



MALMÖ UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF CULTURE
AND SOCIETY

Where Are You *Really* From?

**Everyday Racism Experiences of
Swedes Adopted from Korea**

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Abstract

This study examines the everyday racism (as defined by Essed, 1991) experiences of Swedes adopted from Korea, through a narrative analysis of two autobiographical novels by adoptees, Lundberg's *Gul utanpå* (2013) and Trotzig's *Blod är tjockare än vatten* (1996). It also discusses the role and implications of everyday racism.

The study suggests that everyday racism is a constant feature in the adoptee's life, with much of it relating to the adoptee being racially categorised as Chinese. This paper argues that racism against adoptees is used by white Swedes to maintain boundaries of privileged white space, and stems from a fear that adoptees, Swedish in everything but skin colour, threaten to blur the boundaries of white Swedishness. The covert nature of everyday racism, combined with Sweden's colour-blind discourse and a national myth of tolerance and anti-racism, means that such racism is often denied or goes unrecognised, and is thus legitimised.

Key words: Everyday racism, colour-blindness, international adoption, Sweden, racism.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Sweden is a major importer of children: since the 1950's, over 55,000 children have been adopted from abroad by Swedes (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2011), rendering it the country with the highest proportion of internationally adopted citizens in the world (Hübinette & Tigervall, 2009:336). While the seemingly insatiable demand for non-white children from the (perceived) Third World by white families in the political West, and the continued flourishing of the adoption industry raises serious criticism from feminist, postcolonial and anti-racist standpoints (see, for example, Hübinette, 2005; Trenka, Oparah & Shin, 2006), international adoption continues to be considered a non-controversial practice in Sweden.

The main area of interest in this paper is the everyday racism experiences of Swedes adopted from South Korea¹, who make up around 9,000 of Sweden's adopted population (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2011)². Despite being raised by, and raised as, white Swedes, and despite being culturally and ethnically Swedish, Korean adoptees' non-white bodies prevent them from being exempted from the racism and discrimination reserved for (non-adopted) Asians by the white majority (Hübinette & Tigervall, 2009). Hübinette and Tigervall suggest that these problematic non-white bodies expose the adoptees to "routinised and systematic discrimination", and that this discrimination can explain the over-representation of international adoptees in suicide rates, as well as their greater propensity to addiction, unemployment and mental health problems (2009:339). Unfortunately, there is a dearth of serious research into adoptees' experiences of racism in Sweden; indeed, Hübinette notes that there is an academic disinterest in international adoption, claiming that it has a "strong invisibility in ethnicity, migration and diaspora studies", and that mainstream adoption research has tended to ignore the delicate issues of race and ethnicity (2005:19).

I believe that international adoption in general is a phenomenon that begs urgent attention from the IMER field: the motivation behind, and the implications of, a (non-white) child being removed from its society, culture, people, and language to fulfil the domestic dreams of a (white) couple in another part of the world, whilst generating a profit for adoption agencies, needs to be analysed and questioned. On a macro-level the adoption trade involves large-scale forced migration, through systems disturbingly comparable with the transatlantic slave trade (Hübinette 2005:30, 31); on a micro level, the individual adoptee is faced with struggles of ethnic and national identity and belonging, whilst being exposed to racism and degrading attitudes (Lindblad & Signell, 2008); these elements alone should be of great interest to IMER scholars.

¹ In this paper I have used "Swedes adopted from Korea" and "adoptees" interchangeably. An increasingly common internationally used alternative is "KAD", but it implies a sense of belonging to a Korean adoptee diaspora (of sorts), and is politically charged. I have used "international adoptees" to indicate international adoptees in a wider sense, that is, not just those adopted from Korea.

² Up-to-date estimates of the total number of adoptions from Korea vary between sources, but Statistiska Centralbyrån cite that 8,840 South Korean born adoptees were living in Sweden in 2011.

1.2 Aims and Research Question

My main research question is as follows: *What is the nature of the everyday racism experiences of Swedes adopted from Korea? How does such racism manifest itself, and what are its implications?*

The main aim of this project is to identify, analyse and discuss accounts of everyday racism experiences in published works by Swedes adopted from Korea. I will approach the question through a textual analysis of two autobiographical novels by adoptees: Patrik Lundberg's *Gul utanpå* (2013) and Astrid Trotzig's *Blod är tjockare än vatten* (1996). I aim to explore the nature of everyday racism against adoptees, and to address the question of why it manifests itself; what its purpose is. I will also discuss the wider societal implications of the phenomenon of people who are raised to be ethnically, culturally and linguistically Swedish being subjected to sustained, regular racial discrimination.

A further aim is to consider whether the Swedish colour-blind discourse and myth of tolerance and anti-racism play a role in the everyday racism process. If adoptees from Korea are raised as white Swedes, that is, they are raised in white families, within geographical and meta-physical spaces that are generally exclusively white (Hübinette and Tigervall, 2009:349), then they are likely to be influenced by the colour-blind discourse and myth of tolerance and anti-racism as much as their white peers: I aim to examine what effect this has on their own interpretations of their experiences of everyday racism.

Following my initial inductive readings of Hübinette and Tigervall (2008; 2009) and Lindblad and Signell's (2008) research into racism and degrading attitudes towards adult adoptees, I hypothesise that everyday racism is a persistent feature of the Swede adopted from Korea's life, and that much of this racism stems from the adoptee being racially categorised as Chinese. This categorising is based on a misreading of the ethnic signifier that is the adoptee's skin (Eriksen, 2002:29), and carries the assumption that Swedishness is white. Colour-blindness and the national myth of tolerance and anti-racism play a role in the reproduction of everyday racism, in that they create a culture of denial of racism, and establish an environment where discussing issues of race and racism are difficult for the adoptee.

1.3 Outline

The following two sections will outline and explain my choice of research methods: 2.1 will introduce the methods, while 2.2 establishes my methodological and philosophical perspective, my role, and the limitations of the thesis. Section 3, Literature, offers a review of previous research in this area, as well as an introduction to the source texts. Section 4 constructs the theoretical framework, and includes definitions of racism, everyday racism, colour-blindness and national myths of tolerance and anti-racism.

