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ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

**ACCEPT**  
PLURALISM

**(In)tolerance and recognition of  
difference in Swedish schools.  
The case of Islamic denominational  
schools and practices of veiling**

Fredrik Hertzberg  
Department of Education,  
Stockholm University

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ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

**(In)tolerance and recognition of difference in  
Swedish schools. The cases of Islamic  
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**FREDRIK HERTZBERG**

**WP3: National Case Studies of Challenges to  
Tolerance in School Life**

**D3.1 Final Country Reports on Concepts and  
Practices of Tolerance Addressing Cultural Diversity  
in Schools**

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## **Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe (ACCEPT PLURALISM)**

**ACCEPT PLURALISM** is a Research Project, funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Program. The project investigates whether European societies have become more or less tolerant during the past 20 years. In particular, the project aims to clarify: (a) how is tolerance defined conceptually, (b) how it is codified in norms, institutional arrangements, public policies and social practices, (c) how tolerance can be measured (whose tolerance, who is tolerated, and what if degrees of tolerance vary with reference to different minority groups). The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium conducts original empirical research on key issues in school life and in politics that thematise different understandings and practices of tolerance. Bringing together empirical and theoretical findings, ACCEPT PLURALISM generates a State of the Art Report on Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Handbook on Ideas of Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Tolerance Indicators' Toolkit where qualitative and quantitative indicators may be used to score each country's performance on tolerating cultural diversity, and several academic publications (books, journal articles) on Tolerance, Pluralism and Cultural Diversity in Europe. The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium is formed by 18 partner institutions covering 15 EU countries. The project is hosted by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and co-ordinated by Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou.

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The Department of Education at Stockholm University is the largest department of education in Sweden. The department has a long tradition of research and teaching in fields such as disability studies, intercultural education and gender studies and has extensive cooperation with neighboring department at the university such as CEIFO (Centre for migration studies), Department of Politics and the Centre for Gender Studies.

Fredrik Hertzberg is senior lecturer at the Department of Education at Stockholm University. He has a PhD in Ethnology from Stockholm University. He was preciously active as researcher at the National institute of Working Life in Stockholm. His research interests include social identities and social categorizations, the politics of multiculturalism in education, school-to work transition and processes of ethnical and racial exclusion.

### **Contact details:**

Fredrik Hertzberg, Department of Education, Stockholm University,  
10691 Stockholm, Sweden  
Fax: 0046(0)8 158354  
E-mail: fredrik.hertzberg@edu.su.se

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## Executive Summary

The aim of this report is to describe and analyze the embodiment of acceptance and recognition in discourses and practices which address cultural diversity in the Swedish educational system. In order to fulfil this general aim, we study how different categories of practitioners in the Swedish school system, such as teachers, headmasters and union representatives, and other stakeholders, such as civil servants, and representatives of political parties and the civil society, discuss and relate to the claims of recognition put forth by Muslim practitioners and/or policy measures designed to reach the fulfilment of those claims. Two cases are studied: the establishment of Muslim independent schools and the claims to dress veiled in public schools, out forth by Muslim youth.

The cases are selected with consideration to a number of circumstances. First, the faith and belief practices of Muslim migrants have been debated on a large scale in Swedish media during the last decade, as in many other West European and North American countries. It is quite common that these practices has been put under scrutiny, and subjected to extensive critique. The attention paid to Muslim belief practices and institutions has also reached Muslim denominational schools and the practice of Burqa and Niqab. The establishment of denominational schools during the last two decades, whether Islamic or not, has also received a lot of attention, in mainstream media as well as in debates on education policy. For instance, a number of political parties have voiced demands to keep down the number of Islamic denominational schools.

Second, Muslim migrants has, according to a number of studies, been subjected to direct and indirect discrimination. Whether this discrimination primarily is religious to its nature, or ethnic, and hence targeting their ethnic identity, is not always concluded, but the extensive negative attention mentioned above suggests that the scope of religiously motivated discrimination is either predominant or on the rise. The enactment of Muslim belief practices is not infrequently obstructed. For example, the construction of Mosques does seldom take place in silence; frequent and high-pitched voices of rejection and disapproval are common, and when the buildings once are completed, the congregations receive numerous threats and insults. The opposition is evident, and two mosques have been burned down. Moreover, women wearing burqa or niqab report being harassed in public. Apart from the lack of recognition and acceptance in religious matters, the prevalence of discriminatory mechanisms might also obstruct the access to welfare services and the entry to the labour market.

This report consists of two cases studies, which relies solely on qualitative data. The main part of the empirical material consists of interviews with 13 persons – three teachers, three headmasters, two union representatives, two civil servants, one jurist, one imam and one representative of a political party. The interviews are used as a source for both cases. As additions to interviews, we have collected newspaper articles, memos from public authorities, bills introduced to the parliament, debates on commentary fields in web-edition of newspapers, et cetera. Being a minor study, it is necessary to make some reservations concerning the reliability of our material. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether or not it is possible to make generalizations from our material, thus asserting that the viewpoints found in our material are overlapping with or similar to the attitudes of other teachers, headmasters et cetera.

In sum, a number of disadvantages with the establishment of Islamic denominational schools are expressed. They are allegedly divisive, both culturally and socially, and the quality of their instructions is supposed to be inadequate, in relation to the standards explicated in the national curriculum and syllabi. If the attitudes found in this study is spread all over Sweden, it could reasonable be said that Muslim schools are met by suspicion. Still, few calls for shutting down of these schools are voiced. It seems that the Muslim denominational schools are tolerated in a literal sense: it is accepted, sometimes pragmatically, but not liked. On the other hand, it could be said that the provision of a juridical and institutional space for religious minorities to establish denominational

schools is part of politics of recognition; i.e. an educational policy which, under auspicious circumstances might provide the means for religious minorities to receive respect as equal and gain admission as normal.

It must also be noted that some of the objections to the existence of denominational schools implicitly and explicitly related to some central notions in Swedish educational policy. The notion of *equivalence* is a keyword in this context, and signifies on the one hand a demand for abidance by the national curriculum and syllabi, and on the other a priority of equalizing measures over freedom of choice. The equalizing and integrative objectives of the compulsory school project seem to be vital, but the quest for recognition of minority beliefs systems is circumscribed. Thus, the reproduction of “demos” is given priority over the recognition of “ethnos”. As such, the notion of “equivalence” [likvärdighet] has been a keyword in Swedish educational policy since the 1980’s, denoting equalizing ambitions as well as educational uniformity and compliance to steering documents.

A number of objections to the practice of wearing Burqa or Niqab are put forth by our interviewees. In contrast to the media debate, the argument of gender equality was relatively downgraded. Rather, the interviewees focused on assumed problems with identification and communication. It was said that the abovementioned veiling practices obstructed the possibility of identifying the students at school, and also rendered the communication – and hence the instructions – at school more difficult. In comparison with the question of Islamic denominational schools, the non-tolerant stance was more manifest, although few explicit calls for a prohibition were made. Moreover, a specific discursive framing of the veiling practices could be discerned. The wearing of Burqa or Niqab was associated with phenomena such as mischief and the hidden, thus casting suspicion over the practice in question.

As an instance of the everyday life, rather than an institutional arrangement, veiling practices could arguably be considered to be of less concern for educational policy than the establishment and maintenance of Islamic denominational schools. Still, the question of prohibition has gained a lot of media attention during the last years, and brought the regulating dimension to the fore. And though our material contains few explicit calls for prohibition, several interviewees claimed that a teacher must see the face of the student in order to instruct and educate. And although the goal of equivalence was less relevant in this matter, the practice of veiling was questioned with reference to universal human rights, as the rights of the child. The right of the parent to exert influence in religious matter was questioned, since it could be regarded as a limitation of the freedom to choose direction to the walk of life. Thus, it seems like that the right to wear Burqa and Niqab in public schools are among the non-tolerable, although few explicit calls for prohibition can be discerned. So far, the material in our report, consisting of a relatively limited set of qualitative data resonates with the broader tendency discerned by Orlando Mella, Irving Palm and Kristin Bromark (2011): the resistance in Sweden against the Burqa and the Niqab is compact; almost nine Swedes out of ten find it (totally or partly) unacceptable to wear Burqa and Niqab, respectively, at school or at work (Mella *et al* 2011:30), whereas seven out of ten find it (totally or partly) unacceptable to wear Burqa and Niqab at other public places.

As noted above, the stress on equivalence consists of two distinct although related arguments. On the one hand, there is a demand for abidance by the law (here: steering documents such as national curriculum and syllabi), which among other things are paid attention to because Islamic schools are suspected not to follow these steering documents accordingly. This interpretation of “equivalence” is related to an understanding of the term which has become more and more frequent since the introduction of freedom of choice and independent schools in Swedish educational policy, and the decentralized system of governance of education in Sweden (Lindensjö & Lundgren 2002). In this context, where regulation is obtained through management by objective and evaluation, and responsibilities are spread between numerous responsible organizations, the goal of equivalence is equivalent (!) to abiding by the law.

On the other hand, there is wish to maintain socially integrated educational environments, in which students from different ethnicities, classes and gender meets and interacts. Thus, it seems like the equalizing and integrative objectives which were central to the compulsory school project implemented during the heyday of the Scandinavian welfare regime (Esping-Andersen 1990) seem to be “alive and kicking”. But the quest for recognition of minority beliefs systems, central to the policy of multiculturalism, is circumscribed. In so far, the arguments employed here gives priority to the reproduction of “demos” over the reproduction of “ethnos”. It must also be noted that the freedom of choice, an important feature in the neoliberal turn of educational policy, does not seems to be so important for the interviewees in this particular matter.

If we focus on the most elaborated objections in the report, we find arguments which 1) was presented as a response to the presumably universalist claims of freedom of religion, thus setting the professional considerations which are presented above in a more general, ethical context, and 2) focused on an ethical value of overriding importance, viz. the rights of the child. Emphasis is laid on the right of the child to “choose his own path”, a wording which is used by several interviewees, which most of all seems to refer to the first paragraph in article 14 in the United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child, which aims at protecting “the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion”. In the arguments of the teachers, the headmasters and the union representatives, this ethical principle makes it to possible to assert that children possess the freedom *from* the religion (as well as from other loyalties, or sets of ideas and beliefs) of their parents. Although not explicitly questioning the parents rights’ to raise and guide their own children, they distinctly emphasize the autonomy of the child, and it’s potential to choose something else than that which is given within the family.

The emphasis on the rights of the child is regularly explicated in a specific discursive context. The right to “choose one’s own path” is contrasted to the restrictions inherent in the religiosity of the parents. Religion is regularly depicted as the repressive force, and the secular mind-set as the entity in need of protection. The possibility of secular parents putting down religious inclinations among their children is never represented. Evidently, a discursive coupling of religion with repression and secularism with liberation may be discerned in the claims for freedom from religion. It may also be noted, that the impact from parental (Islamic) faith is the only aspect of upbringing which is questioned in this context. The arguments against tolerance or recognition of Islamic belief practices in this report are not primarily based on islamophobic or orientalist discourses, but with reference to notions of equality. The interviewees stress the *professional* aspect of their opposition against veiling practices. They dissociate themselves from standpoints put forth in media, above all those who solely focus on the gender aspect of complete veiling practices. Instead, their emphasis on the professional educator dimension entails a focus on communication and identification. These acts of discursive positioning might be seen as an effort to “maximize the intertextual gap” between their own argument and the discourse in media, which to a fair-sized extent was articulated by radical right-wing populists. This dilemma is solved by the rhetoric of equivalence, which offers a way to reject claims of recognition in tandem with the defence of values as diverse and important as social justice, the rule of law and the freedom of the individual (child). Thus, the non-tolerance of religiously motivated veiling practices could be motivated with values which is central to diverse but culturally dominant ideological universes, such as socialism and (neo-)liberalism.

## **Keywords**

Acceptance, toleration, recognition, Islamic denominational schools, Burqa, Niqab, veiling, educational policy

## **(1) Introduction**

The general aim of this report is to describe and analyze the embodiment of acceptance and recognition in discourses and practices which address cultural diversity in the Swedish educational system. In order to fulfil this general aim, we study how different categories of practitioners in the Swedish school system, such as teachers, headmasters and union representatives, and other stakeholders, such as civil servants, and representatives of political parties and the civil society, discuss and relate to the claims of recognition put forth by Muslim practitioners and/or policy measures designed to reach the fulfilment of those claims. Two cases are studied: the establishment of Muslim independent schools and the claims to dress veiled in public schools, put forth by Muslim youth.

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, we will describe the general attitudes among teachers, headmasters and other categories of professionals with an interest in educational matters towards the existence of Islamic denominational schools and the practice of wearing Burqa and/or Niqab in public schools. Second, we will describe which arguments that are employed in the opposition of those phenomena, and implicitly or explicitly argue for the closing-down of those schools or a prohibition of the abovementioned veiling practices. Third, we will analyze the ideological and policy-related underpinnings of those arguments. The main objectives of this study are extracted from a perspective on acceptance, tolerance and recognition compiled and developed by Jan Dobbernack and Tariq Modood (2010). To put in the phrasing of Dobbernack and Modood, we examine whether the practices of ethnic or religious minorities are not tolerated, tolerated or recognized, thus suggesting an analytical framework consisting of the categories *non-tolerance*, *toleration* and *recognition, respect as equal and admission as normal*.

Non-toleration occurs when “individuals, groups and practices who seek for or for whom/which claims of toleration are being made but to whom/which toleration is not granted, and the reasons are given in favour of or against toleration” (Dobbernack & Modood 2011: 31-32). Toleration, on the other hand, occurs when the opposite is the case – the groups, individuals and practices in question are tolerated, and the reasons for it are given in favour of or against toleration. The third category describes claims for recognition, respect as equal and admission as normal, i.e. when toleration is not enough, and other normative concepts such as equality, respect, recognition, accommodation, which focus on majority-minority relations and the reform of institutions and citizenship, are more relevant. Thus, in this report we study whether demands from ethnic or religious minorities (such as demands for the acceptance of the veiling practices Burqa and/or Niqab) or institutionalized arrangements (such as the possibility to establish Islamic denominational schools) are met by non-toleration, toleration or recognition, respect as equal and admission as normal.

It has been claimed that the category of tolerance contains an element of disapproval and objection (Brown 2006) that, though balanced out and overridden by reasons for forbearance and acceptance, may be seen to perpetuate a condescension, smear or denigration on minority groups (cf. Dobbernack & Modood 2011). Many contemporary media debates on the multiethnic condition, in Sweden and elsewhere, are centered round an implicit binary opposition between the tolerant, Western majority, and the potentially intolerant and probably Muslim minority. From this perspective, the rhetoric of tolerance “identifies tolerance and the tolerable with the West, marking nonliberal societies and practices as candidates for an intolerant barbarism that itself is signaled by the putative intolerance ruling these societies” (Brown 2006:6). In order not to reproduce this approach, some caution is needed, and it must be noted that this report primarily approaches the notion of tolerance in an empirical, sociological way: what is tolerated, what is not tolerated, and why?

## ***The educational system in Sweden***

In Sweden, attendance at school is compulsory for all children aged 7-16, but the age when children may start school is flexible. A child can start school as a six, seven or eight-year old. Compulsory school is mandatory and free of charge. The vast majority of schools in Sweden are municipally-run, i.e. the municipality is the owner. Usually, children attend a municipal school close to their homes. However, the pupils and their parents are entitled to choose another municipal school, or a school that is run independently. The independent schools are open to all children and must have been approved by Skolverket, the Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE). Teaching in independent schools has more or less the same objectives as those of the municipal school, but can have an orientation that differs from that of the municipal schools. The definition of an independent school is that the school is run by a private actor such as a company or an association. If the school does not comply with current regulations, SNAE can withdraw its permit. In several cases, independent schools have a different orientation from municipal schools, including special teaching methods (Montessori or Waldorf), a linguistic/ethnic orientation, or a certain religious profile, even though there is a non-negligible number of schools whose orientation similar to the public schools (Skolverket 2011a).

The schooling system is decentralized; a number of general goals and guidelines are formulated on the national, central level, and then the municipalities and the local schools are given the responsibility to design and work out the activity which has to arrive at the national goals; it is a goal-based system with a high degree of local responsibility. The guidelines and the goals are expressed in a number of steering documents. The *national curriculum* (läroplanen) describes the school's basic goals and guidelines, and also its fundamental values, the so called "value-base" (värdegrund). These are common to the compulsory comprehensive school, as well as the Sami school, the compulsory school for children with learning disabilities and the school for the deaf and hearing-impaired. There is also a *national syllabus* for each individual subject, and a *national time schedule* which states the minimum guaranteed time that pupils are entitled to teacher-led instruction in the various subjects. At the municipal level, there is a municipal school plan that shows how the municipality's schools are to be organised and developed, and at the local level, we find a work plan for each school, which is an adaptation of the contents of the national curriculum, the syllabi and the school plan to the organization, work methods and local circumstances of that school (Skolverket 2011b).

