

# Efraim-A Desire to Fit In

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*There are too many immigrants there, there are of course also good immigrants, but there are too many of them, which is bad /.../ If all immigrants are gathered in one place, it becomes impossible to live there. They make up their own rules.*

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Efraim is twenty years old and was born in Iran. He arrived in Sweden eight years ago. In Iran he lived with both his parents, but they divorced when he was five years old. His mother moved to Sweden, but for several years he stayed with his father in Iran. When Efraim was twelve years old, his mother brought him to Sweden. In the beginning it was very difficult for him to adjust to a new country, environment and family (his mother had remarried). He started a preparatory class, studying Swedish and some other subjects. Efraim was quite surprised that all the kids and adults he met in Sweden came from other countries. His family lived in a suburb, and his school was also situated in this urban environment. Efraim was surprised and disappointed that all his new friends were immigrants, and many were black. When he talks about this, he says:

*Everyone was black! I have nothing against blacks, but I had a totally different picture of Sweden, I thought everyone was blond, you know.*

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Efraim had considerable problems adjusting to his new home, which also affected his schoolwork and academic results. Instead of starting high school, he had to attend supplementary courses in certain subjects. For one year he studied at the Cathedral School, which is considered to be a high status school. He actually wanted to continue his education at this school, but the student counsellor told him to apply to another school since his grades were not sufficiently high to grant him a place at the Cathedral School. So, Efraim applied to the Educare School, and started to study in the social science programme. He was quite satisfied with the school and the programme.

During the first year his mother divorced her new husband leading to a family crisis. Efraim was drawn into a complicated family situation, which affected his studies. He started skipping school. His teachers reacted, and there was a school conference. Efraim was

advised to attend another programme, and he was more or less “sent” to the child minder education programme. According to Efraim, this was not by choice but rather that he was told that this would be the best approach to his school situation.

During the interview, Efraim explains to us about his family background. His father studied in Italy to become an architect, but is now living in Iran, working in a food store. His mother worked for several years in Sweden, at a home for elderly people, but now she is on sick leave. He has not seen his father for five years.

Efraim described himself as a very lonely and quiet person. He has ambitions, and dreams – for example to become a pilot – but at the same time he is working hard just to pass his exams. He still nourishes the dream of becoming a pilot, but realistically, this may not be a viable option. He has already started to modify his future plans. As an alternative plan, he would like to become a social worker. Efraim clearly wants to finish his studies and to pass his exams. The next step will be to take some complementary courses so he can apply for university studies. His primary focus now is to get his own apartment and leave his mother’s home.



When discussing apartments, suburbs and other urban places, Efraim states that he wants to move away from the suburb. He wants to move to what he describes as a neighbourhood with less immigrants and more Swedish people. He clearly distances himself from his ‘pizza friends’ and his local neighbourhood. His plan is to become better adjusted to society, to fit in, continue his education at University and to move to a more “Swedish” urban environment.

One way of interpreting his narrative and his discursive positioning is to put his tale in the framework of “the importance of becoming Swedish.” Efraim develops his life plan in relation to space and ethnic identities; by distancing himself from stigmatized urban spaces and ethnic identities causing a gradual adaption to a more ‘Swedish’ lifestyle. In many ways Efraim is still struggling to adapt and to find a place ‘inside’ Swedish society. There is a clear connection between what can be seen as a turning point in Efraim’s story, and his ambition to become ‘more Swedish.’ The child minder programme was not his first choice, and he describes how he was more or less sent to this programme. But gradually his motivation has increased. Consequently, Efraim has restructured and adjusted his plans now with a more realistic aim to become a social worker; he dreams to achieve a good education and to fit into society.