t!” When asked what their overall approach to the subject was, they all agreed that they think of the subjects as a sort of history course, where they present students with different ideas that other people have had over time. One teacher said that “of course, none of it is real, but we have to remember that there are people who still believe in this nonsense, so it is important for the students to know that so they can relate to other cultures.” Another teacher put it gentler but similarly. “The curriculum says that we have to teach our students about other cultures and it is important for them to know that there are other cultures where people do still have religious beliefs.

5.6 Discussion

In the questionnaire data, there are several interesting responses. For instance, when asked whether students prefer a meditation room or prayer room, a large number of students are comfortable with a meditation room but uncomfortable with a prayer room. This is a telling indication about how the conversation around religious expression is making students uncomfortable. Arguably, if a school sets up a designated room and puts a ‘meditation room’ sign on the door, students would not object, but if the very same room had a ‘prayer room’ sign on the door, they would. This indicates how powerful language is in the debate around religion. It also give some indication as to how carefully teachers must use language in instruction so as to not alienate students, and how carefully administrators must use language in the process of religious inclusion to avoid on-campus conflict.

Another noticeable effect was in regards to the question on what is being taught in class. The Swedish curriculum states that “teaching in the course should cover the following core content: Christianity, the other world religions and different outlooks on life”. In addition students should
gain “knowledge and understanding of Christianity...and its traditions are of special importance” (Skolverket, 2012). Indeed, the questionnaire reveals that students who are primarily being taught about Christianity, primarily wants to learn about Christianity. They do not want to learn about Islam, and they go to schools that celebrate only Christian holidays. These same schools do not give any consideration of other religions or students who might need to celebrate those religions. This could certainly lead to a school in which religious students who are not Christians is a minority and could come to feel that they are not as important or welcome as the Christian students. This would stifle their ability to express themselves religiously because they have understood that their beliefs are not part of the accepted culture and they could soon come to understand themselves as less valuable.

It was also significant to see that students have some patience with religious clothing and/or symbols, except when it comes to head coverings such as the Muslim hijab. Many students do not feel that it belongs in the Swedish school, or in Swedish culture. This is a telling sign and certain symbols of certain religions and beliefs cause friction in the school system, and that certain religions are not welcome. Students in hijab would pick up on such frictions and might experience themselves as very different from the majority of students.

Finally, although this effect spanned three different school systems with a range of Swedish and International Students, when singling out the traditional Swedish school student responses the effects became significantly higher. This seems to indicate that it could be a somewhat more inclusive and a more accepting experience for a non-Christian religious student to attend an international program rather than going into a traditional Swedish gymnasium, where students may be far less tolerant. Such finding would suggest that religious students might come to feel that they do not belong in the traditional Swedish school.

The semi structured interviews revealed that the individual teacher has a very important role in the teaching of the subject. They make different choices about the content matter in the teaching of the course based on their interpretation of the curriculum; and their approach to the course can
vary. These differences can potentially make a huge differences in the lives of students within the school. If a teacher says that they do not like a religion and, therefore, does not teach it, a student in the class from that religion may feel ostracized among their peers. Additionally, that teacher may have a bias against the student because the teacher feels that the student is somehow ‘old fashioned’ or laboring under a non-scientific world view. This can seriously affect the relationship between the student and the teacher and cause damage to the trust that is needed for students to learn. This, in turn could have a negative outcome on how the student performs in class.

To summarize, the findings of this study suggests that there are many factors that can lead to a religious child in the Swedish school coming to feel as if they are less valuable, very different, do not belong, feel ostracized, and feel that the teacher has a bias against them. These feelings are not conducive to successful integration. If the Swedish school experience is eliciting these results, then the multicultural policy of the Swedish state has clearly failed to connect with the public education system. What is more, the school causes harm to the children as they come to grow up feeling inferior to the rest of Swedish society. Within the school, they are emotionally segregated from the dominant majority culture because social norms dictates that religious students are not really permitted to feel what they do. They experience a segregation of ideas and beliefs within the school in that they have the undesirable beliefs and the rest of the school’s students, teachers, and administrators have the preferred beliefs. These feelings have lifelong consequences and are participatory in the student’s ability, or inability, to pursue continued education and gainful employment. We know that segregation causes children in the minority group to feel inferior and have a lack of self-esteem, which ultimately leads to them internalize a dislike for themselves and a preference for the dominant majority (Clark and Clark, 1939, Clark and Clark, 1947; Davis, 2007). Marginalizing people from school age can have a substantially negative impact on the life span in the individual child and on greater society, particularly when the marginalized students are also immigrants. Immigrants who are marginalized are less likely to make it into academic and professional career tracks and are more likely to go into low income service fields, or turn to criminal activities (Ray, 2017).
5.7 Evaluation