All young people in Sweden who have finished compulsory school are entitled to three years of schooling at upper secondary. Upper secondary education provides a platform of knowledge for further studies and for a future career. Upper secondary education comprises the regular upper secondary school and the upper secondary for young people with learning disabilities. It offers various types of programs: first, 17 national programs, which last for three years. These are divided into mandatory courses, optional courses, individual choices core subjects and project work; then, individual programs for pupils with particular educational needs (which for example include pupils who want to do an apprenticeship), and last specially designed local programs, which combine subjects from the various national programs. Secondary education is not mandatory in a formal sense, but it is more or less regarded as mandatory, since the labour market for young persons without secondary education is virtually non-existent.

## ***From equality to equivalence and freedom of choice***

The Swedish educational system went through substantial changes during the 20th century, from the so-called "parallel school system", consisting of separate schools for the elite and the working class, to a formally integrated - still internally deeply divided - comprehensive school system (Bunar 2008). During this process, which in main was carried out by social democratic governments, education was particularly seen as one of the main instruments for achieving more social equality in a developing welfare society and in ensuring social citizenship, especially during the years of social politics expansion in the 1950's and 60's (Lindensjö & Lundgren 2002, Richardson 2010). Through numerous

reforms, social democratic governments intervened on the field of education, by changing the organizational structure of the schools. In tandem with this process, new positions and new status differences appeared within the formally integrated schools. There were no special educational institutions catering solely to the elite, but a deep gap opened between different public schools, depending on which social group - working class, immigrants, middle-class Swedes etc. - dominated the particular neighborhood and thereby the particular school (Bunar 2008).

Moreover, it can also be said that the educational system gradually was incorporated into a new ideological order; virtually every aspect of education that allegedly contributed to the reproduction of social differences and in sustaining the old social order was changed. The education reforms during the post-war period had a strong focus on *equality*, thus promoting equality of opportunity and outcome through a system which deliver education of the same quality to everyone. During the 1970's and 80's, however, the goal of equality, which was central for the above mentioned reform program, was redefined and re-articulated in terms of the goal of *equivalence*, which stipulates that the education delivered at school should be of equal value to everyone. According to the researchers Bo Lindensjö and Ulf P Lundgren (2002: 86-91), there are at least two distinct causes behind this change. First, it was an attempt to avoid the radical political connotations of the term "equality". Second, it was a pragmatic adjustment to the difficulties involved in implementing equality in education; since the capacity and hence the needs of the pupils varied, the focus should be on supplying education that was of value for everyone, rather than a uniform format. Thus, it was implied that different needs has to be recognized, and that an overall homogeneity was not desirable, not even for the equality objective. Lindensjö and Lundgren (2002) also note that the goal of "equivalence" often tends to be interpreted as "to offer education in accordance with the national curricula" or "to offer instructions by qualified teachers".

Not only was diversity in needs acknowledged. Gradually, the question of parental influence over education became more important. This question rose during the 1970's, to a large extent as a reaction to the strong centralist tendencies in-built in the integrated comprehensive school project. This anti-centralist tendency grew stronger during the 1980's, when the ideological tenets of neoliberalism and the ideals set out in the new public management agenda gained ground – in education as well as other sectors of public administration and production of welfare goods (Green Pedersen 2002). Between 1992 and 1994, a number of educational reforms were carried through in Sweden, which changed the organization and production of primary (and secondary) education in a fundamental way. The municipalities gained much more influence over primary and secondary education; parents were given the right to decide which school their children should attend, and a voucher system was introduced, giving parents the right to chose between public and private (so-called independent) schools (Green Pedersen 2002, Bunar 2008).

According to educational scientist Tomas Englund (1993), a shift of perspective in educational policy took place during the 1980's and early 1990's; education became a private good, and an instrument for individual capital acquisition, rather than a public good. "Freedom of choice" became the overriding principle in many official discourses on education, and the ethos of equality lost its appeal. The social ambitions of the educational system become more diffuse during the 1990's (Blomquist & Rothstein 2000). Still, the goal of equivalence maintained its strong position (Lindensjö & Lundgren 2002), as it was compatible with the promotion of a new system of accountability and its emphasis on the evaluation of student achievements (cf. Englund 2003). In this new discursive context, the goal of "equivalence" also became a keyword in the endeavors to control the outcomes/products from public as well as private suppliers of education, assuring that the same standard of education is provided throughout the country.

The advent of the independent schools in 1992 has posed a serious challenge to the basic ideological foundations of the Swedish educational system (Bunar 2008). With the principle of non-separation, which aimed at counteracting differentiation of children into schools based on class, gender or

ethnicity, education was earlier “regarded as an instrument for equalizing class differences, providing a meeting place for children with different social and cultural backgrounds and an education free of religious or commercial involvement (Bunar 2008:424). With the establishment of independent schools - adding up to 714 schools on primary level and 414 on secondary level in 2011, providing education for roughly every tenth student on primary level and every fifth student on secondary level (Friskolornas Riksförbund 2011, Skolverket 2011c) - the development is going in the opposite direction. High achievers and students of middle class background are concentrated to a limited number of schools (Bunar 2008). Moreover, about ten percent of the children in independent schools attend to a confessional independent school, i.e. 8 000 pupils at primary level and xxx on secondary.

A number of studies in different academic disciplines suggest (e.g. Arnman et al 2004, Daun 2003, cf. Bunar 2010:9), among them a number of studies from SNAE (e.g. Skolverket 1996, 2003), has pointed that the selected use of school choice has augmented not only social segregation in Sweden, but also the ethnic, particularly in relation to schools in relatively deprived areas in the suburbs of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. Still, a good-sized number of students have during the last decade left low-achieving and stigmatized suburban schools in the above mentioned cities, opting for high-status middle-class schools in areas predominantly populated by non-migrant Swedes. But recent studies also indicate that they haven’t reached any relevant “measures of integration”, such as raising their average grades or making friends with children living in the school’s attendance zone (Bunar & Kallstenius 2007, Bunar 2010). Thus, a fair number of students have used the possibilities put at disposal by the independent school reform, but it has not enhanced their social capital and thus not yet changed their social position.

Those developments suggest that the goals of equality and freedom of choice are not wholly compatible. Though, it must be noted, that after 20 years of developments in educational policy under the aegis of “freedom of choice”, even the advocates of such a policy have raised doubts over its adequacy and efficacy. In recognition of the limitations of a decentralized school system, the promotion of equivalence has been strengthened in the new national curricula, which was implemented during 2011 by the right-wing liberal government. For example, the objectives in the national curricula are made more explicit, and the content of each subject is specified.

### ***Tolerance, recognition and education policy***

In Sweden, policies towards different immigrant and minority groups during the first two decades of the post-war migration were in general assimilatory, and the tolerance for or recognition of various cultural identities and customs was by and large absent from the official political agenda and the public discussion. In addition, there was no systematic reception policy. The period of assimilationist policy was not put to an end until 1975, when multiculturalism became an important element in the Swedish model of welfare-state politics (cf. Roth & Hertzberg 2010). In Swedish multiculturalism, welfare ideology objectives focused on “equality” occupy a central position; the other main objectives were “freedom of choice” and “partnership”; thus paraphrasing the slogans of the French revolution: *liberte, egalite, et fraternite*:

*The goal of equality implies the continued efforts to give immigrants the same living standard as the rest of the population. The goal of freedom of choice implies that public initiatives are to be taken to assure members of ethnic and linguistic minorities domiciled in Sweden a genuine choice between retaining and developing their cultural identity and assuming a Swedish cultural identity. The goal of partnership implies that the different immigrant and minority groups on the one hand and the native population on the other both benefit from working together (Hammar 1985: 33)*

Notwithstanding the relatively far-reaching promises for the recognition of perceived alterity, and the cultural expressions of non-dominant ethnic groups, the issue of cultural diversity was not even mentioned in the new national curricula, which was introduced in 1980 (Runfors 2003). Some issues

relating to migration had been debated already in the 1960's, for example the question of home language (Borevi 2002, Hällgren et al 2006), and by the end of the decade, instructions in home language and "home culture" (Hällgren et al 2006:315) was offered to *some* minority students, as an addition to the compulsory instructions. In 1976, a large-scale reform was fully implemented, recognizing the right to instructions in non-Swedish home languages. Still, certain attention was given to the specific demands of migrant children in educational policy during the early 1970's, mainly focusing on their possible shortcomings and learning problems, especially their shortcomings in learning Swedish (Borevi & Strömblad 2004) . As a number of authors has noted (Gruber 2001, Mulinari 2007, cf. Runfors 2003), the category of migrant children became singled out as problematic category, in need of special measures.

In line with this "problem-focused" agenda, the full implementation of the home language reform of 1976 was by and large predicated on the belief that instructions in home language were beneficial for the overall school achievement of migrant students. Learning a home language facilitated learning in Swedish as well as other school subjects, it was said. Thus, the reform was not primarily motivated with reference to multiculturalist objectives such as recognition or freedom of choice, but with reference to its general utility (Borevi 2002). Accordingly, political scientist Karin Borevi (2002, ch. 5) points out that the attempts to adapt the Swedish educational system to the new multi-cultural or multi-ethnic conditions during the late 1960's, 70's and early 80's, and the discussions that followed during the production of public educational policy, highlights some of the ideological tensions in the Swedish model of welfare policy.

On the one hand, Borevi argues, it was considered desirable to accept and recognize the fact Swedish citizens now enjoyed membership in different ethnic communities, or *ethnos*. On the other hand, one wanted to promote integration within one single community of citizens, or *demos*; the equalizing and integrative objectives of the compulsory school project were explicit in that case. Still, Borevi concludes that "even though the tensions were clearly present in the discourse [...], they were not explicitly noticed or dealt with by the agents" (Borevi 2002:327). Although the goal of recognition – strongly heralded by the multiculturalist policy introduced in 1975 - was paid attention to, it could in practice be subordinated to the goal of social cohesion. If any possible special needs of migrant pupils were considered, it was primarily in order to promote their integration into the mainstream society, and hence to promote the overall social cohesion, not to recognize their belonging to an *ethnos* external to the imagined community of the majority.

During the 1980's, however, the idea of recognition got more influential. Instructions for a general "inter-cultural" pedagogy were introduced in official educational policy in 1983 (Hällgren et al 2006), thus "promoting an enhanced understanding of and respect for differences in cultural expressions" (Rubinstein Reich & Tallberg Broman 2000:11). The general social value of diversity in educational setting was also gradually acknowledged. It was for example acknowledged that the ethnic diversity of the classroom ought to be mirrored in the instructions, in subjects such as history or religion; whether or not the idea got carried into action or not is of course hard to tell. Following the neoliberal turn in Swedish educational policy during the late 1980's (above), in which its equalizing objectives were subordinated to the promotion of freedom of choice, and education became a private rather than a public good, the diversity in demands on education was more and more paid attention to. It is thus signifying that the national curricula from 1994 (Lpo 94) were the first steering document in which it is clearly stated that Sweden is a multi-ethnic and multicultural society (Hällgren et al 2006). Still, as Sabine Gruber (2001) notes, the category of "migrant pupils" (sv. *invandrarelever*) continued to be depicted in policy texts as a problematic category whose problems, cultures and traditions contrasted to the modernity and rationality of Swedish pupils.

Although the multicultural condition was acknowledged in the 1994 curricula, it could arguably be said that the objective of recognizing cultural diversity was not central to it. The focus was set on equal rights and responsibilities, rather than the recognition of particularistic demands (cf. Roth &

Hertzberg 2011). On the one hand, the need for anti-discriminatory measures was emphasized in the new policy (Hällgren et al 2006), but on other the policy also contained numerous explicit calls for adherence to common and allegedly Swedish fundamental values (*värdegrund*) in education. Thus, tolerance, openness, gender equality and a democratic disposition was designed as desirable qualities and constituents of a set of Swedish fundamental values in this new national curriculum, which should constitute a foundation for the Swedish educational system. It was explicitly also noted in the new educational policy that members of other ethnic groups should adhere to those Swedish values. Paradoxically, values such as tolerance, openness and diversity was at one and the same time both acclaimed and employed as device for accentuating the distance to and inferiority of the migrant other (Dahlstedt & Hertzberg 2010). Thus, in this educational policy, Swedish multiculturalism was firmly set as a national project.

The efforts to combat racism and ethnic discrimination in everyday school life were predicated on the conviction that those phenomena represented a threat and an insult to pupils of non-dominant ethnicities, and an infringement of their civic rights. As such, it could arguably be acknowledged as a manifestation of recognition. In 2002, a number of groups – Finns, Jews, Meänkieli (or Tornedalsfinnish), Roma and Sámi - achieved the status of “national minorities”. The municipalities got responsible for ensuring that all pupils completing primary school has some basic knowledge of the national minorities’ culture, language, religion and history; moreover, they were obliged to provide instructions in mother tongue in schools for the national minorities, in accordance with the general provisions. Thus, it can be claimed that the demands of national or migrant minorities to a substantial degree are recognized, thus following the guidelines provided by multiculturalist political philosophy (although the right to instructions in home language was slightly restricted during the 1980’s, and the status of the subject changed, from compulsory subject to optional; Borevi & Strömblad 2003).

Still, this is hardly the full picture. As a general observation, it must be noted that a significant gulf between theory and practice could be discerned in the implementation of multiculturalism and anti-racism in the public sector (Hertzberg 2006). Despite the promises of recognition and the dissemination of the diversity oratory, the practitioners of the welfare state repeatedly express – in discourse as well as in practice – a plea for conformity to perceived Swedish norms and standards. Hence, there is an attitude of non-tolerance vis-à-vis the norms and customs of minority groups that are perceived to be not in tune with the basic norms of the majority culture. A number of studies suggest that this also holds true for the school system. Occurrences of discrimination and/or racism in the school system are not only a matter of bullying and slurs from other pupils, but also prejudiced and stigmatizing treatment from the school staff (e.g. Parszyk 1999, Sawyer 2006, Mulinari 2007, Lundqvist 2007); the tendency of teachers to – consciously or unconsciously - reward pupils acting in accordance with their own set of values, norms and habits, accurately described by educational sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990) has probably been in function here.

Moreover, critics of the Swedish school system (Teshahoney 1997, Gruber 2001, Francia 2007) has pointed to the existence of homogenizing forces in educational policy as well as practice, in which perspectives on upbringing, education and traditions of the migrant other has been depreciated, neglected and considered to be deviant. Rather than being multicultural, those critics claim that the Swedish educational system suffers under a strong *monocultural* tendency. This argument unfolds in two directions. Guadalupe Francia (2007) claims that the strong calls for social equality expressed in Swedish educational policy during the decades following World War II also established a strong belief in and affirmation of the educative capacities of the school. A strong norm for fostering children, informed by cutting-edge psychological and pedagogical scientific findings, was disseminated at schools and indirectly passed on to the parents. Perspectives on upbringing and learning expressed by minority groups were, according to Francia (2007:42) condemned and marginalized. Francia’s argument echoes the critique put forth by among other British sociologist Keith Pringle, who claims that Swedish welfare institutions are characterized by a “mono-cultural rigidity” (2003), which,

informed by functionalism and scientism, is keen to categorize the irregular as “deviant” (cf. Hertzberg 2008).

Mekonnen Tesfahuney (1997), on the other hand, connects the monoculturalist stance found in the Swedish educational system to the continued existence of a colonial and racializing frames of reference and value hierarchies. Tesfahuney claims that the Swedish school system, as being a part of the “Western educational system” (Tefahuney 1997:66), is central to the reproduction of racist, nationalist and sexist discourses and practices, as well as global hierarchies and injustice. In official education, a Western, male and white norm is (re)created, and Non-western, female and non-white identities are perceived and constructed as deviant. Phenomena such as enlightenment, progress, civilization and liberalism are depicted as a part of a singular and exclusively Western tradition, to which education is instrumental and fundamental. Moreover, the industrialized and liberal West is constituted as the legitimate center of the world. Evidently, rather than focusing on the specifics of *Swedish* educational policy, and following writers such as Franz Fanon (1967) and Edward Said (1978), Tesfahuney points out the significance of patterns of thought and representation which are persistent across several European and North American countries.

