

The invisibility of race in Sweden

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Sweden, a country known for its beautiful nature, gender equality, social democracy and racism. Say this to a Swede 60 years ago and there would be disagreements, say this to a Swede now, and they would not be quite so sure (Hübinette and Lundström, 2014; Pred, 1997; Hübinette and Lundström, 2011). If Swedes mention racism today, they would possibly point to the rise of the xenophobic party that came into parliament and has become an important middle party in between the two coalitions Sverigedemokraterna (SD; The Sweden/Swedish Democrats) (Hübinette and Lundström, 2011). Still the majority of the Swedish population would presumably say, especially until the last decade or so, that racism is not a problem, something which is further strengthened by the Swedish self-image of a country in the lead of and upholder of human rights, equality, freedom and progressivity (Hedenstierna et al., 2008; Hübinette and Lundström, 2011). This is an image that the state wants to project abroad and domestically, and one that it has been quite successful in projecting (Colla, 2013). This image can be found in critical texts of Sweden as an egalitarian country, such as in Alan Pred's book 'Even in Sweden: Racisms, Racialized Spaces, and the Popular Geographical Imagination' (2000). Already in the title it shows the reputation of the Swedish state one where racism does not exist, or where it is very weak (Pred, 2000). However, when reading articles on especially racism and Sweden, and different governmental research projects and organizational reports, it is shown that this is not the case and that racism has been increasing in Sweden (Pred, 1997; European Network Against Racism, 2011; Hübinette and Lundström, 2011). How is it then that Sweden maintains this image, (although it has been damaged) internationally and domestically when there is racial discrimination in politics, education, employment and the housing market (European Network Against Racism, 2011, Pred, 1997)? Herein it will be argued that the view of Sweden being a non-racist state, where racism is no longer a problem has been created by an identity crisis; an identity of equality and freedom versus an identity of white superiority and "Swedish-ness" as whiteness. Furthermore, the scapegoating of different groups of society as racist has been used to create an appearance of a non-racist Swedish population. Additionally, it will be argued that the politics of Sweden has helped reinforce this non-racial view of Sweden and hide the identity crisis through a focus on gender and class, equality policies and a low success rate of right-extremist parties.

Identity

To talk about the Swedish identity and its role in covering up the racism that exists in Sweden, it must first be discussed what exactly this identity is and how it came to be, only then will it be possible to see how it has been (and still is) used. Central to the Swedish identity is homogeneity, a feeling of a sameness among the Swedish population, a sameness that historically has been, and still is centered around a concept of whiteness (Pred, 1997; Emilsson, n.d.; Schierup and Ålund, 2011). This is a perceived homogeneity and concept of the interconnectedness of whiteness and "Swedish-ness". This comes from the early colonial times and early 1900s rhetoric in Europe and that was very strong in Sweden at the time (Pred 2001; Pred 1997; Hübinette et al., 2015). Despite Sweden's current reputation, Sweden has previously been at the forefront of the eugenic movement and racial classification (Kjellman, 2013). It goes back to the 1700s and Carl Linnaeus' classification of

different species, among them the human species, something which inspired some of the more prominent eugenicists for example Blaumenbach (Kjellman, 2013). In 1922, The Swedish State Institute for Race Biology (SIRB) was founded, it had been initiated by Lundborg who managed to convince parliament of the use of such an institute (Kjellman, 2013). A reason for the opening of a racial institute can be seen in the linkage between race and Swedish nationalism in the 1900s (Ivarsson, 2007). The Swedish nationalism at the time was inspired by the German one and used the notion of the people, unity, homogeneity and race in the construction of the nation, the typical Swedish person and the Swedish race (Ivarsson, 2007). The Nordic type at the time of the SIRB was considered the true Swedish race and was characterized through 'a light eye colour and light head hair, with a stature over 168 cm, and a cephalic index under 78' (Kjellman, 2013 p.183), this Nordic type was a subgroup within the 'Europaicus' race which was characterized by 'white skin, a lot of yellow hair, blue eyes and an athletic body, and they were sanguine, smart, inventive, and vertiginous' (Kjellman, 2013 p.183). So, as can be seen, the 1920s still had a big racial component in Sweden as well.

