

RESEARCH

In Search of the Swedish Asians: Representations of Asians and Experiences of Being Asian in Contemporary Sweden as Reflected in the Non-White Swedish Literature

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Asians in Sweden make up over 200,000 inhabitants. However, compared to the Afro-Swedes, the Latin Americans or the minority inhabitants who have a background in the Middle East, the Swedish Asians are largely absent from the political, cultural and academic spheres in contemporary Sweden. This absence applies in both minority and migrant contexts as well as in connection with migration and integration issues. This article consists of a study of literary texts written by minority authors who themselves are not Asians and in whose works Asians appear as characters as well as an analysis of texts written by Swedish Asians who write about how both majority Swedes and minority residents view them. The purpose is to try to understand this relative absence of Asians within both minority Sweden and majority Sweden and why they are so absent in relation to contemporary Swedish race relations.

Keywords: Asians; Sweden; Literature; Minorities; Race

Introduction

Asians in Sweden number over 200,000 inhabitants and thus, for example, exceed the total number of Latin Americans in Sweden who amount to around 150,000 inhabitants. However, Swedish Asians are not very visible in minority or migrant contexts or in the public sphere in general. The purpose of this article is to shed light upon this relative absence of Asians and why Swedish Asians are so invisible in relation to other minorities. This is being done by examining how Asians are portrayed in a selection of titles belonging to non-white Swedish literature. This is of interest in light of the fact that Latin Americans, Swedish Muslims, Afro-Swedes and people with a background on the Balkan Peninsula and in the Middle East have become increasingly visible in Swedish society at large after previously having been relatively invisible.

The article consists of a study of a selection of novels, autobiographies and poems written by minority authors who are not Asians and in whose works Asians appear as characters, as well as an analysis of a number of passages derived from books written by Swedish Asians who write about how both majority and minority Swedes view them. The article begins with a demographic overview, a review of previous studies and an account of the theoretical point of departure and the empirical material in the form of the non-white Swedish literature. Thereafter follows the first review of texts, which aims to account for how non-Asian minority authors write about and look at Asians. This section is then followed by the second empirical section, which describes how Asian authors look at their own situation in Sweden.

Finally, a discussion and concluding summary follow that aim to explain the Swedish Asians' relative invisibility and to answer the following research questions: How are Asians in Sweden being represented in the non-white Swedish literature? How are Swedish Asians writing about their own experiences of being Asian in Sweden in the non-white Swedish literature? And why are Swedish Asians so relatively absent and invisible in both minority and majority contexts? At the end, the article argues that Asians in Sweden are placed closer to the white majority population than the other minority groups according to a Swedish version of the American model minority myth but this proximity to Swedish whiteness does not seem to be seen as something positive by other minorities.

Demographic Overview of Swedish Asians

Residents in Sweden with a background in Asia-Pacific or in Northeast and Southeast Asia amounted to 211,194 persons in 2018 (Statistics Sweden 2019).¹ This demographic category is here referred to alternately as Asians in Sweden or as Swedish Asians, and the category includes both Asian immigrants and adopted Asians, as well as mixed Asians and second-generation Asians. Although people who have a background in South Asia and sometimes in Central Asia are also included within the Asian minority category, for example in American and British contexts, this study only focuses on those who originate in Northeast or Southeast Asia because they are usually the ones referred to when Swedes talk about Asians.

Among the 211,194 Swedish Asians, two-thirds are immigrants, and of these foreign-born Asians, two-thirds are women. Furthermore, up to 15% of all Swedish Asians are adopted by mainly majority Swedes, and of the adoptees, almost two-thirds are girls or women (Statistics Sweden 2019). Unlike other minority categories of Sweden that are dominated by boys and men to a greater or lesser extent, such as the inhabitants from the Middle East, Swedish Asians are dominated by women and a relatively large proportion of them are also adopted.²

To continue, only 7.4% of Swedish Asians belong to the so-called second generation in the sense that they are born in Sweden with two parents born in Northeast or Southeast

¹ All demographic statistics in the article are derived from this source. Having a background from Asia-Pacific or Northeast and Southeast and is here defined as either being born in Hong Kong, Japan, China, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Taiwan, Brunei, Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and East Timor or being born in Sweden with one or two parents who are born in any of these countries.