The symbolic order or mode of discourse depicted by Francia (2007) and Tesfahuney (1997) respectively might, in line with the theory of structuration put forth by Anthony Giddens (1984:31), be described as a “structure of signification”. This structure makes certain social actions possible and other hard to perform. Acting out in line with the norms and standards set out by minority cultures is probably quite often to be found in the latter case, as being depreciated and devalued by formal and informal majority institutions. Whether the discourses described by Francia and Tesfahuney are employed consciously or not, they will very likely obstruct the implementation of the multiculturalist goals expressed in notions such as “tolerance” or “recognition”.

### ***Islamic independent schools and the issue of complete veiling in school***

The paragraphs above claims to represent the development in Swedish educational policy during the last decades, in general as well as with special regard to questions of recognition; still, it is a mere outline of a discourses and processes much more complex than indicated above. Nevertheless, our purpose is to highlight some of the contradictions and conceptual tensions which surface, when multi-ethnic conditions and imperatives of tolerance and recognition has to be considered in educational policy. In the following study, we will examine how those imperatives are dealt with in two particular cases, and how they are related to the tricky educational policy questions encapsulated in the conceptual oppositions of “equivalence” and “freedom of choice”, “demos” and “ethnos”, and also “monoculturalism” and “multiculturalism”, respectively.

To put it more exact: we will study how different categories of practitioners in the Swedish school system, such as teachers, headmasters and union representatives, and other stakeholders, such as civil servants, and representatives of political parties and the civil society, discuss and relate to the claims of recognition put forth by Muslim practitioners and/or policy measures designed to reach the fulfilment of those claims. Two cases are studied: the establishment of Muslim independent schools and the claims to dress veiled in public schools, put forth by Muslim youth.

The cases are selected with consideration to a number of circumstances. First, the faith and belief practices of Muslim migrants have been debated on a large scale in Swedish media during the last decade, as in many other West European and North American countries. It is quite common that these practices has been put under scrutiny, and subjected to extensive critique (Malm 2009, ch. 2, Gardell 2010). In populist or radical right-wing quarters, it is said that the enactment of Muslim belief practices is a part of a slow but threatening “islamization” of Sweden (Malm 2009). Given the fact that Sweden traditionally has been characterized by a majority religion (i.e. Lutheran Christianity which also formed the base for a state church until the year of 2000), the space for religious diversity and tolerance has been rather limited in Sweden (see below and Roth & Hertzberg 2010).

The attention paid to Muslim belief practices and institutions has also involved Muslim denominational schools and the practice of wearing Burqa and Niqab, and, more generally, other forms of veiling. The establishment of denominational schools during the last two decades, whether Islamic or not, has also received a lot of attention, in mainstream media as well as in debates on education policy. For instance, a number of political parties – and not only radical right-wing parties - have voiced demands to keep down the number of Islamic denominational schools. The practice of more or less “complete” veiling, as described with the notions of “Burqa” or “Niqab” has also reached a lot of attention in public debate, not least since a young woman dressed in Burqa filed a complaint to the national ombudsman against discrimination (Diskrimineringsombudsmannen, DO) in 2009, in which she claimed that she was subjected to discrimination on religious grounds at her school, when she dressed in a Burqa. Again, several political parties – once again, not only radical right-wing parties - put the questioning at the centre of the political debate, when they recommended a ban on complete veiling at public schools.

Second, Muslim migrants have, according to a number of studies, been subjected to direct and indirect discrimination. Whether this discrimination primarily is religious in its nature, or ethnic, and hence targeting their ethnic identity, is not always concluded, but the extensive negative attention mentioned above suggests that the scope of religiously motivated discrimination is either predominant or on the rise (Sander 2004, Gardell 2010). The enactment of Muslim belief practices is not infrequently obstructed. For example, the construction of Mosques does seldom take place in silence; frequent and high-pitched voices of rejection and disapproval are common, and when the buildings once are completed, the congregations receive numerous threats and insults (Gardell 2010). The opposition is evident (Integrationsverket 2005, 2006), and two mosques have been burned down. Moreover, women wearing burqa or niqab report being harassed in public (Berge & Manga 2006, Gardell 2010; moreover, some studies also report harassment of women in *hijab* veiling, which only covers hair and shoulders; Englund 2006, Listerborn 2011 ). Apart from the lack of recognition and acceptance in religious matters, the prevalence of discriminatory mechanisms might also obstruct the access to welfare services and the entry to the labour market. Third, the general policy discussions that have emerged in relation to those phenomena are obviously also connected to the policy questions outlined above; those connections will be elucidated in the introduction to each case, in the following sections.

Apart from that, some general observations on the nature of the selected cases might be explicated. The gradual establishment of Islamic denominational schools obviously concerns the structure of the education system; by and large, it became possible through the introduction of a voucher system and the so-called independent schools in 1992. This reform constitutes a sharp break with the earlier educational policy regime in Sweden. Thus, the reform was not primarily a measure promoting the recognition of religious minorities, but rather a change of government in education, in line with the neo-liberal agenda of “New public management”. Being so, it is not infrequent that the establishments at stake are regarded as an “unforeseen consequence” of this neo-liberal turn in educational policy (cf. Roth 1999, Bunar 2008). Islamic organizations were not a leading actor in this policy change; rather, they made use of a new opportunity structure which emerged through the implementation of a new education regime. In general, it might nevertheless be said that the possibility for a religious minority to arrange and offer primary and secondary education in denominational schools might be considered as a fulfilment of the objective of recognition, which is a constituent of multiculturalist policy.

In the second case, concerning the practice of wearing Burqa or Niqab in public schools, the initiative is coming from young practicing Muslims. It is a rather spontaneous phenomenon, not directly supported by any of the larger Muslim organizations in Sweden. As such, it is a matter of how young female Muslims wish to present themselves in the social context at school. In terms of morals, it could be said that the claim to wear a headscarf in public school is a claim for toleration; the agents do not necessarily seek approval of or support for their dress-code; rather, they just want to dress in line with their conviction and/or faith (cf. Dobbernack & Moodod 2011).

### *Methodological considerations*

This report consists of two cases studies, which relies solely on qualitative data. The main part of the empirical material consists of interviews with 22 persons – nine teacher students, three teachers, three headmasters, two union representatives, two civil servants, one jurist, one imam and one representative of a political party. The interviews are used as a source for both cases. As additions to interviews, we have collected newspaper articles, memos from public authorities, bills introduced to the parliament, debates on commentary fields in web-edition of newspapers, et cetera. Being a small study, it is necessary to make some reservations concerning the reliability of our material. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether or not it is possible to make generalizations from our material, thus asserting that the viewpoints found in our material are overlapping with or similar to the attitudes of other teachers, headmasters et cetera. Still, as it is a qualitative study, it does not aim for representativeness and reliability, but at describing an instance of the meaning production on Islam, religion and the politics of recognition at Swedish schools.

Let us briefly introduce our interviewees. *Peter* is in his early fifties and a teacher in Swedish and English at a upper secondary school in northern Stockholm, in a school where the percentage of students of migrant background are close to the national average. *Martin* is a teacher in history and geography at another upper secondary school, also located in the northern Stockholm area. He is in the early thirties and works at schools where the percentage of migrant students is close to hundred percent. The third teacher is named *Ann*; she is in her late forties and works in a primary school in area neighboring Martins, and her subjects are maths and natural science. *John* is in his late forties and a headmaster at a primary school in southern Stockholm, in a school with an “average” level of pupils with foreign back ground, although he until recently worked as a headmaster in the same area as Martin for twenty years. *Lena*’s personal and professional overlap with Johns; her school is located close to his, and she used to work in the same area as him (and Martin), although her experience as a headmaster are slightly shorter. *Alice*, *Amy*, *Elias*, *Gertrud*, *Katarina*, *Linn*, *Lizette*, *Noomi* and *Marit* are students at the teacher education at Stockholm University. *Alice* and *Katarina* are in their late thirties; *Amy*, *Gertrud* and *Noomi* are in their early twenties, and *Elias*, *Linn*, *Lizette* and *Marit* are in their late twenties. *Linn* is of Finnish decent.

*David* is a higher representative at the National Unions of Teachers (Lärarnas Riksförbund). He is in his early fifties, and also a teacher on leave. *Sarah* is in her early sixties and an employed senior official at the Swedish Teachers Union (Läraryrket). *Mehdi* is a headmaster at an Islamic denominational school located close to the area where Ann’s school is located. He is in his late fifties; of Tunisian decent but has been working as an executive in the Swedish trade and industry for over twenty years. *Mahmud* is one of the Imams at the main mosque in Stockholm, and a representative of one of central Swedish Muslim organizations. He is also of Tunisian decent, but has been working in Sweden for thirty years. *Sylvia* is a senior civil servant at the municipal district committee in northern Stockholm. She is in her fifties and among other things responsible for the reception of refugees. *Ibrahim* works at the same district committee as Sylvia, he is of Turkish decent, in his early sixties, and in charge of the municipal social care. *Irene* is a jurist at one of the trade unions (and of Chilean decent), but she has been appointed as an expert at the Ombudsman on discrimination, DO. The last interviewee, *Lars*, is in his early thirties and a political advisor at the Swedish Liberal party, *Folkpartiet*.

## **(2) Case Study 1: Islamic independent denominational schools**

### *The establishment of Islamic denominational schools*

As described in the introductory part of this report, the independent school system was introduced 1992, paving the way for a considerable increase of private schools in Sweden. The independent

schools made it a lot easier than before to establish schools with a different orientation from the municipal schools, such as special teaching methods (Montessori or Waldorf), a linguistic/ethnic orientation, or a certain religious profile. In 1993, Sweden's first Muslim school opened in the southern city of Malmö. In 2009, the number of Islamic denominational school was nine – all of them compulsory schools. Six of the Islamic denominational schools are organized in the organization Swedish Islamic Schools (SIS, Sveriges muslimska skolor), a part of to the Swedish Islamic Federation (SIF, Islamiska förbundet i Sverige), one of the three major national Islamic organizations in Sweden. Through its connection to SIF, SIS is also connected to Swedish Muslim Council, which is an “umbrella organization” for Islamic organizations in Sweden.

#### A short description about the religious content in the instructions

The 1992 amendment in the Education Act, which made it less difficult to found independent schools, could arguably be regarded as one of the major reasons that Muslims schools began to establish in the Nineties (Berglund 2009). On the other hand, there are also some “push-factors” involved. A study conducted by SNAE in 1997 derived the following reasons that certain Muslim parents send their children to Muslim schools: negatively biased and inaccurate views of Islam in municipal schools (cf. Härenstam 1993, Otterbeck 2005), disregard for common Islamic rules respecting chastity, diet, fasting, dress, prayer, and so forth, poor religious education by the standards of Islam, insufficient discipline, fear of exposure to narcotics and alcohol, and too great a diversity of immigrant groups in the neighbouring municipal schools (Skolverket 1997, cf. Berglund 2009).

The SNEA study also draw attention to the fact that a number of Muslim parents has reported difficulties in their interactions with municipal school officials and staffs – interactions which had left them feeling humiliated, alienated and shamed (Skolverket 1997). As Jenny Berglund (2007:25) notes, this expression of feelings may not be so surprising, considering the results from a study conducted by Anders Lange (2008:91), in which found that no less than 11,9 per cent of teachers are in basic agreement with the statement “Muslim immigrant parents in Sweden do not see their children's best”, and that no less than 81 percent of the teachers state strong or moderate dislike of Muslim denominational schools (Lange 2008:53). Hence, the SNEA study suggests that Muslim parents choose to send their children to Muslim schools for purposes of security and wellbeing, not only for the purpose of religion. Studies conducted by Nihad Bunar and Jenny Kallstenius (2006, 2007) and also Jenny Berglund (2008) points in a similar direction: their choices might as well be seen as a way of avoiding (the risk of) discrimination and obtaining acceptance of difference.

It could arguably be said that the amendment in the Education Act of 1992 made it possible for religious education to find its way back to the Swedish school system. In 1969, the subject of “Christianity” was changed to “religion”. The change of name signalled a change of perspective. Until 1962, the purpose was to foster the pupils in the Christian faith; that year a school reform required the subject of Christianity to maintain a neutral profile with respect to questions of faith. From 1969, the purpose was to teach on religions and religiosity, as social and existential phenomena, in a more distanced, comparative and critical way. The change signalled the end of preaching Christianity in the Swedish school system, which from now on was held to be non-confessional. A very limited number of denominational private schools existed outside the public school system, as for example the Jewish Hillel school in Stockholm, founded in 1954 (Peste 2007), and the century-old catholic schools S:t Erik in Stockholm and Queen Astrid in Gothenburg; still, the latter did not receive any state funding. During the 1970's and 80's, a few evangelistic and partly state-funded denominational schools were allowed to start.

The fact that religion and denominational educations was discarded in 1969 could be seen as the end result of a long and efficacious process of secularization. During the first decades of public education in Sweden, the Swedish protestant national church held a strong influence over all teaching activities

in the country, a position once installed through the parish catechetical meeting system which was institutionalised during the 17th century, when the ability to read and the basic knowledge on Christian theology in the population was examined by local clergymen. Nevertheless, secularization of the schools occurred slowly and peacefully during the 20th century. Debates over education policy were less concerned with who should oversee and control the education system, than with whether to construct a fully democratic education system that would not separate children into different schools according to social class (Morgan 2002). Gradually, the ethos of Christianity and religiosity was replaced by the secular ethos of equality which was central to the integrated comprehensive school system (Rothstein 1986).

With the implementation of the national curricula of 1969, it was decided that the Swedish school system should be non-confessional or non-denominational. As noted above, the instructions of the educational system should observe neutrality in relation to different religions. But in the national curricula of 1994, it was stated that this rule does not apply for the religious independent schools. In order with Sweden's Education Act, however, some general goals has to be achieved whether the schools are independent or public (Berglund 2009), such "imparting, installing and forming in pupils those fundamental values on which our society is based", which "[i]n accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism by fostering the individual a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility". As Jenny Berglund notes, in the pursuit of the common aims, most denominational schools arrange only a small number of hours per week for the introduction of certain subjects, and in the case of Muslim schools, "this number amounts to one to three hours per week of Islamic religious education" (Berglund 2009:23). However, the local syllabi written for such subjects must still adhere to the above described "fundamental values" (Berglund 2009, cf. above). Arguably, the scope for a distinctly Islamic or Muslim curriculum is quite limited (cf. Gardell 2010).

### ***Islamic schools in doubt***

As noted above, the sudden increase of denominational schools has received a good deal of attention, in public media as well as in the debate on educational policy in Sweden, and the same goes for the establishment of *Muslim* denominational schools. For example, in 2003 Swedish television broadcasted documentary by the Swedish-Kurdish documentary film director and producer Evin Rubar, where Islamic denominational schools were represented in a negative way. In the film, interviews filmed with a hidden camera was shows, in which a number of headmasters at Islamic schools states that the do not want to cooperate with the social services in the municipality, use threats to force young women on the run to return to their families, and that they do not intend to follow the national curriculum. After the showing, an extensive media debate followed, in which Islamic schools frequently was depicted as a problem, and calls for ban of those schools were voiced.

Directly prompted by the media debate, the SNAE carried out inspections in seven (out of ten then existing) Islamic denominational schools (Francia 2007), and two of them did not meet the standards required for carry on teaching, and their authorization was suspended. Two other schools got an injunction; within one month, they had to make changes in their staff in order to not to lose their permit. Still, the ability of Islamic denomination schools to pursue teaching was questioned in wide circles. It thus strengthened the doubts over whether Islamic faith schools managed to meet the standard of equivalence (Francia 1998, cf. Skolverket 1997). This *equivalence* argument is one of the arguments which have been given against Islamic schools in the public debate.

Other arguments have also been raised. For instance, it has also been claimed that religious congregations – Islamic as well as Christian -by the transcendent nature of their dogmas and preachings are prone to give their own message – and the world-views conveyed therein - priority over other systems of belief, such as other religions, and over scientific knowledge, and thus inappropriate to arrange

education according to the standards of objectivity (sw. “saklighet”) and comprehensibility (sw. “allsidighet”) given in the national curriculum and the national syllabi (Gerle 1997, cf. Roth 2007). Related to this argument is a third one, which claims that denominational schools violate the basic rights of the children such as freedom of thought, conscience and expressions, given the religious underpinnings of the schools (cf. Roth 2007).