A historically complex past, leading to Sweden losing its once powerful empire led to this creation of the Swedish identity and nation (Hall; Emilsson, n.d.). Because of this loss, Sweden went back to ancient history, looking at its ancestors as Vikings, but also going back to the gothic myth started already in the 15th century (Hall). This myth showed Sweden as the utopia spoken of in ancient Greek writings, as the beginning of humanity after the great flood of the bible as well as the place where men came from (Hall). This led to the concept of the relation between royalty, warriors, superiority and later on, towards the 1800s, the peasants through a common bloodline (Emilsson, n.d.). This was the Swedish race. 'Vi har ju lyckan att äga en ras, som ännu är ganska oförstörd, en ras som är bärare av mycket höga och mycket goda egenskaper.' (Engberg in Hübinette and Lundström, 2011 p. 1) is a quote from a member of parliament in Sweden 1921, the translation is; We are lucky enough to own/be part of a race that is more or less untouched/unspoiled, a race which has many superior and good qualities (Engberg in Hübinette and Lundström p. 1). This together with the rise of nationalism and the founding of the SIRB, then led to the forced sterilization that was carried out on a wide scale in Sweden, something that did not stop until the 70s and affected around 60 000 people (Hübinette and Lundström, 2011). In 1965 when sterilization was still being carried out, Olof Palme, one of the most famous prime ministers of Sweden (he was not prime minister at the time) stated that 'Vi respekterar de grundläggande fri- och rättigheterna. Grumliga rasteorier har aldrig funnit fötäste. Vi betraktar oss gärna som fördomsfria och toleranta' (We respect the basic freedoms and rights. Unclear race-theories have never gained any foothold. We like to see ourselves as tolerant and without prejudice.) (Palme in Hübinette and Lundström, 2011 p.1). As a counter point to Palme, the prime minister at the time Tage Erlander claimed that Swedes were in a very lucky position as the population was homogenous race-wise but also in many other ways (Erlander in Hübinette and Lundström, 2011 p.1). In other words, the homogenous identity, as well as racial practices still existed, but also the identity of Sweden as a tolerant and equal society was also there at the same time. Furthermore, in 2012, the prime minister used the phrase 'etniska svenskar' (Ethnic Swedes) (Reinfeldt in Hübinette et al., 2015 p.54) to refer to the white Swedish population. This perhaps does not imply homogeneity, nevertheless, it equates "Swedish-ness" and whiteness creating a linguistic and ideation separation between people who are white/Swedish and non-white/non-Swedish, the self and the other, superior and inferior.

However as a contrast to this, Sweden has another identity, that of diversity, tolerance and equality which started to develop from the 60s onwards (Justitiedepartementet, 2004). This was something that was projected outwards but also within the state and there was a focus on the now and the present and a form of feigned rejection of the past, Sweden was to be a progressive country (Hübinette and Lundström, 2011). This view was

encouraged by the actions of the Swedish state especially during the 70s and 80s where Sweden switched focus from work migration to refugee migration and more and more non-European immigrants started to come to Sweden as well as more laws for equality being pursued (Pred, 1997). With this, as well as championing human rights from the 50s onward, Sweden started to slowly build its reputation back up again after World War II and gained a form of moral high ground over many other states in the west (Glover, 2012; Pred, 1997). Sweden openly opposed the Prague uprising and thus showed a stance against the USSR, it allowed refugees from all over the world to come to Sweden and seek refuge (Pred, 1997). Everyone from Somalians to Bosnians fleeing different conflicts and persecutions, Sweden was an open country that invited everyone (Pred, 1997). This migration, the egalitarian laws and the support of the UN and human rights in practice and speech created a new Sweden. Sweden was no longer stuck in the past, it was no longer racist; the new image of Sweden with progressivity at its core was based around openness, being considerate of all its people, innovation and an open mind as well as genuineness (Hedenstierna et al., 2008; Pred, 1997). How is it possible to have these two identities, one which cherishes whiteness, homogeneity and the past; and one which is inclusive, considerate, open minded and progressive?