Section 5, Analysis and Discussion, begins with a presentation of categories of everyday racism identified in Lundberg (2013) and Trotzig (1996), while the proceeding three sections

deal with individual categories in depth: 5.2 analyzes enforced Chinese national identity; 5.3, intimate questioning by strangers; and 5.4, the adoptees being addressed in English by other Swedes. This leads to a discussion of my findings, divided into three sub-sections for clarity: Defending Boundaries (5.5); The Denial of Racism (5.6); and The Problem of Coping (5.7). Section 6 concludes my thesis, and considers the implications of this study.

2 Method

2.1 Method

I intend to analyze narratives of experiences of everyday racism in Lundberg (2013) and Trotzig's (1996) texts, using Essed's theory of everyday racism (1991) and Bonilla-Silva (2010) and Osanami Törngren's (2011) studies of colour-blindness to build my theoretical framework. Lundberg (2013) will act as my main source text, due to its contemporary nature, while Trotzig (1996) will be used primarily for comparison. I will also draw upon other published accounts of everyday racism by Swedes adopted from Korea (Höjer & Höjer, 2010; Lindström & Trotzig, 2003; Hübinette & Tigervall, 2008, 2009; Lindblad & Signell, 2008) to gain a wider perspective.

I will begin by using Essed (1991) to develop a working model of my understanding of everyday racism. I will then code the texts to identify the relevant narratives in a systematic textual analysis, using guidelines outlined by Berg and Lune in their description of qualitative content analysis (2012: 349). Having coded, I will undertake a close reading of the narratives of everyday racism, using deconstructionist narrative analysis techniques suggested by Czarniawska (2004). Whilst stressing that there is no correct, set way of carrying out a deconstruction, Czarniawska presents a list of analytic strategies, based on those employed by Martin (1990, cited in Czarniawska, 2004:97), which will guide my analytic process. The list is as follows:

1) Dismantling a dichotomy, exposing it as a false distinction; 2) Examining silences – what is not said; 3) Examining disruptions and contradictions; 4) Focusing on the element that is most peculiar in the text – to find the limits of what is conceivable or permissible; 5) Interpreting metaphors; 6) Analysing double entendres; 7) Reconstructing text to identify group specific bias, by substituting main elements (Martin 1990:335, cited in Czarniawska, 2004:97).

I have chosen to follow a model of qualitative content analysis to code the texts, mainly because of its systematic nature; were I to unscientifically select examples to support my arguments, I would be left, justifiably, open to accusations of “cherry-picking” or “examplifying” (Berg & Lune, 2012:371, 372). Examplifying would also overlook the context in which the examples are given, and why they are there. A thorough, systematic analysis will enable me to test my hypothesis negatively, whilst giving me the opportunity to see unexpected new patterns emerging that my examplifying would have missed.

I will use secondary source data rather than primary sources, such as interviews, for several reasons. First and foremost, Korean adoptees may find it difficult to talk about the deeply

personal matters that are experiences of racism with a white Bachelor's level student (Essed notes that non-white informants may be, "reticent about discussing their experiences of White racism with a White interviewer" (1991:67)); the data may be devalued by the Race of Interviewer Effect (RIE) (Osanami Törngren, 2011:93-98); matters may be complicated further by the Swedish colour-blind discourse which makes race and racism awkward concepts to address; and the participants are certain to have developed coping strategies to deal with racism, which, as an inexperienced interviewer, I am wary of risking disrupting. Additionally, interviews would be affected by a language barrier: my spoken Swedish is poor, so I would need to conduct interviews in English. By analyzing published texts, I can be sure of upholding my ethical obligations on one hand, whilst being able to observe adoption and racism narratives on the other. I believe that the unobtrusiveness of textual analysis and its time-effective nature make it an ideal method to use for a Bachelor level research project.

2.2 Methodology

My project is by nature very much constructivist: I will be examining how socially constructed, but socially realistic (Bonilla-Silva, 2010:9), notions of race are used to categorise and disempower adoptees from Korea; and how such racialisation, and its accompanying discrimination, is concealed from the public eye by a colour-blind discourse. According to Moses and Knutsen (2007:192), a constructivist perspective allows for multiple realities: there is no real world as such. Such a perspective is suitable for exploring the curious phenomenon of a Swede adopted from Korea considering herself Swedish, whilst being categorised and treated as Chinese, and being subjected to everyday racism and discrimination without necessarily recognising it.

A deconstructive narrative analysis technique could be well suited to the epistemological preferences of constructivism (as described by Moses and Knutsen, 2007:193) in that it would enable me to probe the extreme complexities of narratives that are interpretations of "reality" by the adoptee; which are in turn re-interpreted to be acceptable for the potential (Swedish) audience; then re-interpreted once more by myself, and re-presented – in a different language – in support of my arguments in such a way that will not cause a negative emotional reaction in the examiners of my thesis. My approach is not so much that the narratives of everyday racism discussed herein are precise representations of reality, but that they are representations of a reality that are acceptable to a Swedish readership that may see international adoption as unproblematic, and racism as something that happens (or happened) elsewhere. The narrative analysis method will enable me to critically examine how and, importantly, why particular narratives have been presented/re-presented, rather than considering them to be truths, or looking for the truth³.

³ I cannot stress enough that I will be treating Trotzig and Lundberg as narratives in this paper, rather than as people, approaching their work with the understanding that individuals do not make their own narratives (Czarniawska, 2004), and aware that their works are produced by major commercial publishing houses and would

Approaching this project as a constructivist, it is of utmost importance to be aware, and to make my audience aware, of my own position within my research, and the influence that this will have on my work. In my view, all research is political, and the researcher cannot be removed from her research; I do not believe that a pretence of neutrality is helpful, and will strive to make my position and role clear from the outset. I am, as an anti-racist, resolutely opposed to the international adoption industry, and regard international adoption as a severely problematic colonial practice, which can only function with deep-rooted beliefs in racial hierarchies and with massive racialised inequalities in power in place. I am in agreement with Bonilla-Silva (2010), Hübinette and Tigervall (2009), and Osanami Törngren (2011), in finding that colour-blind politics and discourse can be problematic, and a significant barrier to discussing and fighting racism on both a structural and a micro level.