A fourth argument that has been put forth is that Islamic schools bring about values and norms alien to the Swedish society, for example regarding gender roles and the nature of the relations between the sexes (Gerle 1997). This gender equality argument has been voiced by among others present minister of education, liberal MP Nyamko Sabuni, who wrote an article in the Swedish daily *Expressen* a couple of months before her appointment, in which she stated that denominational schools – whether Muslim, catholic/ Christian or Jewish - foster women and men to traditional gender-roles (Sabuni 2006). In the same article, Sabuni also fears that Islamic schools might develop into “a natural recruiting basis for future suicide bombers” (Sabuni 2006, cf. Lillman 2006). Still, this fifth argument, which is stressing domestic *safety*, is quite seldom expressed, at least outside the realms of right-wing populist discourse.

A sixth argument, finally, claims that Islamic denominational schools augment the social and ethnic segregation of the Swedish society. Students who attend to Islamic schools do not, according to this argument, experience the full diversity of the Swedish multicultural and multiethnic society, and hence runs the risk of not fully developing the competence to understand, manage and/or esteem this diversity. Other proponents of the *segregation* argument emphasize their lack of experience from and knowledge on dominant Swedish norms, standards and values. Obviously, this argument touches upon the conflict between promoting ethnos or demos (cf. above); the proponents repeat the equalizing and integrative objectives of the compulsory school project, thus partly sacrificing the goal of recognition given in strong programmes of multiculturalism (Roth 2001).

Thus, it is claimed that Islamic denominational schools are *divisive*; they provide a restricted, non-common educational environment which separates a group of children and young people for schooling from the rest of the society (Halstead & McLaughlin 2005). Another variety of the argument of social division claims that Muslim free schools are segregating or divisive, in the sense that they separate recently arrived migrant Muslim children, and/or Muslim children whose parents belong to lower socio-economic strata, from children of more fortunate social backgrounds, thus denying them the possibility to enhance the value of their social capital. This argument is quite often employed in combination with the argument of equality, thus claiming that the allegedly poor quality of the education given at Islamic denominational schools increases the mixed ethnic and socio-economic segregation (Roth 2001).

This outline of the arguments against Islamic denominational schools are not exhaustive in a proper sense, but it could reasonably be said that it covers most of the arguments that has been expressed in popular media, and it also gives a hint of the diversity of perspectives and/or values on which the arguments are premised. It must also be said, though, that the proponents of Islamic schools have put forth a number of counter-arguments and objections in response to these arguments. For the sake of completeness, it would have made sense to describe them in this context. Still, since the purpose of this text is to describe the context in which lack of recognition or acceptance occur, and given its limited scope, the above mentioned pursue for completeness is omitted.

### ***On the acceptance of Islamic denominational schools in Sweden***

Many of the arguments against Islamic denominational schools voiced in the public debates were also expressed during the interviews for this study. But the discourse that came into being during those

interviews did not only oppose the existence of those schools, it also supported it. Some voices also expressed what can be called tolerance in a literal sense – the interviewees did not really see the point with the establishment of Islamic denominational schools, but they did not oppose it or advocate a shutting-down of these schools. The distribution of standpoints will be described below.

### Segregation – cultural and social

In general, one of the most common objections to the establishment of Islamic denominational schools was the argument that those schools have a number of negative effects on processes of social and/or ethnic integration. For example, Peter, one of the teachers we met during this study, claimed that those schools sets up a closed social setting, in which Muslim youth gets isolated from the surrounding society.

*Peter: Muslim independent schools tend to maintain a quite closed social environment. There are a number of schools in Stockholm, and [...] personally, I think that it is counterproductive, from an educational perspective, to create an environment which shields off the mainstream Swedish society. Actually, the municipality of Stockholm, and its board of education gives away money, which ... and there a number of negative consequences related to the fact that you permit religious believers to create a closed social context, or at least a relatively closed social context. Of course, I am aware of the fact that those schools do not at all resemble any straightforward Koran schools, I have learned that from colleagues that work in those schools and they are neither migrants nor Muslim believers. But the presence of those schools creates troubles, anxieties. I do not think that the linguistic environment is different from those in the nearby municipal school, or in regular independent school, [...] but what really makes me react is the excluding tendency ... if you set up a Muslim independent school, then you are quite explicit about which student you would like to have. The number of non-Muslims in those schools is close to zero, I suppose.*

Thus, Peter claims that the establishment of Islamic denominational schools has some negative effects with regards to social and ethnic segregation, is so matter that they create an closed social environment, in which central aspects of the mainstream society is screened off. The argument is obviously critical to denominational education in itself; it is premised on a negative perspective on religion: believers are, according to Peter, prone to establish closed social contexts. Islam, as other religions, is divisive in that sense. In the second part of the argument, expressed in the last three lines of the excerpt, Peter develops a “strong” critique of denominational schools. He claims that the concentration of believers to specific denominational schools is in itself is a matter of exclusion (of non-believers), and the fact that the interest for and admission to these schools are unevenly distributed is regarded as a problem. Alice, one of the students at the teacher education, developed a similar argument, based on the thesis of segregation: “if they have their independent schools, and meet, and socialize, they become ... segregated. It doesn't matter if it is a Muslim independent school or a music school; you create your own marked off world. And their parents socialize”.

The anti-segregation argument was further employed by the two civil servants, Sylvia and Ibrahim, which was interviewed for this study. Rather than speaking in general terms, though, they referred to the conditions in the area in which they worked, an area in the northern part of Stockholm, among other things characterized by relatively high proportions of unemployed and foreign born, but with a low level of average income.

*Ibrahim: The independent school reform has, among other things, got some individuals involved in processes which do not promote their own interest. We are talking about social networks: "you are my friend, I am your friend, you are my neighbour, I am a Muslim, you are a Muslim", and so forth. Do you understand? Unforeseen consequences have emerged. Sylvia: Exactly. There is no longer a free choice. It is not the family who choose, and not the child. There is someone else who says "you should go to this school". And we have some objections to that, on this specific topic, we have some objections, because it is not of your their choosing. It's*

*like that. And maybe it is like that in other places as well, but then. Maybe, you are stronger; you can say ... you can say "no".*  
*Ibrahim: And then, earlier, it just to be very mixed and diverse out here, even though the members from the majority population was quite few, but now, we see a concentration of a limited number of groups. And the possibility for our youth, for our adults, to mix up with the mainstream society, it does not longer exist.*

In general, Ibrahim states that he is ambivalent in relation to Muslim independent schools. Brought up in Kemalist Turkey and its highly secularized education system, he developed a negative attitude towards denominational schools, Ibrahim explains, but quite recently, he started to develop some new standpoints. With the advent of Islamic denominational schools, he sees a possibility for Swedish Muslims; they are given a chance to “strengthen their cultural identity” and “their self-esteem”, and establish a positive perception of themselves. Then, they can “gain legitimacy” and “gain normality”. Nevertheless, his general outlook is genuinely ambivalent, considering the negative and unforeseen consequences outlined above. In the local context, the Islamic denominational school is a part of a local Muslim environment, in which the relations with members of the mainstream society are limited, and the knowledge on the mores of the mainstream society is false or skewed. Moreover, Sylvia also claims that the religious authorities in the Muslim community exert an illegitimate influence over the choosing of schools. An external force affects what is supposed to be a private family matter. Thus, Ibrahim and Sylvia raise some strong objections to the existence of Muslim independent schools, but also to the influence of religious authorities in general. They make some further elaborations:

*Fredrik: So, one family out of four put their children in a Muslim independent school?*  
*Ibrahim: Yes, that's the way it is. [...] But their picture of Stockholm, and of mainstream Swedish society, and of which we are, it is so limited, and it is build upon fantasies, rather than facts about us. Because of that, we have a responsibility to develop our citizens' picture of the Swedish society.*  
*Sylvia: Also, that problem is made worse if you stay only in a very limited area of Stockholm, if you never go downtown, if you just stick around out here ... and if the school is located here, and the mosque, then you are stuck out here. You don't go around in the Stockholm area; you don't even have a local Stockholm identity.*  
*Ibrahim: It is not a matter of total social isolation. They may have a job, they may be self-supporting, but their interface with the mainstream group is very limited. And there are so many myths about Swedishness that predominate, myths but not reality. Some of the positive, some negative, but in these hard times, the negative seems to predominate, and I think that this is the biggest problem for democracy, when people do not have an interface of their own, own experiences, but have to rely on myths.*

Thus, the segregation argument is related to a representation of the “matters of fact” which strengthens his argument. Muslim migrant populations have a distorted picture of mainstream Swedish society, and the denominational schools are a constituent of the isolated social milieu which creates the distortion. Thus, the conditions of the Muslim population in the local community constitute, according to Sylvia and Ibrahim, a strong argument against the establishment of Muslim independent schools. Still, they do not explicitly support a closing down. Rather, their discursive strategy is to conjure up doubts over the suitability of these schools. To put in the phrasing of Clifford Geertz (1973): their representation of the world (how it is) is connected to a representation for the world (how it should be), but the nature of its implications is not clear-cut. They have a negative view of Islamic schools, but they seem to tolerate what they do not like.

In their argument, Ibrahim and Sylvia focus mainly on the cultural aspect of the segregating quality ascribed to Muslim independent schools. Ibrahim actually points out that some members of the Muslim community in his area might be adequately integrated economically, at least when it comes to their position on the labor market (“*They may have a job, they may be self-supporting*”), but still segregated culturally, in so far that their knowledge of the mainstream society is defective (“*have to*

*rely on myths*”). Still, other interviewees did emphasize the social aspect of this divisive quality. Sarah, a senior official at the Swedish Teachers Union (STU, Lärarförbundet), was explicit in this matter. As an answer to my question about the segregating or counter-segregating qualities of Muslim denominational schools, she made her standpoint clear.

*Sarah: Straight away, my opinion is that independent schools increase segregation. So it is. There is no other answer. The SNEA has proved that, a thousand of times. But then it is a matter of ... who has the guts to stand up and say that the freedom of choice of schools should not exist? No one does that. So, you have to take the rough with the smooth, if you as a parent or a student want freedom of choice, that's my opinion. And if you do not focus at the confessional/non-confessional-dimension ... the gifted students with the powerful parents with the fat wallets choose one kind of schools, and the losers get stuck in totally different environment. Their results get worse, and the equivalence disappears. So it is.*

Sarah focuses solely on the social aspect of the segregation argument. She does not consider the potentially integrative qualities of the Muslim denominational schools, and she does not mention the cultural aspect of segregation put forth by for example Peter and Ibrahim. Rather, she draws attention to a general pattern of socio-economic segregation, not caused by Muslim independent schools per se, but by the introduction of the voucher system, the freedom of choice and the establishment of independent schools, regardless of orientation. Thus, the Muslim denominational schools get inscribed in a general criticism of the changes in the educational system. In order to strengthen her argument, Sarah also refers to reports from SNEA; thus legitimating her argument with the scientific standard of those reports. This argument, premised on the assumption that social and ethnic differentiation is undesirable, seems to have an intertextual relation to the earlier paradigm in Swedish educational policy, in which the principle of non-separation was heralded and differentiation was counteracted (Bunar 2002, Dahlstedt & Hertzberg 2010).

In the excerpt above, we can also see that the argument of segregation is connected to the goal of equivalence (cf. above): since the establishment of Islamic denominational schools may increase the level of social and cultural segregation, the goal of equivalent education may be hard to attain. Then, the question of denominational schools gets framed in a new way. As noted in the first section of this report, the goal of “equivalence” has been central for the governance of compulsory schools in the Swedish educational system. Discursively, the argument of “equivalence” might be regarded as an effectual argument in discussions on the quality of instructions and its design. Anticipation of problems regarding equivalence was also an argument frequently put forth against Muslim denominational schools during our fieldwork. In the next section we will take a closer look on that argument.

Still, the examples picked out above show us the constituents of the argument of segregation, and some examples of the discursive contexts in which it arise. First of all, it is held against the establishment and/or existence of Islamic denominational schools that they increase the level of cultural segregation, in that they decrease the interface between Muslim students and the mainstream society, and hence screen off representations, norms and values from the mainstream society. As a distinctive, non-common educational environment, it is supposed to be divisive (cf. Halstead & McLaughlin 2005). Second, it is also held that they also increase the socio-economical segregation. The first argument targets Islamic faiths schools partly in its quality of being denominational (religious people are more prone to create closed social environments), partly in its quality of being Islamic (Islamic and Christian schools are frequently criticized than other denominational schools), and partly because they attracts many migrants who live in areas with a low number of native Swedes. The second argument targets Islamic schools mainly because their students mainly are recruited from relatively deprived social groups. Still, the arguments are not followed by proposals to shut down Islamic denominational schools. They have the character of objections, rather than clear-cut calls for prohibitions.

## Quality, rule of law and equivalence

Apart from the risk of social and cultural segregation, objections were also made to Islamic denominational schools concerning the quality of the education they offered. The quality was questioned, and so was the ability to reach the goals put forward in the national curricula and other steering documents. As noted above, this argument was often connected to the goal of equivalence, stipulated in the steering documents. Peter was one of the interviewees who expressed doubts in this particular issue, in relation to the quality of the instructions offered.

*Peter: Let me put it like this: if the systems of supervision is in function, and if the Swedish National Agency of Education, and until now Stockholm municipality ... if they can check up on whether the schools are law-abiding or not, then there should be no problems at all, but if you consider how the supervision of the independent schools has been, then ... it was like child's play. The supervision did not function during the 90's. The schools inspectorate haven't been around for such a long time; the Stockholm municipality had some inspections of their own, but that was inspections of the pedagogical content, not about obedience to the law or steering document. Without a strong school inspectorate, with a clear authorization, then you run the risk of degenerated species, the building of false front, of Potemkin villages.*

Peter does not make his argument fully explicit. In a context where he talks about Islamic independent schools and the quality of education in school after the independent school reform, he notes that “degenerated species” – i.e. particular schools – will grow up, and that “Potemkin villages” will be set up.<sup>1</sup> Although he does not explicitly claim that Islamic schools are species of degenerated kind, or fake fronts, this remain an implicit message: if the school inspectorate had been working in the way it should have, then Islamic denominational schools would “have some problems”. Their capacity to offer education by the standards is called into question.

Some of the objections put forward by Sylvia, the senior civil servant, were similar to Peter's argument. If an independent denominational school follows the set of rules inscribed in the national curriculum, and if they provide qualitative instructions in all the mandatory subjects, then, she claims, everything is ok, she stated, “but we're not there yet”. Indirectly and by implication she claimed that Islamic independent schools do not provide the kind of education they are assumed to. Still, she was not critical to Islamic schools only; her general critical attitude also targeted Christian faith schools. And apart from Peter, she clearly stated that she was in favour of Islamic denominational schools *in general*, provided they managed to meet the standards specified in the steering documents, and, above all, thus reached the goal of equivalence.

The argument of quality was also put forward by David, teacher and a leading representative of the National Union of Teachers (NUT, Lärarnas Riksförbund) when he outlined the general and official stance developed in the organization. He also connected into to the question of equivalence, and hence not only the quality of the instructions, but also the question of whether denominational independent schools really offered training or instructions in all comprehensive subjects or not, which apparently also is a part of the equivalence problem.

*David: In general, we are critical to the development of the Swedish school during the last 20 years, and the independent schools are a part of this. It is not the same set of rules for independent schools as for municipal schools, but that's on the way of being corrected now ... but we don't*

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Potemkin villages” is an idiom which refers to a historical myth about the then Russian minister Grigory Potemkin. According to this myth, there were fake settlements purportedly erected at the direction of Potemkin to fool Empress Catherine II during her visit to Crimea in 1787. It is said that Potemkin, who led the Crimean military campaign, had hollow facades of villages constructed along the desolate banks of the Dnieper River in order to impress the monarch and her travel party with the value of her new conquests, thus enhancing his standing in the empress's eyes.