One strength of this study resides in the fact that it allowed access to data that was not otherwise available in published research. Although it was a smaller study, the data did reveal some statistically interesting differences between groups of students in different schools. This significance may inspire others to conduct more research on much larger groups of students. One limitation of this study is that it is rather small. The results of the study could be specific to just the schools that were part of the sample. To understand this better, it would be necessary to conduct a much larger research study over many schools in Sweden that spans the geographical and socio demographic of the country. Another limitation is that the main researcher may have some biases that could have impacted the way in which the questions were formed. To alleviate this in future studies, it may be helpful to design a test of the questionnaire and interview questions, and have an independent and neutral researcher evaluate the validity of the survey instrument.

5.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, this field study has lent support to the overall answer to the research question. In asking whether religious students (who are a minority group) may experience school differently than non-religious students, and if they may feel that they need to hide their belief rather than express themselves religiously, this study point to an answer that - ‘yes’, the school experience for a religious student is different. The primary reason for this may be that the majority of students in the schools have a clear preference of Christianity, the schools have a clear preferences for Christianity, and the teachers have a clear preference for Christianity. Any student who is religious and not Christian, would soon discover this preference. If the school as an institution prefers one religion over another, it sends a clear message to non-Christian students that they, and their belief, is not wanted. This, of course, is the very opposite of the multicultural goal of the Swedish state, and the contrary of the commitment in the Swedish school curriculum, in which students are promised a school where their own ideas can freely and safely flourish.
Chapter 6

Objections

In this section, I am using the qualitative method of inductive content analysis (ICA) in order to consider possible objections to my thesis findings though analysing contemporary public debate in Sweden. Inductive content analysis is, in very general terms, a method in which one draws themes from data and forms a theory. I chose this method for this section because it is well suited to help support an overview of the public debate in Sweden about the anticipated objections that one may find in regards to my thesis findings and arguments.

The data that I have examined is a large group of published articles in the Swedish news that were published in Swedish local and national newspapers between 2016-2019. These years were selected because they follow the historically high influx of migrants in 2015 (many of whom were religious), and the national election in 2018 - factors that both sparked more debate around religion. Here, I have looked for structure in the choice of words or phrases that are used in public narrative about the role of religion in the school system in Sweden, and/or the EU in order to find themes. In doing so, I have been able to divide the public narrative into 4 broad categories - or themes, namely (Section 6.1) Separation of church and state, (Section 6.2) Religion as a matter of the private sphere, (Section 6.3) Freedom from religion, (Section 6.4) Religion as an undue burden for children. In what follows, I will give examples of how these themes are present in the news and evaluate their meaning.

It is important to note, in doing this ICA, that the public Swedish debate about the role religion in the Swedish school system is largely driven by a broader debate about the role of ‘friskolor’ (Translated: Free Standing Schools) in the Swedish education system and the life of children growing up in Sweden. There are many friskolor in Sweden from Primary School to Secondary Schools that have a variety of core values, such as technical education, humanist education, and...

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2 As the data in this section is all written in Swedish language, I have translated the text into the English used in any quotation. This is indicated by the sign post (Tr.). Access to the original text can be gained through following the links in the citation lists on the Bibliography page.

3 A ‘friskola’ is a school that is primarily funded by the Swedish government through tax money, but is run by a non-governmental actor. Minor fees may be covered by private payments or through donations (skolverket.se, 2014)
international education, and more (skolverket.se, 2014). Some friskolor have specific religious education such a Catholic Schools, Islamic School or Jewish Schools, and these schools appear to spark the most debate. Many Swedes who participate in the public debate feel that these schools ought to be forbidden by law.