These two identities, one of equality and freedom and one of the superiority of whiteness/"Swedish-ness", enable each other to exist in the Swedish case, and they together make racism invisible in the Swedish society as well as abroad. The openly democratic and progressive Sweden had been built in a large extent to gain acceptance abroad, especially from the west alliance in the Cold War (Glover, 2012). Nationalism was hidden and toned down and the new image was promoted abroad and within to create this image of Sweden, and through putting this image forward abroad, Sweden had also, in a sense, internalized this image and adapted to it (Glover, 2012). However, this nationalism built on a racial view existed, as shown above. It had only been toned down for the purposes of the Swedish state and society (Glover, 2012). Still the image was projected more and more, abroad and domestically, and Sweden and the world slowly started to accept this image of Sweden, the democratic, open and egalitarian state; Sweden's nation branding had been a success (Pred, 1997; Glover, 2012). As one image dominates, the other becomes concealed, and so the Swedish nationalism was forgotten. Sweden was no longer racist and continued to promote this view, and this is exactly what allows for implicit racism in Sweden. Discussions of racism in Sweden have become taboo, and have been ever since the 80s (Hübinette and Lundström, 2011, Pred). Racism is kept invisible in Sweden as there is a myth that there is no racism in the country created through the nation branding of Sweden, as well as the failure to talk about the problem. What can be noticed though, when one looks below the surface, is that Sweden still has racial bias and discrimination working within the state ranging from work life to educational institutions (Diskrimineringsombudsmannen, 2015; Hübinette et al., 2015; Schierup and Ålund, 2011; Pred, 1997; Kamali; European Network Against Racism, 2011; Södergran, 2000).

What the media does, however, is to focus on the clear cut and obvious racisms that show up in Sweden, such as neo-Nazism, racist violence, and nationalist parties (Pred, 1997; Löwander, 1998). Media shows racism as something that certain groups and individuals do, something that is contained within those groups (Löwander, 1998). So in Sweden, an idea of "it's not us, it's them" is presented through media and reinforces and takes focus from the underlying racism that exists in society outside of right-wing extremists, neo-Nazis and extreme-nationalists (Löwander, 1998). These groups become scapegoats for the Swedish public as racism becomes equated with racist violence more than anything else (Löwander, 1998). Furthermore, this is where the Swedish identity starts to get threatened, and why racism is a taboo subject. For if the underlying racial discriminations and such are brought forward and openly talked about, it will challenge the Swedish identity which the society has tried to build up these last 50 years. Racism is a challenge to the Swedish

identity and to protect its identity the problem is quieted down so as to preserve and protect the national identity of Sweden (Löwander, 1998). However, the other identity, that of “Swedish-ness” and whiteness, still exists in the background, and is normalized and becomes part of everyday life. This is where the real conflict appears, for to protect the outward Swedish identity, the one in the background has to disappear and vice versa. Therefore, as to avoid this conflict and protect the Sweden which is projected and the one that has been pushed into the background but never fully disappeared, racism becomes taboo, avoided and forgotten. However, this conflict still arises, and that is when scapegoats are created to handle the conflict without bringing it out into the open. Once the scapegoats have been identified, targeted and condemned, harmony is restored and the crisis is forgotten.

Politics

To understand the invisibility of race in Sweden, it is also important to look at the politics within the state. Some points have already been briefly touched upon in the identity section, but will be further elaborated. Before that, attention to general trends in Swedish politics should be investigated to get a good overview of the political situation that has allowed for the current state of Sweden. When looking at the most prominent topics in the elections campaigns of the 1900s, the national economy including things such as taxes, employment and social economy have dominated especially from the 1930s until the late 1960s with a social democratic focus (Brandorf et al., 1995). It continued to be one of the most important topics after that as well (Brandorf et al., 1995). During the 70s, there was big focus on freedoms and rights, of workers especially, however, also throughout the general population. It was in 1994 that immigration policy started to get a more prominent role in Swedish politics, something that had hardly been mentioned until the 70s (Brandorf et al.). The Swedish state allowed a large amount of immigrants to fill the work force and later, refugee immigration, especially after WWII (Pred, 1997). This could be a result of the nation branding that Sweden was striving for, as well as its focus on human rights etc. from the 50s onward as well as the need for labor (Pred, 1997). Sweden and its politicians through the nation branding, might have felt compelled to act the part that they were trying to project outward, and therefore migration as a problem did not come up on political debates.