*make any difference between Muslim independent and Christian, but there is a risk connected to the independent school system, in so matter that the overall segregation increases. And the lack of equivalence is one crucial aspect of the segregation, but there other aspects as well, for instance that you choose school in line with your religious beliefs. Still, whether you are Christian or a Muslim, you have to follow the rules. And we have been very explicit in that matter, it is of uttermost importance to follow the rules that governs the Swedish school system. And this is not always the case. And it has been shown on TV, documentaries that has exposed, Christian ... extremists, one might say ... Christian independent schools, and recently it has been exposed that there also exist Muslim independent schools in which you do not follow the rules. [...] We have taken a stand; the same rules should apply for municipal schools as well as for independent. And we think it is great that the School Inspectorate should inspect even more, in order to check the observance of the rules. There has been too much of ... lack of observance, we must say. There are examples of schools that do not care about the goals set up in the national syllabus, or in the national curricula. You don't have teachings in sexuality and life together, or whatever that is censored. For us, it is a matter of lacking equivalence.*

David makes some efforts to point out the general critique put forth by the union. It does not target Muslim denominational schools in particular, but also Christian; it does not target religious independent schools, but independent schools in general. He thus states that the establishment of independent schools in general has increased the social segregation, and that the question of equivalence is one crucial aspect of the segregation problem. With a reference to some documentary films shown on TV, he implies that religious independent schools are more prone than others to not meet the standards pointed out in the steering documents, Christian as well as Muslim. There is a general problem with lack of observance of the steering documents among denominational schools, David claims, in so much that they do not deliver all the instructions that are specified in the national syllabus; the lessons on sexuality is probably not given, he claims. Thus, it is implied that the denominational schools do not meet the requirement to deliver instructions equivalent to the national standards. But when Peter focus in the alleged lack of quality, David and Sylvia focus on the lack of observance to the national syllabus.

David clearly points out that the lack of observance is a problem in itself. Rules and steering documents must be followed, that is their *raison d'être*. Moreover, the argument of equivalence is also framed within the argument of segregation. The lack of equivalence is a problem in itself, but it also because in nurtures segregation. Schools that do not provide instructions in all subjects, and in which the quality of the instructions is lacking, do not prepare the students for life after school in a proper way, and this deficiency is even more apparent since the students in Muslim independent schools often belong to socially underprivileged strata, and live in deprived and stigmatized areas. It might not be said that the argument put forth by David above should be categorized as intolerance towards religion in education. Still, it is a part of extensive and elaborated argument against Muslim schools, in which expressions of intolerance also can be discerned. In the interview with Sarah, the senior representative of STU, the connection between abidance by the rules and the dangers of social segregation got explicated in a manifest way, and her arguments and descriptions will be given extensive space in the next paragraph.

### Quality, equivalence, freedom of religion and the rights of children

In the interview with Sarah, the central arguments against the establishment or proliferation of Islamic denominational schools was clearly expressed and connected to each other. Moreover, the arguments were also clearly connected to the development of Swedish educational policy during the last decades, but also to more universal sets of rules and norms. Because of this relatively high level of elaboration, and the connectedness to wider normative contexts, we choose to allot some more space for the discourse explicated in the interview with Sarah.

After our presentation of the research project, Sarah immediately started off recounting what is her version of the history of the Swedish independent school system, and the STU point of view in this particular issue. For a long time confessional free schools were a non-issue, they were established on larger scale and became a matter of debate only in the middle of the 1990's. The first wave of free schools that came in the beginning of the same decade were followers of those few free schools that already existed, namely those who was organized their education in line with progressive pedagogies such as Waldorf and Reggio Emilia. The second wave was the confessional schools, among them a big group of Muslim schools, but also a large number of Christian schools.

The first time the STU, Sarah's employer, acknowledged that confessional free schools has become an issue is in 1994, when the new national curricula is implemented. In there, it was stated that the independent schools could be organized as confessional, but that the publicly financed municipality schools had to be non-confessional. The national curricula for the different school forms differed in this matter, and, according to Sarah, a huge number of teachers and members of the union opposed this. They thought that all schools should be non-confessional, and Lärarförbundet made a number of statements pointing in that direction, although they weren't too explicit about it (according to Sarah); still, their position was that the same rules should apply for the schools, regardless of ownership.

New debates followed at the turn of the century, prompted by a redraft in the laws and decrees that regulates the national school system, Sarah continues, and since then one of the key issues has been whether the regulations - and hence conditions - for the public and private schools should be identical or not. According to Sarah, the prevalence of schools not guided by a secular and general national curriculum has been met by apparent disapproval, at least from several union-organized teachers. There is a strong opposition against independent schools, and against denominational schools, but not specifically against Muslim independent schools. Thus, the objections against Muslim - and other denominational - schools is based on a premise of equivalence; the Swedish school system should be comprehensive, and the education delivered within in that system, should not deviate too much from the secular norm.

So far, Sarah's call for equivalence is mainly a call for a general rule system, in which the rules apply for everyone, without deviations. But her argument also took the risk of segregation or social division into consideration. In this matter, she argued quite forcefully, which we could see above. In her answer, Sarah does not pay any attention to the potentially counter-divisive potential of Islamic denominational schools. The focus is solely on socio-economic conditions. The main effects are considered to be negative; socio-economic segregation is said to follow from the independent school system and the right to choose type of school, and the establishment of Muslim denominational schools do not change that. Moreover, it is also important to note that Sarah - like, for instance, Sylvia - do not promote the closing down of Muslim independent schools. Still, Sarah's argument reflects a pragmatic stance rather than a concern for freedom or religion; she supposes that it would be more or less impossible to withdraw the freedom of choice almost twenty years after the right first was established.

*Sarah: And then there is another aspect, I can make another contribution. [...] I had a reason to check it out, why confessional schools are allowed in Sweden, why they do exist at all [...]. And I got the task to start digging, and I found a resolution from the UN and all sorts of things. Really, it is based on, if I got it right, and if I haven't forgot anything, it is based on the right of the parents to teach your own child. And that is some kind of protection for ... minorities [...]. We ratified it in the fifties or in the sixties. [...] But here, in Sweden, we created a school where the children, well, where it is possible to choose a path different from the parents. That's why we have a subject called "religion", not Christianity. So, if you should position the STU in this debate, it could be said that we think that the child has the right to choose her or his own path, and it might very well be totally different from the parent's path. If so, you have to create a school which allows you to choose that different path. But then, it should not be possible for parents to teach their own*

*children, of course.*  
*Fredrik: One of the main tenets behind the comprehensive school?*  
*Sarah: Yes, very much so. Equivalence, yes. We don't lose sight of that guiding star, which is the inviolable right of the child to choose its own path.*

In this part of the interview discourse, Sarah makes a clear connection between the goal of equivalence and the – presumably universal - rights of the child. Here, the goal of equivalence is less connected to abidance by the rules, but rather a “guiding star” which directs the attention to the universal rights of the child. It is a discourse of human rights, rather than of abidance by the rules. The goal of equivalence is not justified pragmatically, but because it follows from attention paid to almost context-independent (allegedly universal) rights.

### Summary

In sum, a number of disadvantages with the establishment of Islamic denominational schools are expressed. They are allegedly divisive, both culturally and socially, and the quality of their instructions is supposed to be inadequate, in relation to the standards explicated in the national curriculum and syllabi. It could reasonable be said that Muslim schools are met by suspicion. Still, few calls for shutting down of these schools are voiced. It seems that the Muslim denominational schools are tolerated in a literal sense: it is accepted, sometimes pragmatically, but not liked. On the other hand, it could be said that the provision of a judicial and institutional space for religious minorities to establish denominational schools is part of politics of recognition; i.e. an educational policy which, under auspicious circumstances might provide the means for religious minorities to receive respect as equal and gain admission as normal. As noted above, though, the establishment of Muslim independent schools in Sweden does not follow from an introduction of a multiculturalist program, or any act of recognition. Rather, it could be described as a by-product of the implementation of New Public Management in Swedish educational policy. The introduction of a voucher system provided a new opportunity structure for non-governmental organizations with educating ambitions, such as Islamic denominations.

The repugnance or aversion towards Muslim independent schools found in our empirical material relate to this political context. For example, most objections to the existence of denominational schools implicitly and explicitly relate, to the notion of equivalence, which has been a keyword in Swedish educational policy for almost three decades, and signifies on the one hand a demand for abidance by the national curriculum and syllabi, and on the other its priority over freedom of choice. As the reproduction of “demos” gains priority over the recognition of “ethnos”, the equalizing and integrative objectives of the compulsory school project seem to be alive and kicking, and the quest for recognition of minority beliefs systems is circumscribed.

### **(3) Case Study 2: Burqa and Niqab in the everyday life of schools**

In many western European countries, the practice of veiling has been contested and debated for several years; and an “arena of passionate controversies about the politics of integration and religious and cultural difference” (Sauer 2009:76). For some people, the headscarf has become an icon, and a symbol representing a clash between different world-views, rather than a piece of cloth; it could be regarded as a symbol for patriarchal repression over women, a threat to the (self-proclaimed) openness of the liberal, parliamentary democracy, or as an act of resistance towards an unsympathetic secular and sometimes racist hegemony of the mainstream society. As a highly visible sign, the headscarf has also become a symbol for the religious of Islam. As such, it is related to at least three policy areas: policies of integration, the governance of religious difference, and gender equality (Sauer 2009).

As several authors (i.e. Joppke 2004, Kymlycka 2005, Vasta 2007) has pointed out, the strong reaction to the practice of veiling are parallel to the “recent retreat from multiculturalism”, a recent tendency in integration policy in many western European countries. Calls for integration have gradually become similar to calls for assimilation, and the objectives of toleration and recognition has been downgraded. Discussions of religious freedom focus on its limitations, particularly in relation to the practice of veiling. The secularization of European states went along with the privatization of religious beliefs, and some fear that the visible presence of covered Muslim women in public places might lead to a re-sacralization of the public sphere, and even threaten the fundamental secular dimension of liberal democracy (Sauer 2009).

Many European societies have regulated the wearing of headscarves in the public sphere, at schools, universities, in court rooms or public service jobs. According to Birgit Sauer (2009:77), it is possible to discern at least three different approaches to headscarves in Europe: prohibitive, soft or selective and non-restrictive approaches. In France, Turkey and some German federal states, where a *prohibitive* approach has gained ground, Muslim body covering is banned in public institutions.<sup>2</sup> As *soft* or *selective* approaches, Sauer describes the prohibitive measures in Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands, which bans certain kinds of covering in certain public institutions. The *non-restrictive* approach, finally, is to be found for example in Austria, where body or face coverage are not restricted at all. Moreover, Sauer also notes that there is no clear-cut connection between on the one hand different approaches to body and/or face coverage, and on the other different institutional settings such as citizenship models, church-state relations, or gender regimes.

In this study, we focus specifically on the veiling practices commonly named Burqa or Niqab, not on headscarves in general. Thus, attitudes to the much more common – and often less controversial – veiling practice called hijab are not included. The major difference between Burqa and Niqab on the one hand, and Hijab on the other, is that the latter leaves the face uncovered (cf. Sauer 2009). The reason for this delimitation is empirical: during the last years, the wearing of Niqab and Burqa in particular has been intensely debated and strongly contested in Sweden, rather than headscarves in general; not the least when it comes to matters of education and the regulation of educational institutions. The debate in Sweden differs from those in France, Germany, Belgium, etc; still, the distribution of standpoints between proponents and antagonists, and their argumentation, follows roughly the same pattern as in other the above mentioned countries.

This does not mean that the practice of Hijab is more or less uncontroversial in Sweden. For example, when two journalists dressed in Hijab was hosting the TV-show “Halal-TV” in 2008 by SVT, the national public broadcasting company, an intense debate followed, in which it became obvious that a lot of Swedes did not tolerate TV-show hosts dressed in Hijab. Since then, no show has been hosted by a women wearing headscarf in Swedish television. Nevertheless, recent debates in mass media and elsewhere have focused on Burqa and Niqab, not the least whether it should be prohibited or not to cover your face in public.

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, we will describe the general attitudes among teachers, headmasters and other categories of professionals with an interest in educational matters towards the practice of wearing Burqa and/or Niqab in public schools. Second, we will describe which arguments that are employed among those who are in favor of a prohibition of the abovementioned veiling practices. Third, we will analyze the ideological and policy-related underpinnings of those arguments.

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<sup>2</sup> It must be note, though, that the prohibiton policy in Germany mostly has been directed towards teachers, in their capacity as federal state officials, while more general prohibitions is in force in France and Turkey (Joppke 2007).

### ***The right to wear Burqa or Niqab called in question***

The first nationwide mediated debate on veiling practices of Burqa and Niqab in Sweden took place in 2003 (Gardell 2010). A couple of young women dressed in Burqa showed up at Burgårdens upper secondary school in Gothenburg, which led to some debate and controversy at the school. The teachers and the headmaster at Burgården reacted, and the headmaster made an inquiry to the SNEA, and asked for a clarification.

*“Students with ‘immigrant background’ is relatively frequent at our school, but this year we have for the first time received so called “Burqa”-students, who wears a black, covering dress with a veil, and it is only possible to see the eyes of the student – through a gauze. The staff, which accordingly is used to immigrant students, has reacted strongly to this, and experiences it as unpleasant to teach students whom they can’t identify and hardly make eye contact with. [...] I have told them that the schools demands to take off the veil during the lessons. Can I do that? Are you acquainted with similar cases, and how did one react back then?”(quoted in Hilborn 2003)*

Partly through the inquiry to the SNEA, the case got nationwide attention, and an intense and agitated debate followed (Gardell 2010:171). Most of the contributors were severely critical to the practice of Burqa or Niqab veiling, and focused mainly to its gender dimension; it was recurrently maintained that the practice constituted a patriarchal oppression, which forced women to cover themselves and hide (Åberg 2003, Westgård 2003, cf. Gardell 2010). Among the critical voice leading politicians of different political colour could be found, such as the then minister of integration and future party leader, social democrat Mona Sahlin, who asserted that the purpose of veiling was to “conceal women and make them invisible” (Gardell 2010, Ch. 7).<sup>3</sup> After some investigation, the SNEA responded the inquiry with a memo (Hilborn 2003) to all Swedish schools, in which their appointed investigator, Ingegård Hilborn, acknowledged the headmasters’ right to prohibit Burqa on the local level, in her/his own school.

*If the wearing of Burqa, according to a serious judgment, runs the risk cause disturbance, for example as quarrel between students, or if other students feel worried or unsafe, or if discussions claim of unreasonable amount of time, the school administration may, by means of the general school rules, or a decision in the concrete case, prohibit students to wear Burqa at school. [...] It might [also] be difficult for a teacher who cannot perceive the facial expression of a student to find out whether students have understood a question or a statement; in a similar way, the interaction between the students may be obstructed. That disposes the school to prohibit the wearing of Burqa at school by pedagogical reasons (Hilborn 2003:11).*

The legal matter of this memo never was made clear, as it was neither a law, a decree nor a regulation, but nevertheless it seemed to have a steering influence in many schools (see below). The guiding principles were held to be in line with the Swedish constitution and the guidelines for the educational system, the European convention on human rights and the United Nations convention on the rights of the child (on the other hand, it lacked any reference to canonical pedagogical texts, although its conclusions relied heavily on some very specific assumption concerning the nature of learning processes). Referring to the interpretations of the European convention on religious freedom by Swedish professor Reinhold Fahlbeck (2002, 2004), the SNEA asserted that the negative freedom of religion (“freedom *from* religion”) overtrumped the positive (“freedom of religion”), and that the legal protection for positive manifestations of religion – such as the wearing of Burqa or Niqab was “moderate” in Swedish judicial praxis. Regardless of its unclear legal status, the memo from SNEA gained authority, and an (informal) policy of non-toleration was carried through in this matter.

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<sup>3</sup> However, the political discourse of the then ruling Social Democratic Party (*Socialdemokratiska Arbetarpartiet*, SAP) was not coherent in this matter. Different opinions were expressed, although the equality argument depicted above held a strong position. Nevertheless, their political agency in judicial matters seemed to point in divergent directions.

Some years later, a new debate over Burqa and Niqab occurred in Swedish mainstream media. This time, the debate was even more intense and even more drawn-out (Gardell 2010:177). It all started in 2009, when Alia Khalifa, a 24 years old woman of Egyptian descent, reported her school, Åsö vuxengymnasium in Tensta, Stockholm, to the ombudsman against discrimination (Diskrimineringsombudsmannen, DO). She claimed that she had been exposed to discrimination from her school. The acts of discrimination were related to her Islamic faith, and the belief practices entailed. Alia, a practicing Muslim, covered (and still covers) her face with a burqa, and motivated it with reference to her Islamic belief. Already after a couple of days at the upper secondary education program for childcare, Barn- och fritidsprogrammet, she was explicitly told by the members of the school staff that her veiling practice was not allowed at school.<sup>4</sup> After two weeks, she was told that it was forbidden to cover ones face at the school, and that she had to choose between her ways of dressing, and to continue at the program. Faced with a threat of suspension, she decided to report her school to the DO. The school now stated that Alia could continue at the program as long as her case was handled at the ombudsman, provided she lifted the veil in front of the children at the preschool. Subsequently, they would find out whether the rules at the school were in line with Swedish law or not. Since the dissemination of SNEA's memo in 2003, the legal situation had changed. The legislation on different forms of discrimination – ethnic as well as other forms – had been sharpened. In particular, the legal protection from discrimination in educational institutions had been strengthened in 2006.

