

Why are the Swedes so ashamed about eating halloumi cheese?

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Credit: Malmö University

Think you are doing the environment a favor when you throw a veggie alternative on the barbecue? The Swedes don't, and as it stands they might be the only ones who feel shame when they chomp down on a halloumi burger.

Many of us battle with feelings of guilt when we buy suspiciously cheap clothes, or book flights to far-flung locations, but for Swedes, there is a new [shame](#) to deal with, and one they can get when browsing the cheese aisle of the local supermarket.

"Halloumiskam" (halloumi shame) is a Swedish concept, says Kristofer Hansson, ethnologist, and senior lecturer at the Department of Social Work.

Grilling halloumi instead of a piece of meat is popular in Sweden as it is perceived as a healthier and more sustainable alternative. Sweden is also one of the countries in Europe, after Cyprus, that buys the most halloumi.

The concept came about in 2019, the year the nation really embraced the cheese, when the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) criticized

Cyprus—the home country of this cheese—for using large quantities of preventative antibiotics in animal husbandry.

As a result, sales of halloumi-like cheese made by small Swedish farm dairies skyrocketed.

"Rather than basing their choice in the grocery store on rational facts, the individual must now also relate to their choices more emotionally. This is a development that applies not only to the [grocery store](#), but also to holiday trips or the purchase of clothes.

"Concepts such as flying shame, fast-fashion shame and halloumi shame can be said to illustrate this individualisation of complex problems," says Hansson, who studied the notion in connection with a research project about antibiotic resistance.

Hansson also observed how the newfound Swedish shame was used as a way of poking fun at themselves. He uses a Batman meme from a satirical Twitter account as an example. The message from the image was: 'the sick thing about Sweden is that halloumi cheese got more news time on national television than a double murder.'

"It was noted that a double murder did not get enough attention in the news due to the discussion about halloumi cheese and associated shame during the summer of 2019. But it could also be read as an irony of the Swedes' relationship to the idea of halloumi shame and a fear of making the wrong choice," says Hansson, who adds:

"It is as if the individual, no matter what they do, cannot really do the right thing. There will be a gap between those who suffer from the shame they feel and those who can laugh it off with a "I am feeling halloumi shame tonight" remark at the same time as they put halloumi [cheese](#) from Cyprus on the grill."

Provided by Malmö University

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