6.1 Separation of church and state

In 1962, the Swedish Riksdag formed the Swedish Grundskola (1st - 9th grade). The intention of new school was to ensure that all students in Sweden would get access to equal and the same form of education, in the same type of school (Riksarkivet, 2018). Part of this ‘sameness’ was to ensure that the school began separating from state religion that previously permeated Swedish education, and begin a move towards a more secular education. Still, it was not until year 2000 that the Swedish state made an official legal and political separation from the Swedish Church.

Since year 2000, the idea that the state and the church must be separate, has grown into a normalized way of thinking about government and the role of religion. This thinking extends into the role that religion has in the state schools. One contributor in the public forum exemplifies this by saying “(Tr.) ...for me, it is self evident that school and education is one thing. And religion is something completely different. … Of course, school and religion should never be mixed together” (Mellin, 2018). Another writer highlights the role that state funded institutions must be religion free and says that “(Tr) ...the school must be a sanctuary from religion regardless of whether it is about the Word of Life Christianity or Islam (Gotthard, 2018). A local politician agrees and writes what is commonly stated as a matter of fact in debate articles: “(Tr.) Religion has no place in schools” (Johansson, 2018). Others connect this statement with how the state distributes funds. One debattor says that Sweden is a secular society. Therefore, state tax money should go to the school for improvements but only to secular schools. “(Tr.) Religion is for people to exercise in other locations”, he goes on to say. Never in a school (Böös, 2018).
6.2 Religion as a matter of the private sphere

The argument that religion is a matter of the private sphere is the argument that everyone is free to practice any religion of their choice because it is a human right, but that people need to do this in private and not bring their religion into the public space where non-religious people would be forced to ‘deal with it’. This debate is often recognized in the European debate about religious clothing and Muslim girls. Many schools around Europe have banned the wearing of face veils in schools, telling families that if girls need to wear veils, they must do that outside of the public space. In Sweden, this position that religion is something private and something that should only be practiced in private is fairly common in public debate. One person writes that “(Tr). ...a private faith must not be taken out on others and religious leaders must not compel others to their faith. Religion must be something private” (Vestin, 2015). In this understanding, the idea that religion must be private is not so much that it must take place in the privacy of one's home but that it must be kept private and not shared with others. Although this narrative is quite common, it is important that make a distinction in the meaning of private. The distinctions comes down to how the rights principles end up being interpreted. One debattor writes that “(Tr.) ...it is impossible to conduct a constructive discussion on the important issues that are relevant, until we understand the different meanings of ‘public’, ‘private’ and ‘personal’” (Kyrkans Tidning, 2011). Consider this position in the question of wearing the Muslim hijab. Is it a personal way of being religious in a public space, or should it be something that is done in private in one’s home? Without a proper understanding of privacy this is a indeed a complex problem. On one hand, if private means ‘keep it at home’ then we can ask young girls to remove their head covering for school. On the other hand, if private means that you have a right to make personal choices, then we cannot make such demands on anyone.

6.3 Freedom from religion

This section will show some examples of cases in which the public debate is based on the theme that children have a right to be free from religion. The value partially arises from the UN Convention of the Right of the Child which has been ratified in Sweden and domesticated into Swedish public policy and case law, as well as European law. It is commonly referred to in
Swedish debate. Article 14 states that “1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” (Ohchr.org, 1990). Inductive Content Analysis of news articles reveals that in Swedish debate, this rights article has been understood to mean that a child has a right to be free from religion, not, as it states freedom of religion. One example of this interpretation is exemplified in a debate post by two Swedish ministers from the party Socialdemokraterna (S) (Tr. Swedish Social Democratic Party) who responds to the role of religion following a larger 2018 party proposal to shut down religious friskolor in Sweden. They say that “(Tr.)...a cornerstone in building a stronger Sweden is a school where students from different backgrounds meet...[and that the] education [in schools] is based on science and tested experiences. Religious influences has no place in the school, all children must be free to form their own belief or non-belief” (Swd.se, 2018). Another similar perspective on freedom from religion in the school comes from a long time leader of church and municipal politics and Doctor of Pedagogy who acknowledges that the role of religion has changed in Sweden and that because society is changing, it is essential that the only element of religion in the school is through World Religion courses, where students are exposed to variety of religious ideas. She says that “(Tr.)...all children have a right to an objective education and must have a chance to choose their own path. No child is born into a religion” (Lindberg Johansson, 2017). This is supported by a team of writers who say that “(Tr.) ...there are no religious children. There are only religious parents. Children, therefore, have a right to freedom from faith” until they can form their own beliefs (Mohammad and Lundgren, 2018).