Moses and Knutsson conclude their introduction to constructivism by arguing that a constructivist approach can give social scientists a role as liberators: they can, they maintain, “conduct research that serves the cause of freedom, fairness, justice and peace ... They can give a voice to the voiceless” (2007:221). While it is this worldview that drew me to IMER studies, and to researching and writing about issues of race/racism and international adoption, I do not make any claims to be speaking for adoptees, or even to be putting forward an adoptee perspective.

3 Literature

3.1 Previous Research

When it comes to issues of race, racism and adoption in Sweden, Hübinette has been the foremost scholar, and, as such, my research is heavily indebted to his work. His *Comforting an Orphaned Nation* (2005) gives a detailed history of adoption from Korea, and approaches international adoption from a critical, anti-racist, feminist, post-colonial perspective. This was a groundbreaking work in Sweden, as previous research relating to international adoption had been uncritical, and written either by, for, or from the perspective of, white Swedish adoptive parents. Hübinette himself is a Swede adopted from Korea, and, as an active anti-racist, describes himself as a scholar activist. Hübinette and Tigervall’s *Adoption med förhinder* (2008) is the most significant qualitative research into adoption and racism in Sweden. Comprised of Hübinette’s interviews with 20 adult adoptees, regarding their experiences of everyday racism and ethnic identifications, and Tigervall’s interviews with white adoptive parents, the study highlights the serious issue of sustained and routine racism against adoptees, identifies this racism as everyday racism (as per Essed’s (1991) definition), and addresses the problems faced by transracial adoptees living in a colour-blind society. Their 2009 article, *To be Non-White in a Colour-blind Society* summarises the research, and takes a critical stand against the Swedish colour-blind project, demonstrating the role of colour-blindness in maintaining racist structures

have gone through an extensive editing process with the target audience – and sales – in mind.

mainly by preventing racism being identified and treated as such. It strongly opposes the myth of Sweden being a “post-race utopia”, and urges for race to be recognized as a concept to allow racial discrimination to be discussed in the public sphere. These two texts have been the starting point for my research and hypothesis building.

Lindblad has also been prominent in adoption research in Sweden in recent years, although his work tends to fall into the field of psychology. While he writes from the adopters’ perspective (he is a white adoptive father), he has approached darker areas of adoption: suicide and psychiatric illness (Hjern, Lindblad & Vinnerljung, 2002); and degrading attitudes (both sexual and non-sexual) towards adult female Asian adoptees (Lindblad & Signell, 2008). The latter study, involving interviews with 17 25-35 year old females adopted from South Korea and Thailand, is of significance to this project. The findings on adoptees’ experiences of racism were not dissimilar to Hübinette and Tigervall’s and those outlined in my source texts. While Lindblad and Signell (2008) find evidence of serious, recurring practices of degrading racism, often of a sexually humiliating nature; practices which affect the adoptees’ day-to-day existence, and which several of the informants describe as having, “adversely influenced their well-being and quality of life” (2008:4); they do not actually define them as everyday racism, and describe some of them as being related to adoption, rather than to race. While noting that the degrading attitudes towards their informants are based on negative stereotypes of Asians, they stop short of seeing these attitudes as being linked to structures of racist ideology, and they do not consider the possibility that international adoption itself is a part of a racist structure, and part of a process which constructs, maintains and legitimizes those negative stereotypes⁴.

3.2 Source Texts

Autobiographical works by Swedish adoptees from Korea include accounts of racialisation and everyday racism, and these have provided me with my source material. Trotzig (1996) was the first account of its kind, and as a widely published and acknowledged work, has been important in creating knowledge about adoption to the public. Lindström and Trotzig (2003) is a collection of reflections by adult adoptees on their return visits to their countries of birth, and provides examples of everyday racism and an interesting insight into adoption narratives, although the focus is mainly on the act of returning to Korea for the first time.

Lundberg (2013) is the main source material for this project, chosen both for its contemporary nature and for its focus on national identity and racialised experiences. It is of great significance to note the similarities between Trotzig (1996) and Lundberg’s work in terms of their narratives of national identity and experiences of racism. Both books describe experiences of growing up as adoptees in white Sweden, and chart their first trips to Korea as 25 year old

⁴ It should be noted that the article appears in a journal for adoption researchers and practitioners, so was possibly influenced by being produced for a pro-adoption readership.

adults. Both authors emphasise their strong personal identification as Swedes, and the challenges of constant misidentification by others. Trotzig takes a bolder approach to describing racist abuse, whereas Lundberg's is more of a populist effort, at pains to establish himself as being just as white as the reader. Lundberg's title itself, *Yellow on the Outside*, refers to a section in the book where he likens himself to a banana: yellow on the outside, white on the inside (2013:47)⁵. Both present themselves on their first forays into Korea as being very much the everyman Swede abroad, troubled by foreign food, foreign customs and the lack of people able to speak English; emphasizing to the reader that Korea is not the place they belong, or feel any sort of essentialised connection to⁶.

Another work that is of contemporary significance is Höjer and Höjer's, *Stålmannen, Moses, och Jag*⁷ (2011): a book for adopted children, edited by adoptive parents, which has an impressive chapter on racism, constructed through snapshot accounts of experiences of racism by adult and child adoptees. Considering the traditional avoidance of talk of racism in adoption literature⁸, this is an interesting and important source.

4 Theoretical Framework

I will now outline my interpretation of Essed's theory of everyday racism (1991), beginning with a working definition of racism to be used in this paper. I have hypothesised that in a contemporary Swedish context the notion of colour-blindness and a national myth of tolerance and anti-racism play a significant role in the everyday racism process; as such, I will also use this section to outline my understanding of colour-blindness as a politics and a discourse in Sweden, and define the concept of a myth of tolerance and anti-racism, and present their likely influence.