² Residents in Sweden with some form of background in Latin America amounted to 152,423 people in 2018, while those with a background in the Caribbean consisted of 9,562 inhabitants. To continue, the inhabitants with a background in sub-Saharan Africa totalled 287,594, while those with a background on the Balkan Peninsula comprised 381,723, out of whom 318,308 persons have a background in former Yugoslavia. Finally, there were 847,809 inhabitants deriving from West Asia in 2018, and 71,770 people originating from North Africa, which in total means 919,579 inhabitants with a background in the Middle East. All these residents, including the immigrants, the adoptees, the mixed and the second-generation, amounted to 20% of the total Swedish population of 10,230,185 inhabitants in 2018, and they are in this study referred to as non-whites, non-white Swedes or visible minorities in accordance with the classification that has been used by the National Board of Health and Welfare (National Board of Health and Welfare 2010: 12).

Asia. In contrast, many of the inhabitants with a background in the Middle East and among many residents deriving from sub-Saharan Africa, both the father and the mother originate from the same country or region of origin. This means that the Asian minority in Sweden does not predominantly consist of endogamous nuclear families where both the father and the mother have the same background, and this reflects the fact that a huge proportion of Swedish Asian women are married to and living with non-Asian men. In fact, more than one quarter of all Swedish Asians are born in Sweden and mixed, and most of them have a parent from Northeast or Southeast Asia and a parent born in Sweden. Finally, more than 80% of all mixed Swedish Asians who have a parent from the region and a parent who is Swedish-born have a mother from the region and a Swedish-born father, meaning that the majority of mixed Asians have an Asian mother and a white Swedish father.

Swedish Research on Asians, Asians as a Model Minority and the Non-White Swedish Literature

Research on Swedish Asians is tiny and fragmentary in light of how big the minority is, and for the most part, it consists of social medicine and social work studies of Asian women who live together with white men (Åkerman 2019; Fernbrant et al. 2014, 2017; Hedman 2009; Hedman, Nygren & Fahlgren 2009; Lundberg 1999, 2000; Pongthipatt et al. 2018). In addition, there are a few studies of adopted Asians and of mixed Asians as well as of interracial marriages and intimate relationships, which include those between Asians and non-Asians (Arbouz 2017; HübINETTE 2003; HübINETTE & Tigervall 2009; Lindblad & Signell 2008; Osanami Törngren 2011, 2016, 2018).

However, unlike other minorities, such as Swedish Latin Americans and Afro-Swedes or Swedish Kurds, Iranians, Assyrians, or Turks, there is no major report, introductory overview, Ph.D. thesis, anthology, monograph or history of Swedish Asians as a minority in Sweden or, for example, Swedish Japanese or Swedish Filipinos. Swedish Asians are almost never highlighted in either academic or non-academic contexts, and only sketchy attempts to write a history about Swedish Koreans, Chinese or Thais have been made (Hedberg 2016; HübINETTE 2003; HübINETTE & Tigervall 2011; Kjellgren 2001; Webster & Haandrikman 2014). This means that it is simply not yet possible to account for the history of Swedish Asians.

Within Swedish ethnic and migration studies, virtually all major immigrant and minority groups originating from a particular state, region or continent have been dealt with and researched over the years, while no one has a doctorate based on a study of the Swedish Chinese and no monograph exists on Swedish Malaysians. A cautious and presumably overly generous estimate suggests that some 20 academic texts may exist, which thus constitutes the existing Swedish research on Swedish Asians, and in addition to the already mentioned studies, there are few student theses on Swedish Asians while at the same time there are many student theses on Afro-Swedes or Swedish Muslims (Hooi 2018; Ohtsuki 2010; Schwarz 2005; Sörensson 2015).