Important to note as well, is what has been discussed in politics and what forms of politics have been pursued by Sweden. Economy, with socialist tendencies have been the major topics of discussion throughout Swedish history (Brandorf et al., 1995). What this means is that the welfare state, high taxes, focus on helping people of low or no income and class has been in the forefront of Swedish politics (Bergqvist, n.d.). Moreover, if one looks at Google, and searches for Sweden, one of the first things that one finds is Sweden.se. On the front page of the website, one can see a link to Sweden and gender showing Sweden as one of the most equal countries in the world when it comes to gender, which is backed up by the Global Gender Gap Report (Sweden.se, 2015, Global gender gap report, 2014). This shows that Swedish focus seems to be more on class/economy and, later, gender equality than anything else (Klas and Åmark, 2001). That is further supported by the world economic forums study which puts Sweden in the top of labor and gender issues in the world (Global Gender Gap Report, 2014; Webforum.org). What can be seen here then is that the economy has always been a big factor in Swedish politics, and that gender has later developed into an important issue. From the 50s onward, equality became a major topic of discussion within Swedish politics, but it was related initially to class which was the focus on the Swedish social democratic leadership (Larsson, 2005). It then started to incorporate gender as well during the 60s, but still mainly with a focus on class. It is not until the 70s that immigrants and ethnic minorities are mentioned and still then only briefly (Justitiedepartementet, 2004; Larsson, 2005). It is first during the 90s that such groups start to get more attention in equality policy from the different parties, as equality was seen as a class and gender

problem. Additionally, it's really only recently that the question of ethnic discrimination and immigration has become a major part of Swedish politics (Larsson, 2005). Moreover, it was at this time where the nation branding of equality had really started to become prominent internationally and within the state (Hübinette and Lundström, 2011). This together with the assumed homogeneity, and equality policies that implicitly focused on class and gender helped to mask the underlying racism that still existed (Larsson, 2005; Pred, 1997; Emilsson, n.d.; Schierup and Ålund, 2011). The focus was averted from the problems to do with racism through focusing on other issues of society that have always been at the heart of Swedish politics as well as the new developing equality issue in the western world; gender.

As was touched upon earlier as well, Swedish immigration policies have been fairly open in general, especially from around the 50s until the 70s (Hollifield et al, 2014; Pred, 1997). The amount of people that are born in a country outside of Sweden or are related to a person with a foreign background is very high in Sweden initially due to Swedish labor migration policies, and later due to refugee migration policies (Södergran, 2000; Pred 1997; Dahlstrom and Esaiasson, 2011). Initially the migration policies were motivated by a big wave of emigration from Sweden, a gap in the labor market that had to be filled (Migrationsverket.se, 2015). However, labor migration policy was not expecting immigrants to stay permanently in Sweden, so migrants and ethnic minorities entering Sweden did not receive any larger attention until the mid to late 60s (Justitiedepartementet, 2004). When comparing with the neighboring countries Norway and Denmark, Sweden has the most open immigration policies and more immigrants accepted each year than any of the other two even though the countries generally are quite similar politically (Hollifield, 2014). For example, one neither needs to give up one's previous citizenship, nor learn Swedish, nor know anything about the society, nor prove economic self-sufficiency, nor be part of a citizenship ceremony, nor swear an oath of allegiance to acquire permanent residence in Sweden, at least if they are refugees (Migrationsverket.se, 2015; Hollifield et al., 2014). Furthermore, Sweden has not, in general, used assimilation policies that require immigrants to abandon their previous identity, it rather tries to incorporate it into Swedish society, in theory.

