

From the people's heroine to a criminal

About how we all – people and media alike – love to idolize everyday heroes, the gifted and the ones who make a difference. But we also have an urge to tear down people and idols in a black and white image with no nuances. This is especially true for people who stand out from the flock – for example like people with foreign backgrounds. Take the famous and widely acknowledged headmistress Rani Hørlyck from Søndervangskolen in Aarhus, who was transformed from the people's heroine to a criminal in the course of just a few months last year.

By Jesper Larsen
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Nothing is easier than to stand outside and point fingers, nothing. Except maybe to not say or do anything, but just silently and passively let things pass.

I have – admittedly – received my share of both fair and unfair criticism from media researchers, media commentators and media students in my 25 years in the Danish news industry. Of course, I have learnt from my mistakes. But I have also – admittedly – often told myself that there are people out there who have a little too much time to contemplate what everybody else is doing in Bruxelles and at Christiansborg, on TV, radio and in the newspapers.

Apparently, they are all experts.

Which is fine, but also extremely arrogant and patronizing. And if my fellowship at Constructive Institute the past year has taught me anything, it is exactly this: that in Denmark, there is so much good, important and well written journalism being created every single day. I knew this already. But there are also some wild misses, which are not fatal as such for the media, but far from costless for the people involved – it can be costly, fatal, life changing.

The story of the headmistress Rani Hørlyck is – for me – such a story and probably among the biggest misses in Denmark last year. But the story did not find its way to neither Pressenævnet nor Presseløgen, not even a reflection in the industry paper Journalisten or Mediawatch.

The story was originally published in Politiken – but it is not about Politiken or who wrote it, because it could have been published in any media by any journalist. And it went on to be covered by a host of other media, primarily Folkeskolen, DR, Jyllands-Posten and Aarhus Stiftstidende.

First, some background:

According to Wikipedia, Rani Hørlyck was born in India in 1965 and was the headmistress of Søndervangsskolen in Viby close to Aarhus until last year, which almost only has pupils foreign background.

Books have been written by and about Rani Hørlyck, who has fought for the foreign children's future in the school system "A school for everybody – Rani's defence of the community". TV has portrayed her methods, both firmly and demandingly and she has even been nominated Dane of the Year, as someone who has "set particularly ambitious goals and obtained them for the good of others".

In other words, a real prize immigrant, the kind that the media loves to follow and are quick to put on top of the pedestal. A school example of integration.

Søndervangsskolen had better results than other similar schools. Period.

Right until the opposite story, let us call it the myth killer, suddenly becomes the best story. Which is exactly what happened last year – again, in my mind.

Rani Hørlyck was invited to speak at the ceremony of the Language Prize in Aarhus at the end of September together with Søren Brostrøm, the manager of the Board of Health, who also was, and is, a kind of national hero. But she seemed different and somehow distracted – perhaps because she knew what was awaiting her on the front page of Politiken the following day:

"Everybody knew it: Successful school accused of cheating in final exams", was the headline – and the day after inside the paper: "Rani Hørlyck praised as an example of successful integration. Now the image fades."

Quick, tough conclusions, shot from the hip. A life's work ruined.

The substance of the criticism was, in short, based on current and former teachers and pupils, who - mainly anonymously – accused the school management of giving the pupils of Søndervangsskolen too much time at the final written Danish exam five years earlier, in 2016-2017. This is a bit technical, so read carefully: In stead of 30 minutes for the reading part of the exam, they were given 15 minutes extra, thus 45 minutes. This was admitted by the school in a written report to Aarhus Municipality, which had therefore already reprimanded Søndervangsskolen for having interpreted the possibilities of giving extra time a bit loosely, as it was stated, for which the school had been placed under surveillance. Also, part of the criticism was that it had been leaked to let the teachers which subjects the pupils would be examined in.

In reality a guilty plea, since Aarhus Municipality and Søndervangsskolen, as mentioned, had had a dialogue about this faulty practice during several years – a practice that had ended, and the school put under surveillance.

Still, the criticism towards Rani Hørlyck grew and suddenly also centered around everything from her management methods to her reward systems, and Aarhus

Municipality was put under pressure for not having informed the public about the cheating, that had actually been stopped long before.

One should always be careful not to jump to conclusions about other people's motives, but the combination of a municipal election campaign and a group of teachers who had held a grudge against Rani Hørlyck for a long time, was – seen from the outside anyhow – an explosive cocktail where one accusation followed the other.

This is Politiken's entire coverage the following weeks:

"A very, very unfortunate situation: Politicians demand a report after accusations of systematic cheating in exams at a school."

"Parties demand answers regarding cheating in exams: I think it was just a scam"

"Aarhus-politicians' report of disastrous case must be the understatement of the century."

"When a high school headmaster read about cheating in a successful school, she was both relieved and angry."

"Union rep at Søndervangsskolen: Nobody listened to us".

"Report shows that headmistress's explanation does not add up".

"Aarhus Kommune admits to withholding information about systematic cheating in exams".

"Søndervangsskolen to be subject to an impartial investigation, but former teachers will not be interviewed."