However, in the American context, there are several studies in literary texts examining how Latin Americans and African Americans relate to Asians (Fan 2017; Hong Sohn 2012; Kim 2005; Lee 2011). Even if it is not possible to fully transfer the relations between the different minorities in the US, I have chosen to make use of this American research on how other minorities relate to Asians as the theoretical point of departure for my study. The literary scholar Stephen Hong Sohn highlights that the so-called model minority myth, which dominates the image of Asians in the US, is decisive for how other American minorities are looking at and writing about Asians in light of how American race relations have developed in recent decades (Hong Sohn 2012: 152). Most importantly, this model minority myth, which says that Asians are more socio-economically successful than other minorities, makes the other minorities perceive Asians as standing closer to American whiteness and white Americans compared to themselves.

Further, the critical race studies scholar Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003, 2004) has argued that American racial formations are increasingly becoming transformed into a Latin American model, which means that some former non-white minority groups have over time come to be incorporated into, or at least come closer to, American whiteness. Bonilla-Silva calls this new racial hierarchy the black/non-black divide, which according to him has begun to replace a previous division between non-whites and whites and which is increasingly beginning to resemble the Latin American so-called pigmentocracy. Bonilla-Silva's idea about the new American race relations also informs my study on how other minorities in Sweden look upon Swedish Asians.

The texts that constitute the empirical material of this study are taken from what I have named and defined as the non-white Swedish literature (Hübinette 2019). Non-white Swedish literature is defined as all book publications that have been written in Swedish by an author who belongs to a visible minority group and having a background outside of Europe or on the Balkan Peninsula. This means that books published in Sweden in Arabic, Hindi or Somali have been excluded, as well as translations from other languages to Swedish. Since 1969 when the first titles came out and until 2018, a total of just over 500 titles were published according to this definition, out of which 100 are anthologies and over 120 originate from authors with an Iranian background, while 75 and 77 have Swedish Latin Americans and Afro-Swedes as authors (Hübinette 2019: 390–392).³

Among the 500 titles, Swedish Asians are mentioned or appear as characters in about 50 novels, poetry collections, autobiographies, play manuscripts and anthology contributions written by non-Asian authors, and almost all of these instances derive from the 1990s and onwards. A little bit more than 80 of the 500 titles have been written by Swedish Asians, and most of them, or about 75%, originate from female authors, out of whom two-thirds are adopted and mainly from South Korea. A dozen or so of the 80 works emanate from mixed Asians, and only about 15 titles have Asian immigrants or second-generation Asians as authors. The adoptees from Korea are behind nearly 60% of the 80 titles, and the dominance of adopted Asians and to some extent of mixed Asians can probably be explained by the fact that both of these sub-categories of Swedish Asians have only or mainly Swedish as their first language. The strong female dominance among the Swedish Asian authors is a little more difficult to explain, not least because it is otherwise male authors who dominate among the other minority groups.

Representations of Asians in the Non-White Swedish Literature

As for where, how and when Asians occur in various titles that belong to the non-white Swedish literature and which are written by non-Asian authors, it must be said from the outset that Swedish Asians are not particularly common at all as characters. In about 50 books where Swedish Asians appear, it is usually only in the passing, and there are only a handful of more complete portrayals of an Asian character; therefore, it is rare that Asian characters are even named. This invisibility probably also applies to Swedish literature in general written by white authors except for a few rare examples, such as Lars Norén's play *Kyla* from 2003 wherein an Asian man who is adopted from South Korea holds one of the main roles.

The fact that Asians are associated with adoption and with being adopted by Swedish society as a whole is not surprising in view of the fact that transnational adoption was born in Asia-Pacific and originated in the wake of the Korean War in the 1950s (Hübinette 2003). Since then, adopted children from Southeast and Northeast Asia have always dominated the world of transnational adoption numerically and proportionally, with Korea being the single largest country of origin in Sweden and in almost all other adopting Western countries.

³ Both the selection of books belonging to the non-white Swedish literature and the data concerning the authors and the titles derive from this publication.