The claim to freedom from religion extends to requirements of the administration and teachers of a school. It is considered inappropriate and a violation of children's' rights to express religious beliefs within the Swedish educational environment. This means that teachers and administrators who are religious are frowned upon, and may be disciplined, if they express any of their religious beliefs in the school environment. Again, it it leaders of Socialdemokraterna who best exemplifies this narrative. Socialdemokraterna “(Tr.) ...thinks that it is an important principle that Swedish school must be free from religious influence and religious elements. The leader of a school must never have a structured influence on the students” (Lundgren et al, 2018). In this
they are followed by many writers in the public forums. What this means is that any teacher or administrator who are required by their religion to express their beliefs in ways other than verbally (such as through payer, clothing, and jewelry) could be interpreted to have a structured influence over the children simply by virtue of their position within a school.

A certain issue arises within this debate that is not addressed with the ICA but is worth noting here. The general theme is that children have a right to be free from religion. It does not follow from the debate that children are also free to have religion. So it seems that the argument is used in a very specific way, as a means to an end. This discrepancy in the debate was observed before the large immigrant wave of 2015, when a Uppsala University researcher noted that “(Tr.)...interestingly the argument about religious freedom is used in entirely different ways in the debate” (Sundin, 2014). For instance, some sees religious friskolor as an protection of children’s right to religion in school where religious education is normalized, while others sees religious friskolor as a violation of the child’s right to freedom of religion because they are being indoctrinated into one certain religion within the religious school. So on one hand, religion in school can be understood as something that protects the child, and one the other hand, it can be understood as something that the child needs to be protected from.

Another issue within the theme of freedom from religion surrounds the definition of freedom. In the debate about religion, the anti-religion side appears to define freedom as a radical freedom in which the child is completely free. This view on freedom is exemplified when one writer claims that if a newborn child is registered in a church, that child does not have the same freedom as other children. “(Tr.) It is not the child who chooses the society, but the parents” (Keminmaa, 2018). This idea that a child must be radical free to make its own decisions is quite popular in debates, but I question how realistic this proposal might be. Afterall, we are all born into a greater society in which we are always part of social communities. Some happen to be secular, some might happen to be religious. To presume that children born into a religious family are not free, or born into a form of conscientious servitude, seems largely exaggerated for debate effect. In the real world, we are all born into a social context where ideas and beliefs already exists. This
fact of human existence does de facto not lead to a life in which we are not free to develop our own ideas. We can learn to freely navigate the social space. As we have seen in this research, it is the system within the social community - the systems that teaches the child - that may determine how free a child might be to have its own ideas. If the social community of the child (for example family or school) embraces inclusiveness, diversity and differences of ideas, then the child should feel quite free to make up its own mind. If the system is repressive in that it teaches the child to have a preference for only one certain set of beliefs, and teachers the child that it will be unwanted or less desirable if it believes in anything else, then it seems as the system conflicts with the child’s right to freedom of religion.

6.4 Religion as an undue burden for children

In this section, I will look at a recurring theme which proposes that religion is an undue burden for children. One example of how language is used to portray religion as a burden for children is when headlines implicitly or explicitly suggests that religion harms children. Following, the article may not necessarily support the claim but the headline has already ‘said it all’, so to speak. One example of this comes from Sverige Radio, which headlines one post with the words “(Tr.) Sharp criticism against Kirunaskolan - religion and parents control the education” (Sveriges Radio, 2018). This segment does not actually go on to explore anything directly justifying the headline and does not show that religion harms children. Rather it discusses the issue that some parents at the school have concerns about the films that children are made to watch in the school’s sex education program.