As mentioned above, Alia Khalifa's report to the DO led to a reborn and intensified debate on the practice of wearing Burqa and Niqab in public places in general, and in schools in particular. As the election of 2010 came closer, politicians started to react. In October 2009, two MP's of the agrarian Center party presented a bill for "the prohibition of Burqa and Niqab in society, in schools and workplaces" (quoted in Gardell 2010:178). In their bill, they asserted that

*The face of a human being – her eyes, nose and mouth – is her interface to the world and other human beings, and imagining an open society where more and more people covers their face, for example in public spaces, at work or at school does not seem to be an option for our future. The freedom of religions is extremely important and protected by the constitution, but there are some limits to it. We think that the boundary is set by the will or imposition to conceal ones face in public spaces or at work. An open society ought to consider setting the limit, and we suggest that the government investigates this question (Danielsson & Pettersson 2009).*

Moreover, they also claimed that someone has to "dare to discuss the veil as a problem", in order to the right-wing populists of Sverigedemokraterna should not be left alone with this question – thus obtain popularity and votes in the coming election. By and by, the liberal party *Folkpartiet* joined the debate, voicing a similar proposition; they put forward that it should be possible for schools administrations to prohibit complete veiling such as Burqa or Niqab at schools. "Education is communication. Education is premised on the interaction between teachers and pupils. It must be possible to see each other faces", their party leader Jan Björklund (2010, cf. Lundberg 2010, Scherlund 2010) asserted.

In a public debate during the same election campaign, broadcasted in public service radio, then Social democratic party leader Mona Sahlin and Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt, leader of liberal conservative *Moderaterna* party, had a heated discussion. Reinfeldt claimed that he "does not believe in a society where women aren't allowed to appear [in public]", and that he "doesn't want to see women in Burqa in the [Stockholm] underground", and "wants to press back those who sympathize with the covering of women", although he stressed that this was his personal opinions, and that he

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<sup>4</sup> The account of the case is based on Alia's own presentation in an article in the Swedish daily *Expressen* (Khalifa 2009). However, it does not differ in any significant way from other accounts that I have received during the fieldwork.

does not want any legislation against the practices of Burqa or Niqab (Sundén Jelmini 2010, Karlsson & Hedlund 2010). Sahlin, still critical to the practice in question, claimed that veiling is an instance of oppression against women. She also dismissed a prohibition, and criticized the French anti-veiling legislation for being stigmatizing (Karlsson & Hedlund 2010). Lars Ohly, leader of the leftist party *Vänsterpartiet*, was one of the leading politicians who distinctly opposed a prohibition (Ramqvist 2009).

Without any doubt, the practice of complete veiling was one of key debates in the 2010 election in Sweden, and it has been one of the major issues in the politics of integration during the last five years (Malm 2009; Gardell 2010). As noted above, it has been discussed both in relation to gender and education. The positions in the debate have been more or less overlapping with those in other western European countries, with the exception that it focused almost solely on the practices of Burqa and Niqab, leaving the dress-code of Hijab in the background; obviously, the covering of *faces* was one central ingredients of the debate, in 2003 as well as in 2009-2010 (cf. Hilborn 2003, Danielsson & Pettersson 2009, Björklund 2010). On the one hand, there was a claim for recognition of different veiling practices motivated by an Islamic faith, which in the main is motivated with references to the freedom of religion (Khalifa 2009, Ramqvist 2009). The support for this position was mainly to be found in the political left (cf. Ramqvist 2009, Munther 2010), but also among a quite narrow fringe of liberals (Bauhn 2010), and a small number of conservatives (Poirier Martinsson 2010).

On the other hand, the opposition against the practice of complete veiling and/or the support for different prohibitive measures was based on notions of gender equality, secular freedom from religion (cf. Gardell 2010), Swedish traditions and standards, and/or social interaction, together with pedagogical considerations. Thus, it was claimed that the practices of Burqa and Niqab constituted central elements in the repression of women in patriarchal cultures (Pekgul 2011, cf. Lorenzoni 2010); that manifest religious dressing should not be visible in public places (Azme Rasmussen 2009, Åkesson & Ekeröth 2010), and that veiling is alien to traditional Swedish mores (Dervishi 2009), such as a “traditionally” Swedish benevolent attitude towards gender equality (Pekgul 2011). It was also said that complete veiling obstruct social interaction at public places, workplaces (Danielsson & Pettersson 2009), and – in a general sense – in open societies (Alcala 2009), as well education process at schools (Kjöler 2009, Levander 2009, Björklund 2010). The opposition against the practices of Burqa and Niqab, and the calls for a prohibition, was voiced all over the political spectrum, from the Social Democrats to the Liberal Conservatives and Christian Democrats; needless to say, right-wing anti-migration populists such as the Sweden Democrats were among those who voiced their opposition most powerful (cf. Åkesson & Ekeröth 2010).

Apart from the debates at the internet, in media and among politicians, and intellectuals – what do we know about the general public opinion towards the practices of Burqa and Niqab? In their yearly study *Mångfaldsbarometern* (Barometer of Diversity), sociologists Orlando Mella, Irving Palm and Kristina Bromark (2011) measure the attitudes to different kinds of veiling in public places, such as schools and working places. From the 2011 survey, they conclude that the resistance in Sweden against the Burqa and the Niqab is compact but slightly lower level compared to 2010. Thus, 88.8 % and 86.2 % of the population find it (totally or partly) unacceptable to wear Burqa and Niqab, respectively, at school or at work (Mella *et al* 2011:30), whereas 69.0 % and 64.6 %, respectively, find it (totally or partly) unacceptable to wear Burqa and Niqab at other public places. The opposition against using Chador at school or at work is smaller, and decrease when comparing the years 2010 and 2011. The issue of using the Chador in other public places may also even less resistance. The Shayla and Hijab practices are assessed by a majority as acceptable for use in school or at work, and the acceptance is even higher in other public places.

Obviously, the covering of ones face remains a threshold, when it comes to questions of acceptance and recognition. A general attitude of non-tolerance towards complete veiling is widespread in

Sweden - and it has been around for some years now, according to earlier studies of Mella and Palm (2008, 2009, 2010). It might be the case that this wide-spread non-tolerant attitude explains why the question of Burqa and Niqab at school received large-scale attention during the 2010 electoral campaign. As noted above, it was commonly argued among liberal and conservative right-wing parties that it was necessary to “dare to discuss the veil as a problem” (Danielsson & Pettersson 2009, cf. Björklund 2010), in order not to let the right-wing populists of Sverigedemokraterna be left alone with this question. Whether this claim for discursive courage should be interpreted as an ambition to extend the liberal notion of freedom from religion, or as a concession to the anti-multiculturalist project of radical right-wing populism is still under debate, and a way to increase the number of votes from xenophobic strata of the electorate, is still under debate.

Regardless of their motives, it seems like that the political agenda of the Swedish liberals and conservatives are brought closer to the radical right –wing populists’ in this matter. This signifies a change of course among mainstream Swedish political parties; since the beginning of the 90’s, the issue of migration and multiculturalism hasn’t received as much attention as in many other western European Countries during election campaigns (Dahlström & Esaiasson 2009, Rydgren 2010, for a different view, cf. Green-Pedersen & Krogstrup 2008), then signalling a dismissive approach to the endeavours of the radical right-wing populists. This could imply that the political ontology of the latter has gained further influence in Sweden. Nevertheless, if the rejection of veiling practices such as Burqa or Niqab is to be regarded as an act of non-toleration (cf. Dobbernack & Moodod 2011), then the political agenda of the Swedish (non-radical) right clearly showed some proofs of non-toleration during the 2010 electoral campaign.

However, by the end of 2010, the DO had completed their investigation, and made their verdict official. In an article in Sweden’s biggest and most influential daily, *Dagens Nyheter*, head of DO Katri Linna published an article, in which she explained (her interpretation of) the legal situation. In sum, she claimed that the exclusion of a student from education because of the wearing of Niqab conflicts with the present legislation on discrimination (Linna 2010). Still, DO choose not to take the case to court, since the complainant had reached a compromise with the school. Thus, no precedent was in sight in the nearest future. Partly because of the latter, and partly because of the content of the decision, the verdict was contested, debated and criticized (Hellqvist 2010, Åkesson & Ekeröth 2010).

### ***What is wrong with Burqa and Niqab?***

As noted above, different categories of interviewees were approached during the fieldwork; teachers, headmasters, union representatives, representatives for Islamic organizations, politicians, municipality civil servants and lawyers - each one of them representing different professional perspectives on Niqab and Burqa. The significance of the practice of veiling varied, according to professional activity. Already from the outset, though, it might be said that a certain convergence in standpoints could be noted. Just a few persons expressed values or attitudes deviating from the main tendency. This study suggests that the discourse on Niqab and Burqa expressed within the realm of the Swedish educational system – at the primary and secondary levels – moulds up to a quite homogenous phenomenon. Later on, the significations and the logic of that particular discourse will be outlined.

### The relevance of the media debate

The first convergence is to be found in the case that almost every interviewee working in schools call attention to the fact that they never met a student in Burqa or Niqab. For instance, Martin, a teacher at an upper secondary school, points out that he never had a pupil dressed in Burqa and Niqab; “*I have seen them in the schoolyard, in the area, but I never have had them in here*” – although Martins’

school is situated in the area which has the highest proportion of migrants in the Stockholm town district, among them a large number of Somali migrants. Ann, who teaches at a primary school, but exclusively at the highest forms, notes that she never had any pupil with a Niqab or a Burqa, although she has been working in areas with a high proportion of migrants for at least a decade; “*we don’t have any veiled girls except for those in Hijab, I have never experienced that*”. Lena, who has been working as headmaster in one of the most “immigrant-dense” suburbs in Stockholm for almost 15 years, said that she “*never had one single student dressed in Burqa, and only one in Niqab*”. Thus, it must already from the outset be said that the interviewees’ experience of meeting young women dressed in Burqa or Niqab was strictly limited.

Moreover, a few of them also stated explicitly that the media debate exaggerated the relevance of the above mentioned veiling practices to the everyday life at school. They claimed that Burqa and Niqab is not at all common in Swedish problem, it is a social phenomenon which you rarely, if at all, meet. For example, John, who is a headmaster, notes that the public debate, according to him, is distorted.

*Fredrik: But do you consider it to be an issue, does young women in Burqa or Niqab ever show up?*

*John: No, it is not an issue. But from what I know, nationwide, it is not an issue at all, no matter of which kind of socioeconomic area it might be ... it is a non-issue, except for in the national political debate.*

*Fredrik: How and when do you encounter this matter – except for when it is debated in media?*

*John: In media, that’s where I take notice of it, it is right there it ever shows up. But it spreads out, it rubs off on ... in discussions among school administratives, maybe not at my school, but between headmasters, in different contexts ... in further education classes, in conferences, that’s where it shows up, mainly with an air of ridicule added, as a non-issue, as if it is slightly pathetic that such a media hype on a question which is non-existent.*

*Fredrik: So, that is the most pronounced opinion?*

*John: At least among those I meet. But I mostly meet Stockholm headmasters, or ... maybe not. I do meet headmasters from all parts of Sweden, but above all Stockholm headmasters - and over here, it’s like that. You take notice of the media coverage, but with a scornful sneer. [...] And among those headmasters who still want to discuss it, they consequently regard it as a symbolic issue, rather than a practical problem, as is it a matter of drawing a symbolic boundary, “you cannot go further”.*

John is very critical of the ways in which the veiling practices are discussed in media, in particular when it comes to its relevance for educational questions; “*it is a non-issue ... it is not an issue at all*” to which “*an air of ridicule [is] added*”. No other interviewee develops such a strong critique. Also, the opinions on whether or not it is worthwhile to actually discuss those practices at great length differed. Some of the interviewees, as Peter, upper secondary school teacher and union representative, disagree with the standpoint put forth by John; he claims that “*it was necessary to discuss*” the practice in question, since it touched upon some serious matters such as justice, power and the public presence of religion in society. Peter admits that never met a young girl completely veiled in his classroom, and that his standpoints on whether it should be prohibited or permitted to dress like that “*definitely not [comes] from personal experience*”.

Thus, the school professionals and other interviewees questioned whether the scope of the debate put at disposal in media corresponded to its importance. On the other hand, most interviewees - with very few exceptions - thought that it the practice of complete veiling “has to be discussed”, to put in the phrasing of Peter quoted above, and expressed a number of objections against wearing Niqab or Burqa at school. And even though some of the topics from the media debate were dismissed, could some clear and legible instances of disapproval be discerned. The dismissal of the media debate was not an expression of acceptance; rather, it was call for bringing the professional dimension to the fore. And, as we will see below, this did not always bring about an attitude of recognition or tolerance.

## The problem of identification

The main arguments against the practice of wearing Burqa or Niqab in the Swedish school could be summed up below three separate headings: matters of identity, communication and gender. The second was the one most forcefully spelled out. On the other hand, the question gender and equality, which was - as seen above - so frequent in the debate on the internet, was quite seldom explicated. Objections relating to identification and communication were predominant. In addition to the arguments against complete veiling, a number of interviewees also questioned the wide applicability to the freedom of religion. They claimed that other rights had an overriding importance, and gained superiority over the claims for religious freedom.

Let me begin with a description of the first case – how issues of identity and identifications made up an argument for not permitting complete veiling in school, thus suggesting restrictions in the freedom of religion. Still, it must also be noted but some of teachers recognized possible solution to the problem of identification, thus implying the demands for confirmation of personal identity and religious freedom could be met simultaneously – is someone was prepared to cover the eventuality of costs. For instance, Martin, the upper secondary school teacher that we also quoted above, claims that there is practical dimension that has to be clarified:

*Martin: The practical dimension, concerning identification – really, just who is present in the classroom? That's the big issue. [...] In general, I think, in an educational system, you must show ... who you are. You should do that. Just because we are civil servants that do the marking, marking that is irrevocable. Period! We can hardly change them ourselves.*  
*Fredrik: It is an exercise of public authority?*  
*Martin: Yes. And then, you want to be sure that it is the right person.*

Peter, the other upper secondary school acknowledged the same problem of identification:

*Peter: It would be a quite strange society, if you could just go around and ... well, if I went around town with my balaclava, which I wear when I go skating and it's freezing ... I would probably have a lot of problems, for example if I had to prove my identity. And my wife, she's a nurse, she says that there are some problems connected to it, in different situations ... and that some of those in Burqa take an advantage of it. I don't in which situations, at the driver's license test maybe, etc. So, behind the religious norm, or protected by it, you can get into some mischief. In every group, you'll find some individuals prepared to take advantage of such things. [...] And I think that most [of my colleagues] would demand the school to put the foot down. The norm system of the school demands that all students are identifiable, and possible to interpret, when it comes to the facial expressions. Ok, it is not on the societal level, to stipulate exactly how people should dress, but the school is a world in itself, where ... a certain minimum level of ... what concerns so to speak personal ... personal expression, well you know what I mean, must be guaranteed.*

Lars, the political advisor at the liberal Folkpartiet party, expressed a similar fear:

*Lars: It is also discussed, some kind of uncertainty, whether you know or not who actually is sitting in front of you, or if it is someone else who showed up, I mean, if we talk about the Burqa anyway. A lot of people think it is unpleasant with someone who hides her face. You're sitting together in a group, having a discussion, and teacher is at front, by the desk, and then, there is one person ... you do not know, does she take part in the discussion or not? Does she listen? Is she attentive?*

First of all, the interviewees put forth an argument closely related to the activity of the school, and its quality of public institution: complete veiling cannot be tolerated, since the teachers must be able to identify the student. He or she must know which students are present in the classroom, or whose examination is to be marked. Even so, Martin recognizes it as an exercise of public authority. In Peter's case, the quest for identification obtains an almost profound meaning: the personal character behind or dimension of the expression must be secured. Secondly, and related to the latter, it is

claimed that the specific conditions at the school make it possible to circumvent the freedom of religion. Thirdly, reference to diverse “problems” outside schools are made, and some suspicion is thrown on “some” person employing the practice concerned in order to obtain illegitimate advantages. Once again, implicating misuse and hidden mischief is employed as a discursive strategy. Lastly, we can also note that the argument of identification merges together with the argument of communication: do I know with whom I am talking? Whose knowledge is expressed in the saying?