It is also a fact that there are several references to adopted Asian children in the non-white Swedish literature, often from Korea but also sometimes from China and Vietnam. One example is Dilsa Demirbag-Sten's novel *Fosterland* wherein the narrator remembers that she was practically the only non-white pupil in her high school except for 'some adopted children from Asia' (Demirbag-Sten 2010: 294).⁴ In Jonas Hassen Khemiri's novel *Pappaklausulen*, or *The Family Clause*, a former girlfriend from Korea is mentioned in passing, which according to the narrator is the only one of his former partners who carries a completely Swedish-sounding name (Khemiri 2018: 203). To continue, in Zulmir Bečević's dystopian youth novel *Avblattefieringsprocessen*, a white woman dreams of adopting a 'Chinese baby that she could bathe, take care of and put tassels in her hair' (Bečević 2014: 11). Further, the artist Jason 'Timbuktu' Diakité tells in his memoir *En droppe midnatt*, or *A Drop of Midnight*, that his African American grandmother once in the 1970s urged his black father and white mother to adopt a child from Vietnam before he himself had been born (Diakité 2016: 279).

When it comes to gender, it is much more common for Asian girls or women to appear in the non-white Swedish literature than Asian boys or men, and the former usually turn up in connection with, and especially as, partners of non-Asian men. Asian women are most often portrayed as originating from Thailand and sometimes also from the Philippines. In Marjaneh Bakhtiari's best-selling satire *Kalla det vad fan du vill*, a Swedish man named Bengt is said to have been 'offered' a woman from Thailand by his male acquaintance who also is a white Swedish man: 'One of his acquaintances had offered him a Thai woman. The acquaintance himself had one, and knew people who could directly import them. The Thai women were calm, cleaned well and fixed good food every day' (Bakhtiari 2005: 177).

In Alexander Motturi's (2017: 38) novel *Broder*, the Thai woman Srinak turns up as the former girlfriend of the novel's character named Brother, and in Khemiri's previously mentioned novel *Pappaklausulen*, the narrator's North African father visits Sweden, and when he comes to Arlanda Airport, he sees white men in the arrival hall waiting for their future wives from Thailand:

Several men have bouquets and extra jackets in their hands. Dad recognises their type. He has seen them before. They are Swedish men waiting for their Thai wives. They have met on the internet and become engaged without having met and now the men have their jackets with them to show that they are kind and to avoid that the girls become shocked by the cold. But gentle men do not need to order whore wives from the other side of the globe, he thinks and continues toward the exit. (Khemiri 2018: 16–17)

However, not all adult Asian women who are together with white men are immigrants; many of them are also adopted Asian women. For example, the Afro-Swedish artist Kayo writes in the anthology *Svartskallarnas sammansvärjning* that her female adopted friend from Korea who had a white boyfriend was treated as being more or less something of a prostitute: 'Her boyfriend's friends, for example, asks him: "How much did you get to pay for her?"' (Kayo 1992: 110).

In rarer instances where Asian boys and men are mentioned, they are also sometimes referred to as being a 'whore' or as being 'gay' and non-heterosexual, for example in Hassan Loo Sattarvandi's two novels *Still* and *Belägring* (2008: 91; 2011: 72). 'I knew all the time that that the wimp was a gay, I said, and my eyes must have been completely circular in curiosity. Yes, damn, clearly the Chinese is gay' (Sattarvandi 2011: 72).

⁴ All citations from the texts have been translated from Swedish to English by the author.

In one of Lasse Lindroth's novels, the male Asian character Tom Ca-Gai is also non-heterosexual, and it is suggested that he is possibly a paedophile as his closest friend is Asian as well and said to be 'a little boy in his twelve years who only spoke Thai' (Lindroth 1999: 167).

Adult Asian men, unlike adult Asian women, are rarely or never conceived as partners to majority or minority women. This applies to a Korean immigrant man named Kim who Theodor Kallifatides writes about—'the Swedish girls are probably safe for Kim'—and this image that Asian men are not attractive at all for any woman is also something that turns up in other texts (Astorga Díaz et al. 2015: 117–118; Dennert 2011: 213; Kallifatides 1985: 58). Sometimes adult Asian men also appear as a group, and then it is almost always about male Japanese tourists who are often equipped with cameras (Kamyab 1991: 17–21; Mahmood 2012: 215–16; Rohi 2014: 259–61).

