

Abstract

Swedish images of Korea and East Asia: A case of a colonialism without colonies and an orientalism without orientals

Sweden's historical and contemporary relations with Korea and Koreans in particular and with East Asia and East Asians in general, are in a comparative international perspective both relatively modern and meagre, as Sweden did not have any colonies in East Asia and did not have any direct contacts with East Asians except through tradesmen, travellers and missionaries visiting the region during the classical imperialist era. This makes Sweden different from Britain, France, the United States, Russia and even Germany which all made intrusions into Korea and East Asia, and established colonial settlements, trade stations and military bases in the area, and which all experienced substantial numbers of Korean and East Asian migrants coming to their own countries at an early stage. So if the Swedish colonial enterprise limited itself to smaller trade and low-key diplomacy, travels and tourism, mission and later relief work, the Korean and East Asian minority of Sweden must be one of the most domesticated in the Western world given the fact that it consists of highly integrated researchers and students, and restaurant owners and entrepreneurs, and above all completely assimilated wives of Swedish men and children of Swedish adoptive parents. It is a fact that Sweden must be one of a few Western countries without any trace at all of a Koreatown, a Chinatown or a Little Tokyo or Little Saigon in any of its cities. Thus, it is no surprise that the majority of studies analysing various Western ways of imagining and representing Korea and East Asia through the matrices of colonialism and orientalism, seldom if ever take up Swedish examples and the Swedish case.

This study aims at mapping out the specific Swedish images and representations of Korea and Koreans, and East Asia and East Asians. This is being done within the context of Sweden's past and present relations with the country and the region, and with the background that Sweden lacks any colonial experiences in Korea and East Asia and harbours very few Korean and East Asian immigrants. The study examines both high and popular cultural texts, visual images and material artefacts, and the point of departure is to try to understand how it is possible that a full-fledged and complete colonial and orientalist imagery related to Korea and East Asia has been able to develop and is able to exist in the public culture of Sweden. In addition, this colonial and orientalist imagery which is still going strong also seems to show strong archaic features which in other Western countries today would be considered outright racist, and be officially condemned and opposed either by government and the establishment or by Korean and East Asian immigrant communities. Finally, the study argues that Sweden can be seen as a case study of a colonialism without colonies and an orientalism without orientals, given the fact that colonial and orientalist images and stereotypes regarding Korea and Koreans and East Asia and East Asians seem to be so prevalent and widespread in Swedish culture.

Keywords: Sweden, Korea, East Asia, colonialism, orientalism, representation

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Swedish family relations with the Others: From racial segregation and fear of miscegenation to multiculturalism and antiracist desire

For many years, family relations between white Westerners and non-white non-Westerners were both culturally condemned, socially stigmatised, and very often criminalized by law. This concerned both the colonial setting in the non-Western colonies regulating the sexual relations between settlers and natives, and the metropolitan setting in the Western homelands upholding the reproductive borders between the white majority population and non-white immigrants. The mixed race children were often forcefully removed from their non-white parents, and placed into foster and adoptive homes or at special institutions, where they sometimes were sterilised. However, ever since decolonisation started to accelerate and even more after the end of the Cold War and with globalisation, family relations between white Westerners and non-white non-Westerners, whether of heterosexual or of homosexual character, have increased dramatically and exploded in numbers. Instead of pathologising and marginalizing these family constellations in the form of interracial couples with their mixed children, and adoptive parents with their adopted children, a new trend marked by the discourse of multiculturalism is now instead valorising these interracial families as tokens of antiracism.

This study will apply this colonial context to the Swedish situation, by mapping out the history of Swedish interracial family relations, starting from the mixed marriages that took place in the Swedish colonies of Delaware, Cabo Corso, and Saint-Barthélemy, and continuing with the first non-white migrants who came to Sweden as slaves, servants and “court Negroes” and married Swedes in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. After World War II, Swedish family relations with the Others not only increased substantially, but also took on a strongly gendered manner. In the 1960s and 1970s, Mediterranean men from North Africa and the Middle East started to arrive in Sweden as partners to Swedish women, and from the 1970s and 1980s African men from West Africa, South America and the Caribbean came to Sweden for marriage with Swedish women. At the other end, Asian women from East and Southeast Asia have migrated to Sweden for marriage with Swedish men ever since the 1970s and 1980s. At the same time, non-white children from South America, Africa and Asia have arrived in Sweden in great numbers for adoption from the end of the 1950s.

With regards to this historical background, this study will examine various cultural images and representations of Swedish interracial family relations and how they have changed over time, and link these interracial families with their mixed and adopted children to the discourses of colonialism and racism, as well as multiculturalism, exoticism and antiracism. How did Swedish family relations with the Others interact with the nationalist narratives of Swedish homogeneity and Swedish modernity? What happens when the category of race and colonial and postcolonial relations and processes enter and are inscribed into the saga of the Swedish welfare-state?

Keywords: interracial families, adoptive families, biracial children, adopted children, colonialism, racism, multiculturalism, antiracism

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