Sweden has continued to be open to refugee migration, but has put more and more restrictions on who is allowed to come to the country through, for example, restricting who is allowed to come because of a relationship to a Swedish citizen and workers ability to provide for themselves (Migrationsverket.se, 2015). This migration enforces the identity of openness and equality that Sweden has tried to create for itself. Thus, the egalitarian policies created and the nation branding of Sweden, makes the state of Sweden seem, on paper and without much scrutiny into the success of the integration and equality policies of Sweden, to be an equal and non-racist society. Additionally, the Swedish integration policies have, from the beginning, been focused on promoting and upholding organizations for ethnic groups (Justitiedepartementet, 2004). That has been done as to ease the integration into Swedish society without forcing a loss of the own previous culture and national identity, and to focus on a multicultural society (Justitiedepartementet, 2004). These efforts seem contradicting to a claim of racism within the Swedish state and its institutions, as the state is actively promoting the existence and maintenance of ethnic groups. However, these efforts have failed, and especially the 70s and 80s showed a huge difference in the conditions between immigrants and people born in Sweden especially with regard to the housing and job markets (Justitiedepartementet, 2004). As is argued by Borevi, the tensions between ethnos (group coherence) and demos (society coherence) is deemed not important by Swedish integration policies and has thus continuously failed with its integration efforts (Justitiedepartementet, 2004). Therefore, once again, Sweden looks from the outside to be a state that is very inclusive and egalitarian of all its groups, but in practice it fails to perform, although, the policies help to conceal this domestically and abroad.

It is important to talk about policies and the importance of different political matters, however, political parties and movements also need to be discussed to gain a full understanding of the invisibility of race in Sweden. Sweden, has in general, until the last few years, not had any major success or at least not any long term success for radical-right or populist parties (Dahlström and Esaiasson, 2011; Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008; Widfeldt, 2001). There have been many trying to explain the success and failure of such parties in Europe. Some argue that it is because of the similarities between the other parties in parliament's approaches to the immigration issue that has caused the failure in Sweden as the question of immigration did not become a salient topic of discussion (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008). Moreover, the other parties have actively ignored and frozen-out the populist or radical right parties having a similar effect on the focus and importance of the issue (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008). Others point partially at low levels of nationalism and xenophobia in general of the Swedish people, as well as referring to laws and policies, both specific and general that discourage and undermine populist and radical-right parties (Widfeldt, 2001). Furthermore, Widfeldt explains that it also may be because of the already existing parties have moved, even if not drastically, towards policies of these xenophobic parties which seems to have quieted public demand for such parties and their policies (2001). Then again, others look at the social-environmental aspect of anti-immigrant sentiments and rise in popularity for xenophobic parties such as the correlation between economic hardship and an influx of, in Sweden's case refugees, or at the success in municipal elections to locally gain support, as in the Sjöbo example in Sweden (Dahlström and Esaiasson, 2011; Golder, 2003). Whichever of these explanations is most useful for an analysis of Sweden does not really matter for the discussion of this text. The fact persists that Sweden has had low political success of xenophobic parties, especially nationally, up until recently when 2010 Sverigedemokraterna (The Sweden Democrats) managed to get into parliament, and then for the 2014 election managed to increase their support (something which Ny Demokrati/New Democracy failed to do in the 1990s) (Dahlström and Esaiasson, 2011; Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008).

However, Sweden has had a fairly large amount of xenophobic, and radical-right movements compared to its neighboring countries with, for example, neo-Nazi groups springing up in different parts of the country (Widstedt). These groups carry out, often widely reported and publicized, racist violence and open discrimination. This is the racism which is reported and considered a problem in general in Sweden (Pred, 1997; Widfeldt, 2001; Löwander, 1998). What this does is to reinforce the invisibility even more through hiding the identity conflict even more effectively. These movements, groups and parties effectively become what's wrong with Sweden, they become identified with racism and as racists, whilst everyone else, the "normal" Swedes, escape unscathed from these allegations (Pred, 1997; Löwander, 1998). This creates the assumption that Sweden is not really a racist society, and that the Swedish people in general aren't racist, however, there are a few groups within the society that are, and they are the problem (Widstedt; Pred, 1997). Of course, these groups are racist and carry out acts of racism, but they are only the ones that are obvious and visible. Moreover, the fact that xenophobic parties haven't had much success in general elections further supports this (Widfeldt, 2001). This shows that there is no state wide support for racism, racist practices or racist ideas in Sweden, although, a few communities might do, the majority of the Swedes do not, they are "innocent" (Dahlström and Esaiasson, 2011; Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, Widstedt, 2008; Pred, 1997). Additionally, this manages to place the voters for such parties in the category of racists, which further manages to give specific targets of anti-racism and manages to more effectively hide the underlying racisms in society itself. This is reinforced sometimes by the members of these parties such as Sverigedemokraterna, where the members may have been or still are connected to neo-Nazi groups, have made racist comments or physically carried out racist violence, which is all reported by the media who continue report on and condemn these groups and parties (dn.se, 2015). This is basically scapegoating, Sweden avoids scrutiny

through presenting the targets for anti-racism and taking attention away from underlying structures of racism in society.