Both Asian women and men are frequently described in derogatory terms that allude to their appearance and sometimes also to their supposed manner of speaking Swedish. In Hassan Loo Sattarvandi's debut novel *Still*, one of the main characters becomes angry at an Asian immigrant man: 'I will kick in your yellow slanty-eyed ugly face you little whore bastard with a cracked ass, your yellow little pussy' (Sattarvandi 2008: 92). In Khemiri's and Golnaz Hashemzadeh's debut works *Ett öga rött*, or *An Eye Red*, and *Hon är inte jag*, or *She Is Not Me*, Asian characters appear who are described as 'the surveillance Chinese' with 'Chink eyes', as 'Gooks' and as simply 'ching chong' (Hashemzadeh 2012: 170; Khemiri 2003: 82, 111, 208). Asian people 'all look alike' as Sharock Kamyab writes, and an immigrant Thai man named Kanyuang cannot distinguish between the letters L and R in Bakhtiari's previously mentioned novel (Bakhtiari 2005: 84–87; Kamyab 1993: 93). References to Asians being collectivised as 'Chinese' regardless of their country of origin and who are said to look the same and who say 'L' in place of 'R' also appear in other titles (Carmona & Hellman 2017: 55; Martinez 2003: 68; Pascalidou 2003: 126).

Another theme that turns up in some of the works is non-Asian minority characters who are considered to exhibit certain physical features associated with being Asian. In Bečević's debut novel *Svenhammeds journaler*, one of the main characters is a Mexican immigrant boy who the narrator Svenhammed calls 'Chino': 'He has small, narrow eyes just like a Chinese. I thought they looked like upside down, like thin bananas' (Bečević 2009: 18).

In Rouzbeh Masarrat Agah's novel *FTL*, the male non-white protagonist has a friend who is not Asian but who is sometimes said to have 'Chinese eyes': 'I look at Sasha, who already has Chinese eyes. I feel a strong desire to lower him' (Masarrat Agah 2013: 20). In one of the poet Andrés Stoopendaal's poetry collections, another minority character appears who is probably not Asian: 'The comrade is tired and pushes the skin around his eyes with his fingers. They taper off; he looks almost Asian...' (Stoopendaal 2016: 12).

Asians sometimes also occur in relation to migration and integration issues, but it is not common at all. In Qaisar Mahmood's book *Jakten på svenskheten*, he mentions in passing that Asian immigrants are not perceived as people who 'disturb' Swedes when he visits the 'otherwise racist Skåne' as they are said to be 'silent and unobtrusive', thereby alluding to the Orientalist image of Asians as being docile (Mahmood 2012: 183–84).

Stories about Being Asian in Today's Sweden

Continuing with how Asians write about themselves, far from all texts that emanate from Swedish Asians treat how it is to be Asian in Sweden. Several of the 80 or so titles that have Swedish Asian authors are cookbooks, children's books, detective novels or books set in other countries and do not deal with Swedish issues. The texts that appear in this study are, in other words, only those that thematise issues related to how it is to be Asian in Sweden, and they constitute less than half of the total number of Swedish Asian texts.

To begin with, the adopted Asian writers tend to write that they are not treated as ‘immigrants’ by the majority population, not even by Swedish Nazis, and they are therefore considered to be more ‘accepted’ than both immigrants and adoptees from the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.

‘You’re not immigrants. Said the classmates. In the next moment, they could sit and gasp that the black skulls should be thrown out. That they only come here to make money’ (Trotzig 1996: 80).

‘But they are immigrants, someone told me in my younger teens, but you are adopted. You have the right to be here, one does not even think about that you are Chinese’ (French 2005: 25).

‘Even the racists and the Nazis in the city treated me as Swedish. They meant that I was Swedish because I had Swedish parents and did everything that Swedes do... You’re okay, but those damn immigrants...’ (Lundberg 2013: 22).

At the same time, this does not mean that Asian adoptees are protected from everyday racism judging by experiences of hate crimes that turn up in some of the texts (Christensen 2003; Jacobsson & Bruchfeld 1999: 24; Lee 2018: 55–58). Both Astrid Trotzig, Anna von Melen and Patrik Lundberg, all of whom are adopted from Korea, further testify that they are sometimes also mistaken for being Asian immigrants or even Japanese tourists and that they are sometimes addressed in English (Lundberg 2013: 24; von Melen 1996: 95; Trotzig 1996: 85).