"The Board of Appeal will be involved in the case Søndervangsskolen".

"The management at scandalous Aarhus school to step down".

"There has been a history of cheating out there. Aarhus Municipality to return prize of millions".

"Now it is payback time for sins of the past for pupils, teachers and management of Søndervangsskolen".

"Former teachers at scandalous school criticize impartial investigation: I am chocked that they have left so much out."

Of course the single mindedness and the lack of nuance is striking, but the last article is actually quite wild. Because apart from the fact that the management had stepped down, Aarhus Municipality had asked an impartial consultancy firm to find out what to make of the case – and after a couple of months, the report was ready. In addition to establishing what was clear from the beginning, that the pupils had been given 15 minutes extra for the reading test five years earlier – the practice that Søndervangsskolen and Aarhus Municipality were already in dialogue about, the practice that had ended – the consultants found it likely that the management had informed the teachers too early about which subjects had been chosen for exams.

But there was no proof of systematic cheating in the 50 pages, which led Politiken to the not quite fair statement: "Former teacher at scandalous school criticizes impartial investigation: I am chocked that so much was left out".

Nothing is easier in this world, than to stand on the outside and point one's fingers, nothing. The story was originally published in Politiken – but it is not about Politiken or who wrote it, because it could have been published in any media and written by any journalist.

Six months later, Rani Hørlyck got a new job in Gellerup, as a so called housing social facilitator, but maybe the Danish school system was robbed of a school example of integration.

We all love – people and media alike – to idolize everyday heroes, the gifted and the ones who make a difference. But we also have an urge to tear down people and idols in a black and white image with no nuances. This is especially true for people who stand out from the flock – like for example people with foreign backgrounds.

In my opinion, this is what the story of the famous and widely recognized headmistress Rani Hørlyck shows us, who last year was transformed from a heroine to a criminal in the course of a few months.

HØJT Udstyret



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11. FEB. 2022 KL. 09:21

Politiet lukker sag om mulig prøvesnyd på omstridt skole i Aarhus

Aarhus Kommune vil tage beslutningen om at lukke sagen om muligt prøvesnyd til efterretning, lyder det.

UDDANNELSE

21. DEC. 2021 KL. 17:55

Politiet inddrages i sagen om Søndervangskolen

En uvildig undersøgelse af Søndervangskolen peger på sandsynlige brud på straffeloven. Derfor inddrager Aarhus Kommune nu politiet i sagen.

UDDANNELSE | LUCAS ARTURO RAMSØE WILLKENS

15. DEC. 2021 KL. 22:12

Tidligere lærer kritiserer uvildig undersøgelse af omstridt skole: »Jeg er rystet over, at de har pillet så meget ud«

Aarhus Kommunes tilsyn med Søndervangskolen svigtede, og der blev ikke fulgt op, da det blev konstateret, at skolens elever fik for lang tid til afgangseksamen. Det fastslår en uvildige undersøgelse, som kommunen selv har bestilt.

UDDANNELSE | JACOB FUGLSANG | LUCAS ARTURO RAMSØE WILLKENS

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1. DEC. 2021 KL. 16:57

Nu skal elever, lærere og ledere på Søndervangskolen betale fortidens synder

Søndervangskolen skal nu aflevere en præmiepulje på 1,3 millioner kroner tilbage, fordi der blev snydt med eksaminer. Men Aarhus Kommune skylder stadig svar på mange spørgsmål.

UDDANNELSE | JACOB FUGLSANG

31. OKT. 2021 KL. 17:41

»Der har jo været en historik med snyd derude«: Aarhus Kommune vil tilbagebetale millionstor pengepræmie

Efter afsløringer om eksamenssnyd tilbyder Aarhus Kommune at betale 1,3 millioner kroner tilbage til ministeriet.

UDDANNELSE | LUCAS ARTURO RAMSØE WILLKENS

26. OKT. 2021 KL. 12:55

Ledelsen på skandaleramte Aarhus-skole fratræder

Skoleder Rani Hørlyck og viceskoleder Martin Bernhard fratræder på Søndervangskolen i Aarhus. Det sker, efter at et flertal af lærerne på skolen i sidste uge udtrykte mistillid til ledelsen.

UDDANNELSE | LUCAS ARTURO RAMSØE WILLKENS

22. OKT. 2021 KL. 22:18

Lærerne på Søndervangskolen udtrykker mistillid til ledelsen

I en mail udtrykker et flertal af lærerne på Søndervangskolen i Aarhus nu mistillid til skolens ledelse.

UDDANNELSE | LUCAS ARTURO RAMSØE WILLKENS

8. OKT. 2021 KL. 17.13

Ankestyrelsen inddrages i sagen om Søndervangskolen

Børne- og undervisningsministeriet inddrager nu Ankestyrelsen i behandlingen af sagen om eksamenssnyd på Søndervangskolen. Børn og Unge-udvalget i Aarhus har igangsat en undersøgelse, men det står endnu ikke klart, om de tidligere lærere på skolen vil blive hørt.