The primarily school teacher Ann developed a similar standpoint, but she also recognized an objection to her own argument, when she was elaborating on it, in relation to the case of Alia Khalifa (cf. above).

*Ann: In general, I'm not hostile to immigrants, and I think that most things are ok, I mean, I do a lot of stuff which other people think are strange, according to their culture, but then I thought, when I heard about it [the case of Alia Khalifa], if you are covered a lot, and even wear gloves, then I think, if you work with kids, who are used to it, and have known it, then it is something else, but if you never has experienced it, then it could be frightening for children. So, I was rather provoked. I was thinking about it. If she could teach in that dress, then I could teach in a Father Christmas mask ... Father Christmas at Christmas Eve; that is something positive, still it could be frightening, because you can't see the features of his face, any motion ... so, then I thought: if she could teach in one of those [Burqas], then I could teach in a Father Christmas mask. But then again, that is also interesting ... if I had a student who covered all the way, with a Burqa, I don't think it would be a problem, because I'd get to know her, and recognize her voice. I would recognize her anyway, so ... i had some objections, thinking about doing other each other's exams, and stuff like that, with some cheating involved, but ... if it were my student, I would recognize her, I am her teacher for four years, that's a long relationship, and it wouldn't be ruined because of this. It would take some time to establish the relation, but it wouldn't be ruined.*

So, although the identification argument is spelled out, a counterargument is also developed. The enduring quality of the relation between teacher and student makes it possible, according to Ann, to identify a student, although she's dressed in a Burqa. Linn, one of the students at the teacher education, developed a similar argument, although more forcefully:

*Linn: Then we could go on and shut down schools for blind as well, I mean, they can't see each other, can they? I think this question is so ridiculous, and since when did we have to see each other to actually know each other? There is so many ways communicate.*

Apart from the pro- and contra arguments developed in relation to the matter of identification, we could also take notice of an element of ridicule in Ann's discourse; she is comparing the veiling practice of Burqa with a Father Christmas mask, thus delegitimizing a possible claim for freedom of religion by comparing Islamic religious belief practices with highly secular traditions devoid of any transcendent dimension. Thus, the argument based on the problems of identification is repeatedly articulated in a discursive framing where the practice of complete veiling is delegitimized, through ridicule or allusions to diffuse threats. However, the argument in itself does not give rise to any clear-cut calls for prohibition. The limit to tolerance is hard to detect in this matter, as the calls for prohibition is implicated rather than explicated.

### The problem of communication

The other “serious question” that came upfront seemed to be less open to negotiation and solutions, though. The most commonly voiced reason arguing against the practice of wearing Burqa or Niqab in school, and thereby implying the need for a prohibition, was that complete veiling practices was supposed to constitute a serious obstacle for communication, and by reason of that making difficult or even impossible the learning processes that the teachings at school aimed at.

One of those who voiced this argument was Peter, one of the upper secondary education teachers. Taking his own professional attitude as a vantage point for the argument against Burqa and Niqab in school, he calls attention to the fact that pupils express themselves partly verbally and partly in other ways, through their facial expressions and intonation, which always try to acknowledge during teaching. Peter refers to general linguist findings, which – according to him - indicate that humans communicate in three different ways: with the content of your words, your intonation and your facial expression; and that it is fundamental to make eye contact with the pupil or the student.

*Peter: My fundamental attitude, as a teacher, is that students partly express themselves verbally, but partly also ... everything possible from facial expressions and intonation and so on. Linguists talk about three different areas of communication – first, the things that you do with your voice, second, things that you do ... intonation and so on, and for me, it is obvious that you must see the eyes of the student, you must be sure of that you have a specific student in front of you, and not her sister, and right there, there's the limit, for me, in my profession. I must be able to see, to take notice of all linguistic expressions from the student I'm dealing with, otherwise, you feel a bit handicapped as a teacher, limited in your professional practice.*

*Fredrik: In which way*

*David: Well, you can't interpret the reactions of the student. I teach in Swedish and English, and when it comes to asking questions in the classroom, and keep a discussion going, it is a matter of ... respect for the students, to let them in if you think that they got something to say, and to let go, if they are under pressure. [...] And when the students interact between themselves, you know from the way they communicate non-verbally, if there is something wrong. So, professionally, it [the Burqa] is a barrier.*

Moreover, the concerns of identity and communication are intertwined, according to this argument; you have to be sure of that you communicate with the student, and not her sister, Peter claims, if you can't see the face of the person that you are communicating with, you are handicapped as a teacher and limited in your professional, educational agency. You cannot interpret the reactions of the student. Today, interaction with the student means that you have to let him or her into discussion when you apprehend that he or she has something to say, and knows what to say, and to let her or him go, when the pupil does not know what to say. The same goes for the interaction between the pupils; the communication is also reliant on non-verbal expressions. Strictly professional, the niqab and the burqa constitute a barrier for communication.

David, former teacher and union representative of higher station at the NUT (National Union of Teachers) argued along a similar line. He claimed that the issue at stake had a clear pedagogical dimension. An important part of the communication between human beings, in general as well as in school, David stated, is non-verbal communication, for example communication through reading and interpreting facial expressions and bodily movements. Thus, it might be possible read and interpret and understand the facial expressions of each other. It is an important part of human communication, David continues, which might signal something important.

*David: The NUT has made a number of statements, in which we emphasized the importance of actually see the face of the students, to connect, it is important that you actually connect to the students, that you have a close relation to the student, which is rendered more difficult when the student wears a Burqa. Or Niqab. [...] It's the communicative aspect, to faculty to communicate does not only reside in verbal and written language, but also in facial expressions and movements, there are many different aspects of communication, and a very important part, which signals a lot, is the facial expression. You really don't know how you are perceived by a person on the phone. It's a matter of restricted communication, that's why you often want a personal meeting, an exchange. Communication with facial expressions and bodily movements makes it easier to grasp what someone is actually saying. As a teacher, you do want to know whether a student really understands or not, you can hear a person say "yes", but out of the facial expression, you can tell that he or she doesn't understand at all.*

Thus, according to David, the practice of Burqa and Niqab constitutes and obstacle for the enactment of teaching professions. Moreover, it is not only a personal opinion, but a standpoint expressed by the NUT in the ongoing public debate on educational policy. Until present, the NUT has not yet promoted any particular standpoint in some of the juridical matters, for example whether or not it should be possible for school administrations to issue local prohibitions on the practice of Burqa and/or Niqab – or to ban them all over. They had awaited the verdict from the DO, and when the latter decided not to take the case to court, they were quite discontented. Although the DO were clear regarding the legal status of local prohibitions, the NUT asked for a court ruling –mainly because their members requested clear and unequivocal guidelines.

Lena, one of the headmasters, claimed that the practice of Burqa “*conflicts with the basic principles of the teacher profession*”. You become a teacher “*because you have an interest for human communication*”, but since “*it is hard to communicate with someone who covers her face*”, this fundamental conflict arises. Even the interviewees working outside school stressed the importance of communication, for example the civil servants Ibrahim and Sylvia. “*The Burqa is the border line*”, Ibrahim states, “*it is too much, even for my taste, as a migrant from a Muslim country*”, and Sylvia continues, “*Yes, because everything is based on the contacts we have with each other, you ought to know with whom you are talking. But the hijab does not constitute any problem [in that sense]*”. “*It is a problem of communication*”, Lars, the political advisor at Folkpartiet claimed, “*you can’t communicate as usual, face to face, facial expressions and all that*”.

Thus, the wearing of Burqa and Niqab is met with opposition in this particular matter. No other standpoint is as common in this empirical material as this one: the practice of complete veiling is regarded as not compatible with the general conditions of instruction in primary and secondary schooling. It might be said that the attitudes and demands are always phrased in the positive (“the students have to show their faces”) but almost never negatively (“Burqa and Niqab should be banned”). Moreover, in this specific matter, a number of interviewees – such as Ibrahim and Sylvia, see above - made a distinction between Burqa and Niqab on the one hand, and Hijab on the other. Since the latter did not constitute a problem of communication, it was not considered to be controversial or blameworthy; “*the scarf [hijab] had never been a topic of discussion*”, Sarah noted in her description of the internal discussions of the STU. “*That’s a big difference*”, Alice – one of the students – noted; “*as long as I can see the face, I remain calm*”. Still, it has to be emphasized that it is the alleged problems of communication which most frequently motivate the manifestations of non-tolerance against complete veiling.

### The gender dimension and other less explicated arguments

Thirdly, some interviewees made some objections to the wearing of Burqa and Niqab because they considered it to be in conflict with dominant norms and values on gender equality. As noted above, this viewpoint was not expressed as often in this material as in the popular and mediated discourse on complete veiling. David, trustee at the NUT, developed a more explicit opinion on the relation between Burqa, Niqab and gender equality:

*David: We always try to focus on the pupil, top the pupil at the center of attention, because the well-being of the pupil is always of most importance, and the right to education, and the right to instructions. And then you have to solve all the other issues, at the side. But it is a complication, the ... the freedom of religion, which I think that you should have, at the same time as we have a gender equality discussion in Sweden, equality between the sexes, and ... it is of uttermost importance that teachers signals the right stuff to the students. And of course, there is a complication, if we have a teachers all covered up in a Niqab, what kind of message is conveyed, about gender equality? You might think that there is a clash between two different but equally reasonable standpoints. One the one hand, our struggle in Sweden for equality between the sexes, on the other hand, our understanding of and the rights of minorities to practice their religion. And*

*that is a very tricky question, and we had some expectations that the Ombudsman on discrimination should help us, with their investigation.*

Rather than objecting to the presence of students dressed in Niqab or Burqa, David calls the veiling among teachers in question. Thus, he deviates slightly from the main themes of the Swedish debate, since it most often focus on complete veiling in schools in general, and not among teachers. Still, his objection has some bearing on the case of Alia Khalifa (cf. above), since she was a student at a teachers education program. David states that the presence of a teacher in Niqab indirectly communicates a message to the students, whose content it add odds with dominant notions of gender equality in Sweden. The constituents of the clash of values are not explicated, though. The ways in which the practice Niqab collides with the allegedly Swedish standards of quality is not spelled out at all – although gender equality is inscribed in a Swedish Self-presentation (“*our struggle in Sweden for equality between the sexes*”).

The implicit nature of David’s argument is parallel to the ways in which Peter, teachers at upper secondary level, develops his argument. He claims that the wearing of Burqa and Niqab puts “*important questions*” up front, not the least since “*it would gain a lot of attention, if a women in Burqa shows up in my classroom*”, first and foremost the question of “*the power relation between the sexes*”. In order to clarify the relation between “*important questions*” and veiling practices, Peter emphasizes that he throughout his professional action always has tried to set up a social environment in the classroom, where it is feasible for everyone to participate (“*bli delaktiga*”). Still, he does not put it explicit in which way the presence of a Burqa affects gender relations. He just notes that it probably would affect the gendered power relations in the classroom. Although only implicated by Peter, a theme frequent in the media debate is seems to take shape here: the practice of wearing Burqa or Niqab is at odds with established conceptions of gender equality. But when it comes the making clear of what could possibly be right or wrong, in an elaborated, normative way, Peter takes a step back. He admits that his judgments are strictly personal, and derived from a context not related to school or teaching practices.

If not solely focusing on gender relation, we will discover a similar, implicit normative stand taken by Martin, another teacher active at the upper secondary level. He states that he’s quite often are prone to reflect on issues such as migration, traditions, and the traditions that already are present in the country, and his general attitude is that cultural diversity and mixing is a good thing, when you adapt “*the best of every culture*”. Nevertheless, he questions the general purpose of wearing a Burqa, and he regards it as a provocation. Those who wear it, and claims it is a product of their free will, does so with a purpose wants to provoke and challenge, Martin says, they want to “*provoke and test the democracy*”. The greatest weakness of democracy, he continues, is its openness: everything is permitted, even undemocratic viewpoints. And that perspective of democracy, Martin has no problem with the phenomenon; he doesn’t bother whether people are “*strolling around naked on the town or covered by a Burqa or Niqab*”, he says.

Still, Martin is not only neutral to the practice of veiling. He also claims that the wearing of Burqa and Niqab “*send signals*”, although Martins does not clarify what kind of signals they send, he also says that the women in question makes him think of hooligans who run around the town in order to destroy, with their faces covered wearing balaclavas. “*But that’s my personal connotation*”, Martin admits, and he adds that he thinks that those who don’t want to show their face have “*mischief in their mind*”, which they are trying to hide away. It is not necessarily true, he points out, but it is nevertheless his feeling.

The discourses of above all Martin and Peter share some commonalities. As already mentioned, an implicit morality is expressed. There are no clear statements on what is good or bad, right or wrong, or normal or deviant. All the same, some rejections and dislike come to the surface. The veiling practices at stake are implicitly coupled with hooliganism, destruction, hidden mischief, provocations or even threats to democracy, and feelings of alienation. Of course, it does not make sense to claim that Martin

and Peter actually *state* that women in Burqa, for example, are prone to destruction or a threat to democracy. Rather, I suggest that we may distinguish the outlines of a “semantic field”, in which there is an affinity between some of the significations. Chains of metonymic and/or synonymic relations are linked together. For example, “veiling” is related to “the hidden”, “the hidden” is related to “hidden mischief”, “hidden mischief” is related to “hooliganism” and “destruction”; moreover, “veiling” is also related to “provocations”, which also is related to “provocations against democracy”. In order to use a concept developed by the Swedish ethnologist Per-Markku Ristilampi (1994), we may discern a “dark poetry” at play here, implying there is something fishy about Burqa and Niqab.

As noted above, it may do not make sense to claim that the chains of metonymic or synonymic relations outlined above represent the values, attitudes or norms of the teachers interviewed. As an instance of a discourse analysis, the mapping out of a semantic field does not claim to represent such phenomena or entities. Rather than depicting intentions or instances of an individual agency, the analytic strategy of mapping out a semantic field intends to outline some features of the “frame of reference” that enclose the statements of the persons in the study.

Thus, objections to the practices of Burqa and Niqab premised on notions of gender equality could be found in our empirical material. Still, they were not as frequent and as explicated as in mainstream media debates. On the contrary, the arguments are quite implicit, as for example to ones quoted above. Thus the construction of a dominated Islamic, middle-eastern femininity, and a corresponding dominant, patriarchal masculinity, which is such a common motif in many Western discourses on gender relations in Islamic and/or Middle Eastern societies (Scott 2007, cf. Spivak 1988), is neither particularly frequent nor elaborated at length in this material. On the other hand, we find a discourse on veiling practices in which manifest objections aren’t spell out, but rather communicated indirectly, for example through the establishment of metonymic or synonymic chains, thus conjuring up a frame of reference in which the practice of veiling tends to be related to deprecating or negatively valued objects or phenomena.

### The practice of veiling and the everyday life in schools

Obviously, practices of veiling are imbued with different meanings, not least Burqa and Niqab. For some, it signifies reverence for God (Karlsson Minganti 2007), or resistance to hegemonic secularization and/or the (racist) prejudices of the majority (Yuval-Davies 1994); for others, it signifies oppression of women, support of terrorism and/or other threats to the parliamentary democracy (cf. Scott 2007). In our empirical material, objections to the practices of Burqa or Niqab was now and then articulated within in a discourse which also contained chains of synonyms and/or metonyms which established associative connections between the veils and hidden mischief, threats and provocations. This strategy for producing implicit meaning must not be overlooked. In a slightly more explicit way, though, Burqas and Niqabs were also discussed in relation to other phenomena which also brought the questions of religiously motivated practices in the Swedish schools system to the fore. In general terms, the practice of veiling could be interpreted as an expression of “negotiated participation”; on the one hand, it is a request to hang on to a religious culture, and on the other hand, it is an expression of a willingness to become integrated and participate on equal terms with the majority population in important spheres of society. The first part becomes a necessary condition to fulfil the second part.