To continue with mixed Asians, they are sometimes mistaken for being adoptees. Jesper Huor, who is mixed, tells in his memoir *Sista resan till Phnom Penh* that when he was small there were ‘rumors that I was adopted’, and the mixed narrator in the mixed Asian author Ann-Marie Tung Hermelin’s novel *Inunder* states that she was constantly asked the question ‘where do you come from?’ during her childhood, ‘as if I had been found in a basket in the reeds’, which is a reference to Moses who was an adoptee (Huor 2006: 14; Tung Hermelin 2012: 40).

The dominance of female Asian writers, who stand behind around 75% of the Swedish Asian book titles, means that many of the experiences are highly gendered. By far, the most common theme in texts written by Asian women centers around being racially sexualised. This experience turns up over and over again, and incidents of having been associated with prostitution have also occurred in the presence of the women’s white boyfriends or children:

‘You are so beautiful, you Asian women. It’s just one problem with you. You are so fucking tight down there. He continues to talk about this for a long time’ (Trotzig 1996: 66).

‘I was approached by a drunk man who called me a Thai whore and who wondered if I liked Swedish guys’ (Lifvendahl 2003: 75–76).

When the Volvo man waved down the window pane, I thought he wanted to make me be aware of something. That my lights didn’t work or that he needed help finding the way. But the man in the car just stared at me and my daughter.

- Go home to China you fucking Chinese whore.

My daughter in the back seat stopped singing.

- Go home to China you fucking Chinese whore I said, he repeated (Sundström 2007: 99–100).

A term that appears in some of these texts is 'yellow fever', which denotes the fetishistic phenomenon that exists among especially white heterosexual men who are attracted to Asian women (French 2005: 29; Ljuus 2016: 128). This 'yellow fever' afflicts the white leftist activist Hampus in Ola Wong's novel *Slavarna i Tanzhou* after a second-generation Chinese woman named Eliza has joined his left-wing radical group, but Hampus is also forced to realise that it is hardly *comme-il-faut* in an antiracist environment to be attracted to Asian women according to the 'yellow fever' symptoms that he displays:

Eliza had infected Hampus with yellow fever. He could now only turn on Asian girls. He thought that all other women's bodies were too big in comparison.

[...]

Hampus knew that he had dropped to the same level as the Thai Suedis – colonial paedophiles who took advantage of their economic power to sexually and economically oppress women with bodies like 12-year-old boys (Wong 2011: 169–70).

However, when it comes to Asian men there is no mentioning of 'yellow fever' at all. Patrik Lundberg and Sofia French, who are adopted from Korea, both compare how Swedes and other Westerners view Asian women and Asian men differently in their respective autofictional novels:

In contrast to Asian men, women have a reputation for being small sex machines that are always willing and more accessible than white women. If they don't want to, they are called 'Thai whores'. I have met so many Swedish men who speak of 'yellow fever', a sickly desire to go to bed with an Asian woman (Lundberg 2013: 26).

While Asian women are stereotypically portrayed as either docile or subservient, or totally over-sexualised, it is often the martial arts hero/samurai, or the desexualised geek/comedian who represent the Asian man (French 2005: 198).

The number of texts written by Asian men who raise the issue of being an Asian man in Sweden is only a handful, and they have mostly adopted men as authors. Interestingly enough, several Asian women write that they themselves are solely attracted to white men, such as Linn Heed who acknowledges that 'Asian men have never appealed to me in appearance, neither sooner nor later' (Arctadius Svenungsson 2003: 113; French 2005: 80; Heed 2017: 149).

Lundberg has in his acclaimed and autobiographically colored debut novel *Gul utanpå* told how he was considered unattractive during his teenage years:

It has happened that I have been offered to go to blind dates with girls, but I have never dared due to what would happen when they realise that I am Asian? I know how people talk about Asian men. We are short, feminine creatures who cannot say the letter 'R'. We can be cute, but never good looking and masculine. And then we have small dicks (Lundberg 2013: 26).