UDDANNELSE | JACOB FUGLSANG | TINE KIRKENSGAARD HANSEN | LUCAS ARTURO RAMSØE WILLKENS

6. OKT. 2021 KL. 23.00

Søndervangskolen skal undersøges uvildigt, men tidligere lærere bliver ikke hørt

Efter anklager om snyd skal Søndervangskolen underlægges en uvildig undersøgelse. Men tidligere lærere vil ikke blive hørt.

UDDANNELSE | LUCAS ARTURO RAMSØE WILLKENS

6. OKT. 2021 KL. 14.58

Aarhus Kommune erkender, at man fortiede oplysninger om systematisk eksamenssnyd

I ny redegørelse til Undervisningsministeriet beskriver Aarhus Kommune Søndervangskolens eksamenssnyd i 2016 og 2017. Kommunen beklager nu, at ministeriet ikke blev informeret, og at karakterer fremkommet ved snyd blev brugt som argument for, at Søndervangskolen ikke skulle under statsligt tilsyn.

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4. OKT. 2021 KL. 19.24

Redegørelse viser, at skoleleders forklaring ikke holder

Alle elever på Søndervangskolen fik forlænget læsetid i 2016. Det bliver understreget i en redegørelse, som modsiger skoleleders tidligere forklaring.

UDDANNELSE | JACOB FUGLSANG | LUCAS ARTURO RAMSØE WILLKENS

1. OKT. 2021 KL. 19.27

Tillidskvinde på Søndervangskolen: »Der var ingen, der lyttede til os«

Tidligere tillidsrepræsentant for lærerne på Søndervangskolen mener, at lærerne er blevet overhørt i sagen om eksamenssnyd.

UDDANNELSE | LUCAS ARTURO RAMSØE WILLKENS

1. OKT. 2021 KL. 09.36

Da gymnasirektor læste om snyd med afgangsprøver på succesrig skole, blev hun både lettet og vred

Rektor på Viby Gymnasium Lone Sandholdt Jacobsen undrede sig over udfordringer med elever fra succesrig skole. Nu har hun måske fået en del af forklaringen.

UDDANNELSE | LUCAS ARTURO RAMSØE WILLKENS

30. SEP. 2021 KL. 10.45

30. SEP. 2021 KL. 10.45

Aarhus-politikers beskrivelse af møgsag må betegnes som årtiers underdrivelse

Hvordan kunne det gå så galt på Søndervangskolen i Aarhus? Det spørgsmål er både kommunal- og landspolitikere nødt til at forholde sig til, skriver uddannelsesredaktør Jacob Fuglsang i denne analyse.

UDDANNELSE | JACOB FUGLSANG

29. SEP. 2021 KL. 20.18

Partier kræver svar om eksamenssnyd: Jeg tænker, at det bare har været fup og fidus

Undervisningsminister kræver redegørelse om Søndervangskolens snyd med tosprogede elevers afgangsprøver.

UDDANNELSE | TINE KIRKENSGAARD HANSEN | LUCAS ARTURO RAMSØE WILLKENS

29. SEP. 2021 KL. 13.20

»En rigtig, rigtig ærgerlig sag«: Politikere kræver undersøgelse efter anklager om systematisk eksamenssnyd på skole

Lærere og elever har rejst kritik af ledelsen på Søndervangskolen i Aarhus, der er kendt for sit løft af tosprogede elever. Nu kræver byrådsmedlemmer i Aarhus kommune en redegørelse om sagen.

UDDANNELSE | LUCAS ARTURO RAMSØE WILLKENS

29. SEP. 2021 KL. 11.53

Rani Hørlyck er fremhævet som et skoleeksempel for integration. Nu krakelerer glansbilledet

Som leder af en skole med nærmest udelukkende tosprogede elever er Rani Hørlyck blevet hyldet for sit faglige løft. Nu kritiseres skolen for at have snydt med afgangsprøver.

UDDANNELSE | TINE KIRKENSGAARD HANSEN

28. SEP. 2021 KL. 20.59

»Alle vidste det«: Succesrig skole anklages for fusk med afgangsprøver

Søndervangskolen har været en foregangsskole for sit arbejde med tosprogede elever. Nu rejser tidligere elever og lærere kritik af skolens ledelse, som beskyldes for snyd i forbindelse med afviklingen af afgangsprøver. Kommunen har sat skolen under tilsyn.

UDDANNELSE | LUCAS ARTURO RAMSØE WILLKENS

23. SEP. 2020 KL. 15.32

Rasende skoleleder: Regeringen mobber og udskammer de brune børn i skole. Så stop dog!

Politikerne taler aktivt ned til og diskriminerer mod de skoler, som har mange etniske elever. Det er stødende, det er kortsigtet, og det er skadeligt.

KRONIKEN

11. AUG. 2020 KL. 23.07

Skoleleder på multietnisk skole i Aarhus: »Det bliver ikke på min vagt, at jeg gør noget særligt i forhold til den somaliske gruppe«

På Søndervangskolen i Viby ved Aarhus skal der ikke tales om etnicitet i sammenhæng med