4.1 Working Definition of Racism

To build a coherent and usable framework, I have adhered to Essed's working definition of racism, which is built on a combination of Collins' aggregation hypothesis, which argues that "macro-

⁵ It should be noted that the title was chosen by the publisher. Lundberg's original title was "A Race of Angels", referring to a moment in the book where he briefly felt a sense of belonging with other adoptees, freely floating outside white Westernness, outside Koreanness, as they sang karaoke together in Seoul. This title carries a very different meaning to "Yellow on the Outside", which indicates a sense of belonging to whiteness/Swedishness. This goes to reiterate the argument that the source texts are not presentations of reality, but of a reality which is acceptable, and desirable, for their audiences.

⁶ Trotzig's title, "Blood is Thicker than Water" may imply otherwise, but it is something of a misnomer: the title comes from the book's final sentences, concluding Trotzig's journey into Korea and into her own national/ethnic identity: "Perhaps blood is thicker than water. But love is thicker than blood"(1996:287).

⁷ Superman, Moses, and I.

⁸ Socialstyrelsen, in collaboration with Myndigheten för internationella adoptionsfrågor (MIA), the Swedish state adoption authority, has only two vague references regarding adoptees being subjected to racism in its handbook for new adoptive parents (2007:92; 95).

sociological reality is composed of aggregates of micro situations” (1981, cited in Essed 1991:38); and Cicourel’s representation hypothesis: “macro social facts, or structures, are produced in interactions” (1981, cited in Essed 1991:38). Essed describes the macro-level and micro-level dimensions of racism as being interdependent, and stresses the role of repetition and routine in forming racist structures (1991:39).

At a macro-level, racism can be seen as both a “system of structural inequalities and historical process, both created and re-created through routine practices” (1991:39); while at micro-level, specific practices can only be defined as racist if they activate the racist inequalities which are already part of an existing structure (1991:39).

Racism manifests itself through its interlinked cognitive and behavioural components: prejudice and discrimination (1991:44). As definitions of prejudice and discrimination vary, for clarity I will quote the definitions provided by Essed in full here:

Prejudice:

[A] social representation compounded of in- and out-group differentiations. The basic tenets of prejudice are:

- (a) a feeling of superiority,
 - (b) perception of the subordinate race as intrinsically different and alien,
 - (c) a feeling of propriety claim to certain area of privilege and advantage ...
 - (d) fear and suspicion that the subordinate race wants the prerogatives of the dominant race.
- (Blumer, 1958, cited in Essed, 1991:45)

Discrimination:

Racial discrimination includes all acts – verbal, non-verbal, and paraverbal – with intended or unintended negative or unfavorable consequences for racially or ethnically dominated groups. It is important to see that intentionality is not a necessary component of racism. (1991:45)

4.2 Everyday Racism

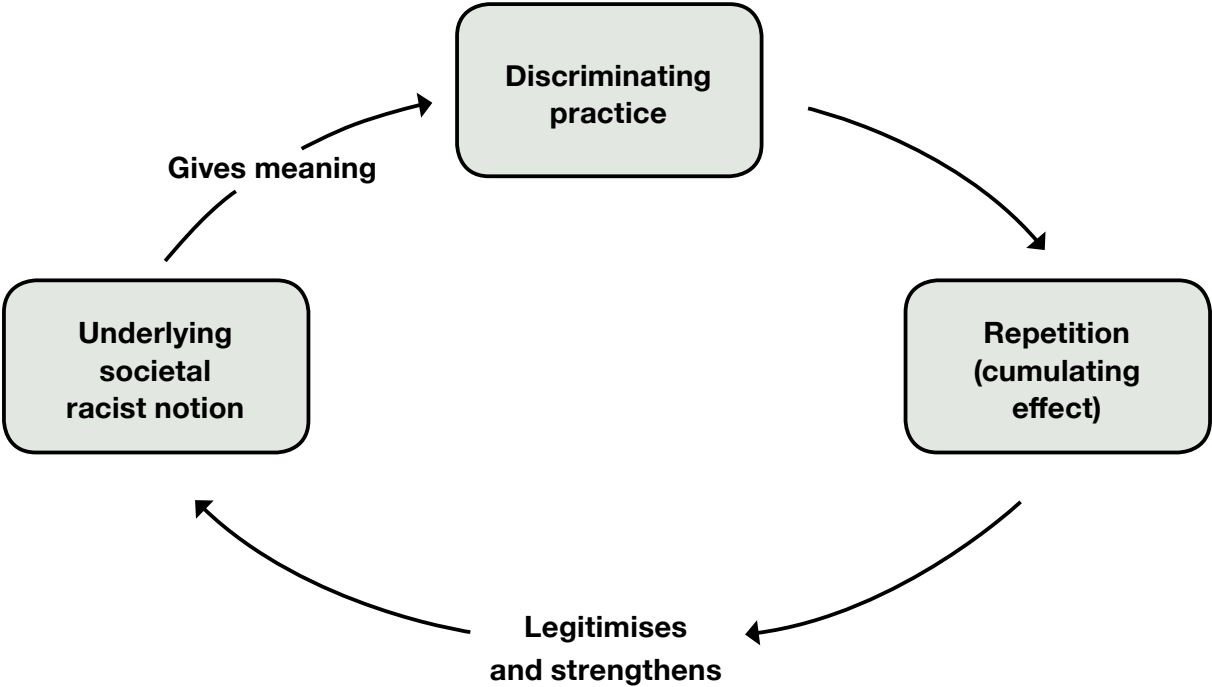
Racism should be seen as a process, involving the continuous production, reproduction and strengthening of existing racist structures and ideological beliefs through routinised practices. This production and reproduction is the role of everyday racism, which also acts as a connection between racist structures and routine situations, serving to communicate racist ideologies through daily interactions (Essed, 1991:2).