Another consideration within this theme is the issue of ‘volunteerism’. According to the Swedish school law, denominational events in a school must be voluntary. But, asks one writer, “(Tr.) ...how voluntary can they be” in light of the social pressure from parents, teachers, and schoolmates. The pressure, he writes, can be very big, so that the child will feel compelled to volunteer to participate (Gustafsson, 2018). This issue, exemplified here, that children are harmed by the coercive measures of religion in the school is quite common in the public narrative. He goes on to say that “(Tr.) ...more important than the parents’ right to choose a
religious school is the child’s right not to have a religion forced upon them in school” (Gustafsson, 2018). Another contributor concurs. “The parents’ opportunity to influence (their children) has gone too far,” he writes (Ericson, 2017). One thing is to go to a religious place of worship once a week, the debattor goes, but it is another to allow parents to put their children in a religious school where they are influenced all day. This will harm them too much. In such cases, “(Tr.)...the parent’s’ ability to influence their children in a certain direction has become too big” of a burden, and to protect them from this, children need to go to a school where children come together because they are children, not because of the parents’ religious choices (Ericson, 2016).

The counter perspective that arises within this theme is the argument that rights are being conflated as if they have the same value. Parents’ Rights and Children’s Rights are not competing rights. Instead, the child’s right is a offspring of the parent’s rights. “(Tr.) The parents are the guarantee that the children's’ rights are protected. Being a parent or guardian is about doing what is best for the child. The state must not determine what is best for the child. … The children are in the parents’ care and the parents’ responsibility - not the states” (Brandström. 2018). To that end, the core of being a parent is protecting the child from undue harm. It seems imperative, within this debate theme, for the public to define what the limitations of parental rights are taken to mean, as the public accusation that religious parenting harms the children could mean an eventual public pressure to issue legal limitations on certain types of parenting. Such pressure could begin with the closing of religious schools. Left untamed, it could cash out as legalization that forbids parents from teaching their children certain ideas that are not sanctioned by the state.

In summary, in the preceding four sections, I have outlined and considered four common themes in Swedish public debate that centers around the overarching idea that religion and education should not be together. Next, I will look at another, but much smaller voice that also suggests that certain elements of religion should be removed from education.
6.5 Religion as repressing for minority groups within the minority group

There is a (smaller) voice within Swedish society, that argues in debates that religion should have no place in schools because it has the capacity to repress a minority group within a minority group. One example is the argument that religion, and certain religious traditions, is repressing women within Islamic culture. Because Sweden is a free and equal society in which democratic values are celebrated, the idea that some Swedish women must be submissive to some Swedish men is foreign to most people. The wearing of a headscarf is seen as a symbol of this submissiveness and inequality between men and women within Islam. Sweden has been part of the same debate as other European nations about the role of the hijab in contemporary democratic society. In France, schools have banned headscarves altogether. But, the debate in Sweden has been less forceful. This is in large part because of the official politics of multiculturalism that encourages Swedish government officials and citizens to accept other cultures without any demand for assimilation. This has led to speculation that multiculturalism is repressive. One researcher has theorized that multiculturalism is problematic because by accepting other cultures as they are, without putting demands on them, we are also preventing those cultures from changing (Adamson, 2017). Thus, two additional issues arise that puts pressure on the argument for religious expression in school. One is that a minority group within a minority group can be harmed when status quo within a religion is accepted. Another is that the minority group itself can be harmed when a refusal to put demands on a religion or culture prevents the religion or culture from progressing and evolving. In other words, if Swedish society does not demand certain things from religions and cultures, they are harmed. This makes the position of that culture within a democratic school system unacceptable.

6.6 What is the Swedish anti-religion establishment?

In my reading of the public debate I have found that the Swedish anti-religion establishment is one that is secular and deeply committed to a science based education. The establishment is very suspicious of religious education and narrowly accepts a historical overview of different religious ideas meant to help students become better at understanding other people. There is little to no tolerance for religious schools and it is expected that administrators and teachers of secular
schools do not express or engage with religious beliefs. Religion is understood to be potentially harmful to children and seen as something that they must be protected from, even if this conflicts with the parents’ right to raise their own family with their own values. Religion, it is claimed, is a burden to children - one that they have a right to be protected from carrying. What is more, there is a strong position that the state and religion must be absolutely separated so that if any state funds are allocated to the study of religion it goes contrary to the support from the anti-religion establishment. I have found the anti-religion establishment to be strong in Sweden because in the public debate about the role of religion and religious expression in the school, there is very little opposition from religious persons. Yet, there must be a silent but powerful opposition to the anti-religious movement because the political proposal to have religious friskolor shut down and banned was recently overturned by the voting majority.