Lundberg's breakthrough within Swedish media did not come with *Gul utanpå*, however, but with a newspaper chronicle that bears the title 'You are ripping my soul out of me' and which was published in *Helsingborgs Dagblad* in 2011. Lundberg's chronicle dealt with how he is mocked and humiliated in the public space by both white and non-white non-Asians of both sexes, of all ages and of all social classes simply because he is an Asian man and he has in another text reminded that 'if people laugh at your body enough times, then you stop going

out' (Lundberg 2015: 43). Danjel Nam, who is adopted from Korea as well, has also testified to the same type of everyday racism that is linked to specific racial stereotypes of Asian men:

A month ago I was on my way home from work. It was a normal Friday evening, and I had worked late, so there was already a lot of partying going on. I am walking on Stockholm's busiest street Folkungagatan. The route starts with taxi drivers who ask if I want a taxi. Then a pub appears with lots of rock music.

And there, right there, I meet a company that is constantly on the verge of dancing into me because it is so crowded and dark on the pavement. Two Swedish girls in arm hook meet me with a look and suddenly exclaim 'Jap Jap' and giggle away into the Stockholm night. Then I pass a pedestrian crossing, and there I meet three Swedish guys talking loudly. When they are just alongside me, one guy turns to me and sends out an air kick and crosses his arms and hands forward and back and bows and shouts 'hooo-aaa, hooo-aaa!' in front of me. His friends start pulling away their buddy who is completely lost in his Karate Kid imitations.

I arrive at a park with two neon-lit artworks, and where two Swedish middle-aged men sit on a bench and smoke. One man chants 'ching chong, Mao Tse-Dong!' (Nam 2012: 137–38).

Finally, with regards to Asian immigrants who interact with other non-white immigrants in the minority dominated Swedish suburbs, there are only a few texts to account for. In the anthology *Rinkeby mitt i världen*, there is a poem written by Anne Pang from Hong Kong wherein she expresses that she both enjoys Rinkeby and feels that she is a part of this Stockholm suburb, which became dominated by minority residents in the 1980s (Pang 1985: 80). Hao Trinh, who is a male immigrant from Vietnam, has also lived in a minority dominated suburb where he as well seems to have felt at home judging by what he tells in his autobiography *Från Saigon till Borås* (Trinh 2012). Finally, in the anthology *Third Culture Kids*, Nattalie Ström Bunpuckdee, who is mixed and born in Sweden with a mother from Thailand and a white Swedish father and is a resident in a suburb, has written a poem that likewise reflects she feels she is a part of her neighbourhood (Ström Bunpuckdee 2017).

Discussion: Why are Asians So Invisible Within the Non-white Swedish Literature?

After having accounted for the arguably most common themes that occur in the non-white Swedish literature when Asians turn up as characters, it is now time to try to discuss and answer why Asians are so relatively absent within minority Sweden and by extension in Swedish society at large. Is it possible to talk about Swedish Asians as a model minority according to the American understanding of the position of Asians within the US? To begin with, as much as it appears that African Americans and Latin Americans in the US can harbor Orientalist images about Asians, which include various gendered stereotypes of Asian men and Asian women and which are similar to the ones that also exist among white Americans, this is also true for minorities in Sweden although in a different and Swedish way.

Concerning the works written by non-Asian minority authors and the texts that Swedish Asian authors themselves are behind, it is striking when comparing these two selections of texts, both with regard to Asian children, Asian women and Asian men, as they speak clearly to each other. Asian children are often perceived as being adopted children to white Swedes, while Asian women are often portrayed as being married to white men, unlike Asian men who tend to be accounted for as being single and not always as being heterosexual.