Essed defines everyday racism as:

[T]he integration of racism into everyday situations through practices (cognitive and behavioural ...) that activate underlying power relations. This process must be seen as a continuum through which the integration of racism into everyday practices becomes part of the expected, of the unquestionable, and of what is seen as normal by the dominant group. (1991:50)

I have illustrated my understanding of this continuum in the model below, which I shall use to define practices of everyday racism in my source texts.

Figure 1: Everyday Racism Continuum



Adapted from Essed 1991

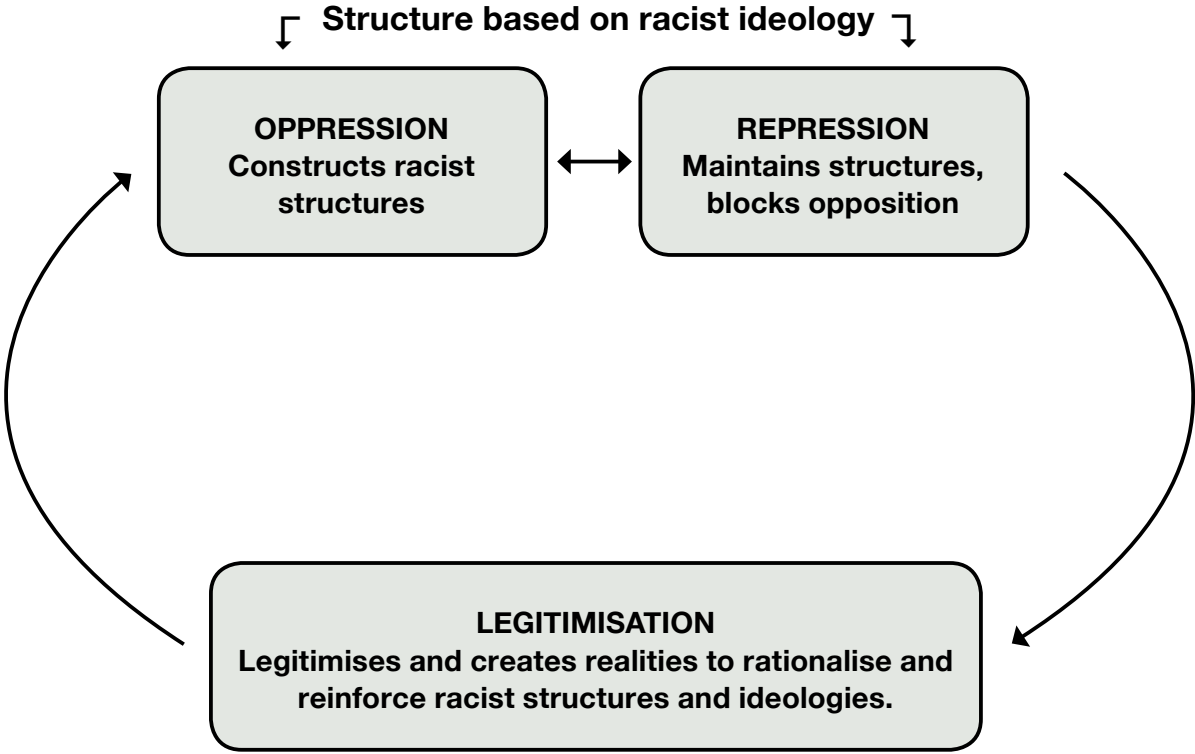
A discriminating practice is given meaning by the underlying societal racist notion, which represents macro-level structures and ideologies, regardless of whether the consequences of this meaning are intended or not. Repetition is the feature distinguishing everyday racism from racism: with everyday racism being defined by “systematic, recurrent, familiar practices” (1991:3), and only existing in the plural (1991:53). The “everyday” in everyday racism represents the normal, the routine, the run-of-the-mill, and therefore the accepted and legitimate; but also as an occurrence

that happens “every day”: a regular, systematic, repeated practice. This routine and familiar nature serves to both actualise and reinforce the existing underlying societal racist notions (1991:52).

The covertness of practices of everyday racism is worth noting here. A key characteristic is that it often takes the form of acceptable and unquestionable practices, which would not necessarily be recognised as racism by the majority population, by the perpetrator, or, indeed, by the victim.

Everyday racism operates within a system of racial domination, which can be understood as a process driven by forces of oppression, repression and legitimisation (1991:51). Forces of oppression, which represent the creation of racist structures are interlocked with forces of repression, which maintain structures by blocking or preventing opposition. To be effective, the structure needs constant legitimisation to rationalise the ideological beliefs behind it. Everyday racism fulfils the duty of continuous reproduction of the system, acting both as a legitimiser and a communicator of ideologies. Everyday racism transmitted through media, images and other forms of communication is of particular importance in the system, having the ability to create and communicate realities in accordance with the underlying ideologies on a massive scale (1991:51). In effect, racist structures are dependent on everyday racism, just as everyday racism is dependent on racist structures. I have attempted to illustrate my understanding of this below:

Figure 2: System of Racial Domination



Adapted from Essed 1991

4.3 Colour-Blindness

Colour-blindness can be defined as, “a mode of thinking about race organized around an effort not to ‘see’, or at any rate, not to acknowledge, race differences” (Falkenberg, 1993:142, cited in Osanami Törngren, 2011:60). Swedish colour-blindness is perhaps unique, in that it has been taken on as a political project, with “ras” (race) becoming a taboo word.

There are significant problems with colour-blind politics and a colour-blind discourse: Osanami Törngren argues, “Failure to *see* and to talk about the role of visible differences is akin to failing to recognize the effects that the visible differences have on some groups of people and their social lives” (2012:59). Colour-blindness also leads to a belief that structural racism does not exist: the belief that we are an equal, anti-racist country; we do not even see racial differences, so we do not have racism. Hübinette and Tigervall mount a significant challenge to Swedish colour-blindness, their research confirming that “the historically embedded and scientifically produced images of different races and their inner and outer characteristics, including their geographical and cultural ascriptions, are ... still very much alive in everyday life in contemporary Sweden beyond the official declarations of being a colour-blind society and a post-racial utopia” (2009:350). They urge Sweden to abandon its colour-blindness project, and to thus allow the problems of race-based discrimination to be addressed in the public sphere (2009:350).