Throughout the text, references have been made to the underlying racist practices of society without going in to the specifics of them. It is important not to leave such a discussion without mentioning these things, for this brings the matter to attention and does not leave it as a diffuse concept in the background that is hard to grasp. Therefore, a few examples are going to be provided. In employment, immigrants are more likely to be unemployed than people who are not, and when employed they are exposed to inequalities and discrimination, additionally, the employment process has a record of discrimination against immigrants (European Network Against Racism, 2011). It can be everything from saying that internships are open up until a person comes to apply in person, and when the person is seen and does not look "Swedish" the person is turned away, to people getting into positions/being denied positions because of their last name and its link to being an immigrant (Diskrimineringsombudsmannen, 2015). In education, the dropout rates are higher for immigrants, but there is also division in classrooms in the schools themselves (European Network Against Racism, 2011). Teachers might come with comments such as 'Oj, va svenskt du beter dig idag!' (Behdjou, 2014, p.23) (Oh, how Swedish you're acting today!), or classrooms might be segregated. Moreover, the criminal justice system is seen to target immigrants more often making claims and basing suspicions on the color of skin and Muslims have been increasingly targeted by the anti-terror practices of Sweden (European Network Against Racism, 2011; Diskrimineringsombudsmannen, 2015). When it comes to access to goods, immigrants, especially Roma, but also other ethnic minorities, have been targeted through being chased out of the stores or overly surveyed by security and store personnel on basis of their appearance (European Network Against Racism, 2011, Diskrimineringsombudsmannen, 2015). In the media, immigrants have been depicted in a Sverigedemokraterna election campaign clip as stealing benefits from pensioner's for example (Sverigedemokraterna, 2010). These are just a few examples of racist practices and discrimination in Swedish society that is being hidden through political and identity practices.

Conclusion

Sweden is not a race-less society, nor is it as egalitarian as it wants to project outwards and inwards. Sweden is at conflict with itself, it has two identities which it has based itself on, one from the past taking a mythical heritage of Goths and Vikings cherishing whiteness and its superiority, and one of progressivity, the future, equality and freedom which it has built for itself since the 1950s. These two contradicting identities are in constant battle, but to protect its identity, Sweden has created a veil that hides the conflict and "forgets" about it. It brings one identity to the front and keeps the other one down low. What this means is that we get an equal and free society in theory but not in practice. To protect the Swedish identities it puts taboos on questions of racism in society, creates scapegoats, speaks loudly against racism and creates laws and policies speaking of equality and projects equality outwards without actually following up on this and acting on what it claims to stand for. Racism of many forms still do exist to a high degree in Sweden within education, criminal justice and working life etc. but this is not seen nor heard. Racist violence drowns out these "minor" forms of racial discrimination until they are forgotten. Racist violence becomes equated with racism, and neo-Nazi and radical right groups become equated with racial violence and xenophobic political parties become targeted politically and rhetorically fought against. This allows for making the Swedish population in general innocent of being racist, it makes Swedish society innocent, and takes focus away from where much of the attention actually should be. Moreover, egalitarian policies are created, but these egalitarian practices have been generally focused on class and gender in practice. Class and gender which have dominated Swedish politics for a long time. The problem for Sweden then is that it is based on contradicting principles, and instead of facing this and taking the hard step of bringing this

conflict into the open, the conflict is hidden. This also hides the racial discrimination of Sweden which is a main component of the Swedish identity crisis. To fight racism in Sweden in an effective way, this needs to be dealt with and brought into the light. Without understanding the roots of the problem, and through ignoring underlying dimensions of the Swedish racialization racism is only reinforced. This will not defeat racial discrimination, but hide it and help it. The race-less society does not exist and will continue to get worse if it is not dealt with, however, for it to get better it may first get worse, maybe once racial discrimination becomes obvious in all parts of Swedish society will it be acknowledge both internationally and domestically and finally dealt with.

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