Further, Asians only appear in a few rare instances as residents of minority dominated suburbs in the various works, and they hardly appear at all in suburban activist anthologies, such as in *Third Culture Kids* and in *Revolution Poetry* or in studies of the so-called suburban social movement striving for social justice for the Swedish suburbs and their minority inhabitants (Hidaya Modig 2017; Sernhede, León Rosales & Söderman 2019; Vargas Alaeb, Rashid & Ruz 2018). Even in the contemporary Swedish public sphere, there are only a few Swedish Asians who are visible within a certain sector, such as within the cultural sphere, the media or the academic sphere. Also, in other cultural contexts besides literature and media, Swedish Asians are relatively invisible compared to other minorities, such as in feature films, in popular music or on stage, as there are hardly any Swedish Asian actors, singers, musicians, artists or stand-up comedians except for a handful of names.

It is also quite evident that there is a strong tendency in the texts to look down upon adopted Asians who, at best, are seen as being fully assimilated non-whites who are not counted as 'immigrants' and are therefore saved from being exposed to racism, and in the worst case, they are seen as something like tragic and pathetic figures who are living in a kind of splendid racial isolation from the minority suburbs and the rest of minority Sweden. Likewise, there is also a strong tendency to look down upon Asian women who are with white men and Asian men who do not seem to be able to live up to the masculinity ideals, neither among minority men nor among majority men in the examined texts and titles.

The demographic fact that around 40% of all Asians in Sweden are adopted or mixed and that two-thirds of Asian immigrants are women and, moreover, mainly married to white men means in all these cases a clear proximity to the majority population of Sweden. This proximity to Swedish whiteness factor, which in practice is about family formations and intimate relations to white Swedes, probably means that Asians appear to be more integrated than all other minority groups. However, proximity to white Swedes is not always regarded as something positive by other minorities and can be seen as something negative, which probably explains why adopted Asians are often portrayed as pitiable non-whites who are lacking racial pride and any racial solidarity with other visible minorities and explains why Asian women who are together with white men are sometimes represented as something like sellouts who turn their back on minority Sweden. Asian men are, in turn, represented as being so unmanly that they are perceived as ridiculous and perhaps only worthy of contempt and, in the end, being invisible.

To come back to the US context, Bonilla-Silva's idea about Latin Americanisation of US race relations means that Asians who are socio-economically successful have come closer to American whiteness in recent times, which is a development in the aforementioned model minority myth that arose in the 1970s as a counterimage to 'failed' and 'problematic' African Americans. In a Swedish context, this American model minority myth may possibly be compared to the undeniable fact that Swedish Asians do stand closer to the Swedish majority society and to white Swedes in general in ways that no other minorities arguably do. As a result, Swedish Asians are perceived as being not really included within and connected to minority Sweden, and to the minority dominated suburbs, although there are many Swedish Asians who also live in these neighbourhoods and thus share suburban space with all the other minority residents that live there.

Conclusion

To summarise and conclude, the relative invisibility that characterises Swedish Asians in the non-white Swedish literature, in minority Sweden and in the minority dominated suburbs, as well as in the Swedish public at large, can probably be understood and explained by the fact that a high proportion of the Asian minority has immigrated to Sweden due to different forms

of family formations with majority Swedes. This migration history has resulted in Asian children being perceived as adopted children to white Swedes even when they are not adopted at all and in Asian women being perceived as with white men even though far from every Asian woman has a white partner in Sweden and far from every Asian woman in Sweden is heterosexual. The fact that this study is based on literature and books is also a limitation in itself as a study of both representations of Asians in Sweden and Swedish Asian experiences; social media material, song lyrics, stage productions, movies or television dramas might have led to other conclusions and results.

Lastly, even if Swedish Asians are not more socio-economically successful than all other visible minority groups of Sweden, they are considered to be more integrated than other minorities as so many of them live together with majority Swedes, which means that the American model minority is only partly applicable to Sweden. This proximity of Swedish Asians to Swedish whiteness in turn means that they are not considered to be a part of minority Sweden in the same way as the other minority groups are perceived to be, and they are also considered to lack both solidarity with and affiliation to the minority dominated suburbs and to the other minorities in general. It is therefore possible to summarise the representations of Asians in Sweden as they appear in the non-white Swedish literature as if they are made up of Korean adopted children, Thai wives and Asian male singles who all have in common that they tend to be invisibilised and also tend to be stereotyped in an all-too-often condescending and derogatory way, which would not be considered acceptable when it comes to representing other minority groups.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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