Osanami Törngren’s (2011) research involved comparing attitudes towards inter-racial marriage/relationships with adopted and non-adopted members of the same racial category. She found that attitudes towards the two groups show little variation; thus proving the significance of colour over culture, and challenging the myth of Sweden being a nation that does not “see” colour, and where colour is not a significant factor in categorizing. Both Hübinette and Tigervall (2008) and Osanami Törngren (2011)’s research indicates that race is effectively still being read, and essentialised characteristics are still being matched to race, even if a different vocabulary is being used to communicate this.

To refer back to Figure 2, colour-blindness, in concealing and denying discrimination and underlying prejudices, acts as a means of repression by blocking challenges to existing racist structures by creating a culture of denial; a denial of both the structures themselves, and of practices and attitudes produced by the structures.

Finally, the impact that colour-blindness has on the adoptee’s own understanding of racism should not be underestimated. Raised in colour-blind Sweden, the adoptee will be party to the codes and ideology of colour-blindness as much as any other (white) Swede, and as such may have difficulty recognizing, interpreting and expressing their experiences of racism.

4.4 National Myths of Tolerance and Anti-Racism

Colour-blindness as a politics and a discourse has been instrumental in the construction of Sweden’s mythical identity as being progressive and somehow “post-race”: an anti-racist, equal

society where people are not categorised by skin colour or physical characteristics associated with racist biology. Heinö argues that Swedes see themselves as “democratic, liberal, equal, tolerant, and individualist”, and highly value and realize the values of, “anti-racism, universalism, secularism and gender equality” (2009: 303-304, cited in Osanami Törngren, 2011:63). Hübinette and Tigervall add that Sweden’s self-image is that of a nation that is a benefactor to the Third World, that stands outside the history of colonialism and anti-Semitism associated with other Western nations (2009:336).

In researching everyday racism experiences of black women in the Netherlands, Essed (1991) discovered that a national myth of tolerance; a shared notion that the Netherlands is a tolerant country, where racism is no longer an issue; had led to a widespread denial of racism. This meant that her informants found it difficult to communicate experiences of racism, particularly to whites, for fear of being told they are over-reacting, or had misunderstood the situation. To report racism in such an environment could only lead to the black women (and, subsequently, black women in general) as being seen as “oversensitive” or “paranoid” (1991:115). Her informants agreed that the (white) Dutch made it impossible to raise the subject of racism (1991:115). Given Heinö (2009) and Hübinette and Tigervall’s (2009) descriptions of Sweden’s self image, I would argue that a myth of tolerance is present here too; perhaps it would be more accurate to define it as a myth of anti-racism though, as the development of the colour-blindness project, and a belief that the nation is the Third World’s Western benefactor would imply a level of activeness: the nation is not just tolerant, but is actively challenging racism and inequalities stemming from racist projects such as colonialism or anti-semitism.

5 Analysis and discussion

5.1 Categories of Everyday Racism

I began my analysis of Lundberg (2013) and Trotzig (1996) by identifying and categorising everyday racism practices following my interpretation of Essed’s (1991) definition. It is worth remembering that the forms of everyday racism listed below should not be seen as an exhaustive list of Lundberg’s and Trotzig’s own experiences, merely those presented in print. I have only indicated whether or not the everyday racism form is present in the texts: some forms are explored in depth, some mentioned in passing.

I have loosely grouped the categories of everyday racism together, basing the groups *denial of dignity*, *whitecentrism* and *intimidation* on those used in Essed (1991:180, 181). The grouping is mainly for clarity, and most categories could appear in more than one group. While the everyday racisms directly linked to Chineseness are placed in a group of their own, it could be argued that all of the everyday racism identified in Lundberg (2013) could be attributed to his being meaningfully categorised as Chinese.

Figure 3: Categories of Everyday Racism in Lundberg (2013) and Trotzig (1996)

	Lundberg	Trotzig
<i>Imposed Chineseness</i>		
Ridicule, racist insults, rhymes and jokes relating to Chineseness	x	x
Treated as Chinese	x	x
Called Chinese	x	x
Shouted “Kina” or “Kines” at		x
Told to go back to China	x	x
Spoken to in pretend Chinese		x
Shouted at in “Chinese” (e.g, “Ni Hao!”) by strangers		x
Comments about Chinese people’s perceived mispronunciation of R/L and related jokes and insults	x	
<i>Denial of dignity</i>		
Intimate questioning by strangers	x	x
Sexualised racism	x	x
Mocking laughter		x
Racialised humiliation	x	x
<i>Whitecentrism</i>		
Name (comments/reaction regarding Swedish/Christian name on “Asian”)	x	x
Compliments on “good” Asian attributes	x	
Spoken to in English by other Swedes	x	x
Questioning national allegiance	x	
“You are OK (like us), it’s the other immigrants ...”	x	x
<i>Intimidation</i>		
Racist views expressed directly	x	x
Racist views expressed in earshot	x	x
Racist insults and jokes	x	x
Looks, stares		x
<i>Other</i>		
Denial of racism	x	x
Passport/customs racism		x

The most significant findings to emerge from this initial inductive analysis were as follows: the sustained regularity of everyday racism in the adoptee's life; the similarities between experiences of everyday racism in the source texts and in previous research; the constant feature of being identified as Chinese; and the covert nature of the experiences: there were very few, if any, experiences that one could imagine being reported (or reportable) to the police (for example), and few instances where the perpetrator would have seen themselves as a racist, or someone committing a racist act.