As noted above, the goal of equivalence was often referred to among our interviewees, when criticizing the establishment of Muslim denominational schools. In most cases implicitly, but sometimes explicitly, it was stated that the right to equivalent education all over Sweden was more important than the rights inherent in the freedom of religion, and that the former should gain priority over the latter, if they clashed. Moreover, the goal of equivalence was also referred to on many other

occasions during the interviews, when it came to the matter of mapping out the limits of religious freedom. In this context, it became evident that the quest for equivalence relied on two legs – on the one hand emphasizing the necessity to abide by the laws and the national curriculum, on the other hand the aspiration to maximize the equality of opportunities. John, who worked as a headmaster in a primary school, was among whom those emphasized the centrality of the national curricula:

*John: The content of the national curricula is clear. The school system should be non-confessional, which means that we can't take part in religious festivals, if it isn't for educational purposes. If it's for an educational purpose, then it is put in a context, it's not just because it's that time of the year, it's because you study a particular religion, the tradition of that religion, and the belief practices of that religion. So, to remove the festival of Advent, that was an easy task, it was the obvious thing to do, from the viewpoint of the national curriculum - which also is right from a pragmatic viewpoint, in that kind of area [an area with many Muslim residents]. You just remove the problem. But a quest for not taking part in instructions on religion, or, which happened me today, a request not to attend to the sex instructions, [...] that's different. That's tricky. It is considerably more difficult to act rational, because there we have a law which I, as a civil servant, am entrusted to maintain, viz. that every kid should take part, and reach the specified course objectives.*

On this point, the opinions expressed reached a consensus. The centrality of the law and the national curricula was crucial. For example, Mehdi, the headmaster of the Islamic denominational primary school, explained at great length that the curriculum of his schools in every detail followed the national curriculum, and the specific Islamic content consisted of additions to the compulsory subjects. One of the reasons for emphasizing the demand to follow the national curriculum was that many teachers and headmasters acknowledged the too frequent prevalence of exceptions.

Lena, one of the other headmasters, noted for example that some religiously motivated demands had been raised from parents, above all “when it comes to modify education and instructions”, “notably when parents wants to exempt their children from instructions”, above all in three subjects: music, physical education and natural science. In general, she did not meet those demands, though. She emphasized that her standpoint was motivated on grounds of principle: “it is a matter of equivalence and legality; all children has equal rights to education, the same syllabus, and the instructions which are inscribed in the national curriculum”. Lena’s argument is central to this matter, and illustrates a frequently expressed opinion: exemptions from instructions are generally not tolerated or accepted, and the reason for this refusal is the evident deviation from the principle of equivalence.

Still, some adjustments were made in order to facilitate for the enactment of religious belief practices, when no significant clashes were discerned. More or less every interviewee working at a school reported that they almost without exemption managed to arrange the scheme so that teachers’ seminars were held by the time of the Eid festival at the end of Ramadan, thus scheduling for an “unofficial” Eid school holiday.

Quite often, the argument of equivalence was entailed by - and gained rhetoric support from - narratives of personal experience (Labov 1972) or hypothetical “semi-narratives” which illustrated not only the clash between different rights, but also between different generations of migrants. When Sarah, the senior official at the STU, called attention to the fact that many members of her union oppose exemptions permitted by headmaster, she employed this discursive strategy.

*Sarah: They have a major problem with headmasters that exempt students from instructions. They [the teachers] are the ones who has to pick up the fight, when the parents wants the kids to be exempted from the camp school, “there’s no problem with the showers”, “the girls and the boys are strictly separated”, being forced to stand up, all by yourself, that’s much worse than the veiling debate. I pity the girl. First, you can see all her joy, her expectations for the camp school, and then her disappointment, when she’s not allowed to join.*

According to those narratives, it happens now and then that the interests and preferences between migrant and/or Muslim parents and children differ. The parents want to exempt their children from certain activities, notably camp schools, physical education or instructions in swimming, while the children wants to take part in it – and, as illustrated above – do suffer if they're not allowed to take part. In other examples, it is narrated how the children are secretive of the activities at schools, for example when it comes to sex education, for example actively hiding text books, in order not to be exempted. Thus, it is both hypothesised and depicted that there is a cleavage between the parental generation and their children, suggesting that they have diverging preferences, interests and – maybe – perspectives regarding the significance of religion.

Calling attention to this cleavage is central when giving priority to the rights of the child over the freedom of religion. This order of argument was employed by Sarah, for example, when she described the values of the STU, which, according to her, were overlapping with the values of most Swedes. You “*have to be careful about children and which path they choose*”, she stated, and “*which religion they choose, and which general path they choose*”. In order to safeguard the interests of the children, you “*have to pinion the power of the parents, because, in a way, their power is total*”, she continued. The parents have the possibility to indoctrinate the child, Sarah stated, and also – if they choose to educate it at home – “*to isolate it from impressions of the outside world*”. Indoctrination is entirely different from the purpose with schooling, she notes; the school should be broad, in the way that the teaching activities represent the diversity and the possibilities of the society, a striving which can be “*discerned in the fact that instructions in religion has replaces Christianity as a school subject*”. In this framing, the primary socialisation of the children in the family is represented in terms of indoctrination and the execution of power, and almost regarded as potential hazard, while the secondary socialization at the educational institutions safeguards the freedom of choice and the rights of the child.

### Summary

A number of objections to the practice of wearing Burqa or Niqab are put forth by our interviewees. In contrast to the media debate, the argument of gender equality was relatively downgraded. Rather, the interviewees focused on assumed problems with identification and communication. It was said that the abovementioned veiling practices obstructed the possibility of identifying the students at school, and also rendered the communication – and hence the instructions – at school more difficult. In comparison with the question of Islamic denominational schools, the non-tolerant stance was more manifest, although few explicit calls for a prohibition were made. Moreover, a specific discursive framing of the veiling practices could be discerned. The wearing of Burqa or Niqab was associated with phenomena such as mischief and the hidden, thus casting suspicion over the practice in question.

As an instance of the everyday life, rather than an institutional arrangement, veiling practices could arguably be considered to be of less concern for educational policy than the establishment and maintenance of Islamic denominational schools. Still, the question of prohibition has gained a lot media attention during the last years, and brought the regulating dimension to the fore. And though our material contains few explicit calls for prohibition, several interviewees claimed that a teacher must see the face of the student in order to instruct and educate. And although the goal of equivalence was less relevant in this matter, the practice of veiling was questioned with reference to universal human rights, as the rights of the child. The right of the parent to exert influence in religious matter was questioned, since it could be regarded as a limitation of the freedom to choose direction in life - religiously and existentially.

## (4) Conclusion

### *Accept of Islamic belief practices in Sweden*

The general aim of this report was to describe and analyze the embodiment of acceptance and recognition in discourses and practices which address cultural diversity in the Swedish educational system. In order to fulfil this general aim, we studied how teachers, headmasters, union representatives, civil servants and representatives of political parties or the civil society discuss and relate to the claims for recognition put forth by Muslim practitioners and/or policy measures designed to reach the fulfilment of those claims. Two cases are studied: the establishment of Muslim independent schools and the claims to dress veiled in public schools, put forth by Muslim youth. The purpose of this study was threefold. First, to describe the general attitudes among teachers, headmasters and other categories of professionals with an interest in educational matters towards the existence of Islamic denominational schools and the practice of wearing Burqa and/or Niqab in public schools; second, to describe which arguments that are employed in the opposition of those phenomena, and implicitly or explicitly argue for the closing-down of those schools or a prohibition of the abovementioned veiling practices; third, to analyze the ideological and policy-related underpinnings of those arguments.

A number of disadvantages with the establishment of Islamic denominational schools have been expressed. They are supposed to be divisive, both culturally and socially, and the quality of their instructions is supposed to be inadequate, in relation to the standards explicated in the national curriculum and syllabi. If the attitudes found in this study is spread all over Sweden, it could reasonable be said that Muslim schools are met by suspicion. Still, few calls for shutting down of these schools are voiced. It seems that the Muslim denominational schools are tolerated in a literal sense: it is accepted, sometimes out of pragmatically motivated considerations, but not liked. On the other hand, it could be said that the provision of a juridical and institutional space for religious minorities to establish denominational schools is a part of the politics of recognition; i.e. an educational policy which, under auspicious circumstances might provide the means for religious minorities to receive respect as equal and gain admission as normal. It must also be noted that the some of the objections to the existence of denominational schools implicitly and explicitly related to some central notions in Swedish educational policy. The notion of equivalence is a keyword in this context, and signifies on the one hand a demand for abundance by the national curriculum and syllabi, and on the other its priority over freedom of choice, and also the priority of “demos” over “ethnos”.

A number of objections to the practice of wearing Burqa or Niqab are also put forth. In contrast to the Swedish media debate, arguments based on notions of gender equality were relatively downgraded. Rather, the interviewees focused on assumed problems with *identification* and *communication*. It was said that the abovementioned veiling practices obstructed the possibility of identifying the students at school, and also rendered the communication – and hence the instructions – at school more difficult. In comparison with the question of Islamic denominational schools, the non-tolerant stance was more manifest, although few explicit calls for a prohibition were made. If the attitudes found in this study is spread all over Sweden, it could reasonable be said that opposition towards wearing Burqa or Niqab is regarded as major obstacle for the enactment of education. Moreover, a specific discursive framing of the veiling practices could be discerned in our case study. The wearing of Burqa or Niqab was associated with phenomena such as mischief and the hidden, thus casting suspicion over the practice in question.

As an instance of the everyday life, rather than an institutional arrangement, veiling practices could arguably be considered to be of less concern for educational policy than the establishment and maintenance of Islamic denominational schools. Still, the question of prohibition has gained a lot media attention during the last years, and brought the regulating dimension to the fore. And though our

material contains few explicit calls for prohibition, several interviewees claimed that a teacher must see the face of the student in order to instruct and educate. And although the goal of equivalence was less relevant in this matter, the practice of veiling was questioned with reference to universal human rights, as the rights of the child. Thus, it seems like that the right to wear Burqa and Niqab in public schools are among the non-tolerable, although few explicit calls for prohibition can be discerned. As noted above, the material in our report resonates with the broader tendencies discerned by Mella, Palm and Bromark (2011): the resistance in Sweden against the Burqa and the Niqab is manifest.

If we focus on the most elaborated objections in the report, we find arguments which 1) was presented as a response to the presumably universalist claims of freedom of religion, thus setting the professional considerations which are presented above in a more general, ethical context, and 2) pointed out an ethical value of overriding importance, viz. the rights of the child. Emphasis is laid on the right of the child to “choose his own path”, a wording which is used by several interviewees, which most of all seems to refer to the first paragraph in article 14 in the United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child, which aims at protecting “the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion”. In the arguments of the teachers, the headmasters and the union representatives, this ethical principle makes it possible to assert that children to a certain extent has the freedom from the religion (as well as from other loyalties, or sets of ideas and beliefs) of the parents. Although not explicitly questioning the parents rights’ to raise and guide their own children, they distinctly emphasize the autonomy of the child, and it’s potential to choose something else than that which is given within the family. The right of the parent to exert influence in religious matter was questioned, since it could be regarded as a limitation of the freedom to choose direction to the walk of life.

The emphasis on the rights of the child is regularly explicated in a specific discursive context. The right to “choose one’s own path” is contrasted to the restrictions inherent in the religiosity of the parents. Religion is regularly depicted as the repressive force, and the secular mind-set as the entity in need of protection. The possibility of secular parents putting down religious inclinations among their children is never represented. Evidently, a discursive coupling of religion with repression and secularism with liberation may be discerned in the claims for freedom from religion. It may also be noted, that the impact from parental (Islamic) faith is the only aspect of upbringing which is questioned in this context.

The notion of “equivalence” is important for the argument outlined above. Equivalence is, as we have seen, a key concept in Swedish educational policy, and frequently used in the national curricula. According to the national curricula, the education which is at disposal in the national school system should be of equal quality and accessibility to everyone. (In the context of official Swedish educational policy, the goal of “equivalence” denotes a political compromise, in so that it expresses an idea of equality and fairness in a context where freedom of choice also is a recognised and highly estimated value.) The interviewees strongly emphasize the importance of the goal of equivalence. In their argumentation, it is implied that some crucial articles in the declaration of the UN supports the standpoints taken up in the national curricula, thus providing an aura of ethical authority.

As noted above, the stress on equivalence consists of two distinct although related arguments. On the one hand, there is a demand for abidance by the law (here: steering documents such as national curriculum and syllabi), which among other things are paid attention to because Islamic schools are suspected not follow these steering documents accordingly. This interpretation of “equivalence” is related to an understanding of the term which has become more and more frequent since the introduction of freedom of choice and independent schools in Swedish educational policy, and the decentralized system of governance of education in Sweden (Lindensjö & Lundgren 2002). In this context, where regulation is obtained through management by objective and evaluation, and responsibilities are spread between numerous responsible organizations, the goal of equivalence is equivalent (!) to abidance by the law.

On the other hand, there is wish to maintain socially integrated educational environments, in which students from different ethnicities, classes and gender meets and interacts. Thus, it seems like the equalizing and integrative objectives which were central to the compulsory school project implemented during the heyday of the Scandinavian welfare regime (Esping-Andersen 1990) seem to be “alive and kicking”. But the quest for recognition of minority beliefs systems, central to the policy of multiculturalism, is circumscribed. In so far, the arguments employed here gives priority to the reproduction of “demos” over the reproduction of “ethnos”. It must also be noted that the freedom of choice, an important feature in the neoliberal turn of educational policy, does not seem to be so important for the interviewees in this particular matter.

In this report, we have emphasized the connection between on the one hand the attitudes to Islamic denominational schools and Islamic practices of complete veiling, and on the other contemporary and anterior education policy in Sweden, above all the idea of equivalence in education. As such, we focus on a specifically Swedish discourse (albeit the ideas of equality and abidance by the law evidently not are exclusively Swedish). Still, it could reasonably be argued that not only national, but also transnational discourses affect what is expressed locally. The influence of specific transnational discourses, such as e.g. those labelled islamophobic (Gardell 2010), orientalist (Said 1978) or racializing (Zebiri 2008) might also be at play, mixed together with or distinctly separated from discourses of secularism or competing religions; the latter might of course also be articulated without any influence what so ever from the earlier. Nevertheless, the analytic task to discern the influence of islamophobic, orientalist or racializing discourses in our material would call for a more elaborated (and suspicious) hermeneutic than the one employed here. This is not all to say, though, that we find those hermeneutic enterprises unnecessary. Rather, on the contrary.

One of the lessons that could be learned from this report is that the arguments against tolerance or recognition of Islamic belief practices might not be primarily be based on islamophobic or orientalist discourses, but rather with reference with notions of equality (although we must remember that questions regarding the nature of the relation between these systems of meaning remain unanswered here). The stress laid on the *professional* aspect of the opposition against veiling practices might be of importance here: in several cases, the interviewees dissociate themselves from the standpoints put forth in media, above all those who solely focus on the gender aspect of complete veiling practices. Instead, the emphasis on the professional educator dimension entails a focus on communication and identification. In the words of the American folklorists Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman (1992:149ff), these acts of discursive positioning might be seen as an effort to “maximize the intertextual gap” between their own argument and the discourse in media, which to a fair-sized extent was articulated by radical right-wing populists. This dilemma is solved by the rhetoric of equivalence, which offers a way to reject claims of recognition in tandem with the defence of values as diverse and important as social justice, the rule of law and the freedom of the individual (child). Thus, the non-tolerance of religiously motivated veiling practices could be motivated with values which is central to diverse but culturally dominant ideological universes, such as socialism and (neo-)liberalism.

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## Appendix

Table 1. List of participants in the study

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age cohort</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Alice	35-39	Student at the Teacher education program
Amy	20-24	Student at the Teacher education program
Ann	45-49	Teacher, primary school
David	50-54	Higher representative, National Union of Teachers, teacher on leave
Elias	25-29	Student at the Teacher education program
Gertrud	20-24	Student at the Teacher education program
Ibrahim	60-64	Senior civil servant, responsible for municipal social care
Irene	40-45	Jurist, formerly employed at the ombudsman against discrimination
John	45-49	Headmaster, primary school
Katarina	35-39	Student at the Teacher education program
Lars	30-34	Political advisor, Liberal party Folkpartiet
Lena	45-49	Headmaster, primary school
Linn	25-29	Student at the Teacher education program
Lizette	25-29	Student at the Teacher education program
Mahmud	60-64	Imam, the Stockholm Mosque; chairman, Islamic Federation of Sweden
Martin	30-34	Teacher, upper secondary school
Marit	25-29	Student at the Teacher education program
Mehdi	55-59	Headmaster, primary school (Muslim independent school)
Noomi	20-24	Student at the Teacher education program
Peter	50-54	Teacher, upper secondary school
Sarah	55-59	Senior official at the Swedish Teachers Union
Sylvia	55-59	Senior civil servant, responsible for reception of refugees