6.7 Summary, Conclusions
In summary, Inductive Content Analysis has revealed four overarching themes in the debate around religion in the Swedish school. These themes are commonly debated in contemporary media. The debate also has offspring conversations that are considered more ‘provocative’ and are less likely to appear in mainstream media. These are conversations about the claims that Swedish society can make on religions and cultures to adapt or evolve. To that end, they are also claims about what the children in the Swedish school are entitled to. In public debate, the image is that they are not entitled to religious education, that it is best for children to have a secular education, and that religion should only be presented to children a spectrum of different ideas that other people have. This analysis of the public debate supports my earlier findings that religious students in the Swedish public school experience themselves as outsiders and/or very different from the other students. This impedes their ability to express themselves religiously. In the court of public opinion they are thought to be the undesirable anomaly in Swedish education - the outsiders.
Conclusion

In this research, I have examined religion and religious expression in the Swedish school system. I hypothesized that the Swedish school system might be disenfranchising religious minorities while using the existing school system to endorse the Christian religious majority and an anti-religious faction. This happens because students from minority religions are forced to subordinate their conscientious commitment to the majority. Because most students from minority religions are also immigrants, this leads to a system in which the majority (which consists of ethnic Swedes) rules and the immigrant is subordinate.

Answer to Research Question

This hypothesis lead me to the research question of whether the Swedish public school system allows for a person to live in accordance to her or his own conscience, or if it is a system in which one must render one’s personal beliefs to accommodate the will of the majority? In answering this question, I conducted an extensive literature review, as well as a field study. The evidence collected from this led me to the conclusion that the Swedish school system is not successful in protecting religious minority students. This lack of protection leads these students to understand themselves as inferior to the majority group, a group which consists of non-religious students and teachers. Because of this lack of equal social status and acceptance, religious students do not express themselves freely in the Swedish school. Thus, religious students cannot freely exercise or express their personal beliefs - a matter which rubs against their basic human rights. Additionally, these students are compelled to participate in Christian driven education (masked as ‘neutral’) as well as learning a preference for Christian values. This is because the Swedish school system is still very much influenced by Lutheran ideas. The study also revealed that although the Swedish national policy in immigration is a theory of multiculturalism, as well as a teaching students to be cosmopolitan, the school system appears to fail in the practical application of this policy. Administrators and teachers are not teaching religion education in a multicultural perspective but rather in the science and Christianity driven forum.
**Evaluation of answer to Research Question**

My research indicates that the Swedish school system might be a place where religious minorities could come to internalize a dislike for themselves, in that they grow up to understand themselves to be inferior to the majority of students. The Swedish state does not have a compelling interest in discouraging or preventing any individual student from religious expression in the public school, and indeed, Swedish public policy of multiculturalism seem to say that schools ought to encourage such expression and diversity.

In considering the research, there are limitations. I have examined published data, published public debates, perspectives from students and perspectives from teachers. I have not spoken to Administrators or government officials. To that end, more research may reveal a different outcome of this investigation and, therefore, a different response to the research question.

**Suggestions for further research**

One suggestion for further research is, therefore, to conduct a much larger study that includes a broader demographics. My study was limited in that the students who participated were, by a large majority, ethnic Swedes, some of whom have lived abroad. A larger nation wide demographic group that has a more appropriate representation of Swedish schools (including more students from the immigrant community) would most likely better pinpoint if the factors that I measured, and results that I found, are also factors in other schools. For instance, results may be different if the majority of the students are immigrant children from religious homes. It it also possible that results may be different based on geographical location. Perhaps city students feel differently than country students. Similarly, the results might have a better representation of the teachers in the study are religious themselves, or from the immigrant community, or if they are sampled from city versus country schools.

Another suggestion for research would be to conduct a study on the effect of administrators and teachers in students’ feeling of inclusion. To that end, a comparative study could be conducted between two schools - one where the main administrator is part of the anti-religion establishment
and one in which the main administrator is very inclusive with all religious and religious students.

Finally, it might be interesting to measure the psychological health of religious students in religious friskole and compare them to the psychological health of religious students in Swedish public schools. If the findings if my research are correct, we might find the religious students have feeling of inferiority and low self esteem in the Swedish school system. It also indicates that we might find the religious kids in the religious friskolor to be more psychologically healthy, and more comfortable with their religions expression, because they feel more included, equal, and respected on a day to day basis by the system in which they learn.
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