I will now present a detailed analytical discussion focused on three areas in particular: the linked categories relating to Chineseness, intimate questioning by strangers, and being spoken to in English by other (Swedish-speaking) Swedes. I will then turn my attention to the roles and implications of everyday racism, discussing the use of racism to maintain racialised boundaries, the macro-level ineffectiveness of coping strategies, and the denial of racism. My main focus will be on Lundberg (2013), but I will draw on Trotzig (1996) for comparison and Hübnette and Tigervall (2008; 2009), Lindblad and Signell (2008) and Höjer and Höjer (2011), for a broader contextual understanding.

5.2 Everyday Racism 1: Enforced Chinese National Identity

I have been called Chinese daily for 25 years. (Lundberg, 2013:208)⁹

Swedes adopted from Korea are not Swedes. They are not Koreans. They are Chinese. Sometimes Japanese; but usually Chinese. Hübnette and Tigervall note that adoptees from Korea spend their whole childhood – and adulthood – being called Chinese, categorised as Chinese and spoken to as if they were Chinese (2008:94). Both Lundberg and Trotzig confirm this: “[F]or strangers, and in arguments with friends, I was always Chinese”. (Lundberg, 2013:21); “In school among classmates, I was sometimes bullied for my appearance, called Chinese, Japanese, never Korean ...” (Trotzig, 1996:80).

Being racially categorised as Chinese seems to be an everyday occurrence in adoptees' lives, threatening to happen in any space, at any time. It can manifest itself through racist insults, jokes and rhymes:

Tjing tjong, kines, var det du som fes? (Ching chong Chinaman, is it you that farted?)

Är du en galen kines, eller har du trampat på en galen banan? (Are you a crazy Chinese, or did you step on a crazy banana?)

⁹ All translations from Swedish texts are my own. In situations where the Swedish language is essential to my analysis, for example in racist rhymes, titles, or situations where Swedes are addressed English by other Swedes despite speaking Swedish, I have presented the original with a translation in brackets; in all other situations just my translation appears.

Mamma kines, pappa japan, stackars lilla barn. (Mummy Chinese, Daddy Japanese, poor little kid.) (Lundberg, 2013:21)

Lundberg stresses the everyday, routinised nature of such insults: “I’ve heard all the rhymes. Thousands of times” (2013:21).

Chinese categorizing can occur in the workplace. Lundberg describes his nightly encounters with customers in his work as a croupier:

Pretty much every evening I have been confronted for my non-white appearance. When customers have lost their money, I have often heard, “fucking Chinese”. When they’ve won there’s been the sneering remark, “But you’re Asian, shouldn’t you be awesome at games?” (2013:27)

Both Lundberg’s workmates as well as his customers label him as Chinese:

Virtually all of the customers address me in English or Chinese. My workmates call me Bruce Lee. (2013:195)

It occurs when meeting new people. Lundberg arrives in Korea for the first time to begin his exchange studies at Inha University. At the meeting point in the airport he is relieved to see that there are other newly-arrived international students also from Europe:

Standing around the man were a group of Westerners of my age. When I made contact with them they asked me if I was from China or Japan. (Lundberg, 2013:29)

At borders to countries¹⁰: Astrid Trotzig is going through a passport control in London, before Sweden had joined the EU:

On the way to the passport control I heard a Swedish traveller behind me say in an irritated voice:

It is only us and the Chinese that aren’t in the EEC [EU]. It wasn’t until he’d passed me that I understood it was me he was referring to. I was the only Asian-looking person in the vicinity. (Trotzig, 1996:55)

It occurs in intimate spaces, acting as a barrier to prevent inter-racial relationships. Marie, another Swedish adoptee tells Lundberg when they meet in Seoul:

Back in Sweden boys didn’t even look at me: for them I was just a Chinese. (2013:154)

¹⁰ The metaphoric significance of border/customs racism is discussed in Hübner and Tigervall, 2009

It can come in the forms of screams from strangers in the street, looks, laughs:

[They] can't resist saying or screaming some derogatory word at me when they pass, that I should go back to China, imitating "Chinese", mocking laughter. They are normal Swedes, both children and adults. (Trotzig, 1996:64)

As Trotzig stresses, these are "normal" Swedes. In colour-blind discourse, we can take "normal" to indicate "white" Swedes. The normality of the abusers is also stressed by Lindblad and Signell, who argue that the variety of their informants' accounts of violations "questions the assumption that racism is only attractive to marginal groups in Sweden, as manifestations clearly occur on a daily basis" (2008:57). The perceived normality of the perpetrator adds to the unchallengeable, acceptable nature of everyday racism.

Being categorised as Chinese and being party to its encompassing racism is an everyday reality for Swedes adopted from Korea. As the above examples show, it seems to permeate every aspect of daily life: from the playground to the work place; in the street and in shops; travelling and dating. It ranges from the explicit: "fucking Chinese!"; to the covert: Trotzig describes being frightened by disdainful or patronizing looks that she can't always be sure whether she is misjudging, unless they are followed by (Chinese related) racist comments (1996:64).

The Chinese label is not an innocent one in Sweden; it always carries the meaning given to it by the underlying societal racist notions about China and Chineseness (regardless of whether this meaning is intended by the speaker or not). Indeed, Hübnette and Tigervall suggest that label "Chinese" can be seen as a derogatory term in the Swedish language (2008:94), carrying manifold negative connotations. One of their informants described these connotations as: "ugly"; "one-child policy"; "too many of them"; "like animals"; "annoying"; "they want to come here and take over" (2008:94). Lundberg presents his own interpretations of what Chineseness means in Sweden (or Asianness: he points out that Asian in the West is "Chinese" (2013:21)). Of the men, he says: "We are short, feminine beings who cannot say the letter R. We can be cute and sweet, but never handsome and masculine. And we have small cocks" (2013:26). In contrast, Asian women are, "little sex-machines who are always willing and more available than white women" (2013:26).

These notions of Chineseness in relation to Swedishness fit neatly into Blumer's definition of prejudice (1958, in Essed, 1991:45): there is a feeling of superiority; there is a feeling that Chinese is a subordinate race, different, alien ("like animals", as Hübnette and Tigervall's informant explains (2008:94)); there is a claim to areas of privilege and advantage, and a fear and suspicion ("they want to come here and take over"); and at the same time they are seen as pathetic, ridiculous, asexual (male), or hyper-sexed and sexually available (female). This then, in terms of the everyday racism continuum (Figure 1), can be regarded as the underlying racist notion, which gives meaning to the process of labelling somebody Chinese in Sweden.

This notion is widely recognisable, as illustrated by Lundberg's use of his experience of

being labelled Chinese to triumphantly, and movingly, make the audience of a debate TV show in which he appeared (and, subsequently, the readers of his book) realise the persistent, daily traumas endured as a result of being a Swede with an Asian body:

I have been called Chinese daily for 25 years. Of course it leaves scars in your brain and your heart. (Lundberg, 2013:208)

For Lundberg's example to be effective, the audience would have to be party to the underlying prejudicial notions of Chineseness.

Lundberg also presents the following dialogue. He dances with a girl in a club in Dublin. Then they sit down together on a sofa:

“What’s your name?”

“Patrik, but I spell it without the c.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“Why?”

“Come on, what’s your Chinese name?”

“I’m not Chinese, I’m Swedish.”

“Well, show me some ID, then.”

(Lundberg, 2013:24, 25)

Czarniawska (2004:97) suggests first identifying false dichotomies in texts: here we can see these as Asian looking = Chinese; Swedish = white. Czarniawska then suggests looking for, and analyzing disruptions (2004:97): in this case the “without a c” may be seen as a illogical disruption, both in the actual dialogue and its retelling. I believe that this attention to spelling is a technique used by Lundberg to communicate his Westernness, both to the girl and to the reader, by demonstrating his linguistic and cultural knowledge of the English language and of Ireland. Lundberg strives to show that he is aware of the subtle differences in common Irish and Swedish spellings of his first name to signify his non-Asianness, having noted that in Dublin Asians are known for their bad English (2013:24).

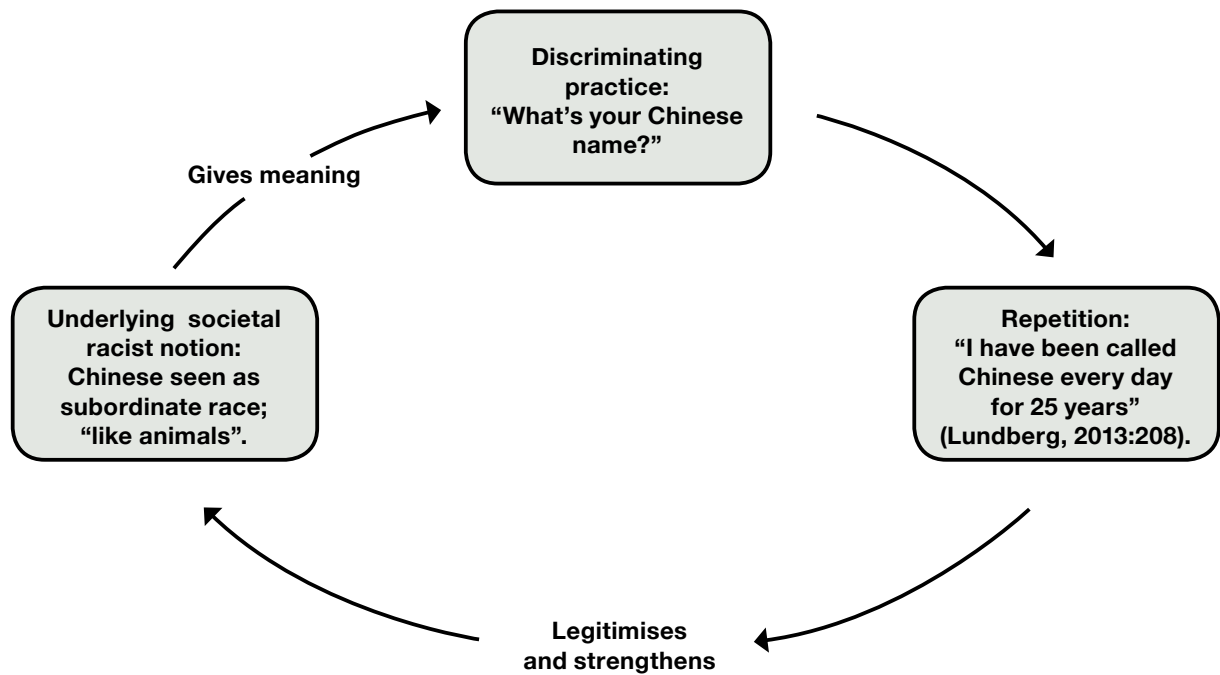
A peculiarity of the text is the act of asking for ID. We can assume, of course, that the demand is made in jest, but still the girl is indicating that she does not believe Lundberg's claims of non-Chineseness. The demand for ID carries metaphorical meaning too, representing dichotomies of legality and illegality, belonging and non-belonging; the idea that some (white) people belong, and some (non-white) people do not.

The labelling of Lundberg as Chinese cannot be seen as merely an affront to his Swedishness, but as an act of everyday racism, bearing in mind the meaning carried by the Chinese label: “uncontrollable”; “ugly”; “one-child policy”; “like animals”. The everyday nature of this process is illustrated by the myriad examples cited above, as well as by the fact that the action was acceptable, unquestionable; the Irish girl would not see herself as a racist, or as someone

who had committed an act of racism; and so, the socialized racist notions of Chineseness are strengthened and legitimised.

I have attempted to illustrate clearly how this experience of being categorised as Chinese fits in with Essed’s theory of everyday racism in the model below.

Figure 4: Everyday Racism Continuum: Chinese Categorising



Adapted from Essed 1991

5.3 Everyday Racism 2: Intimate Questioning

The form of everyday racism that I have called intimate questioning is the interrogation by strangers about the racial and ethnic origins of the adoptee, generally beginning with the opening question, “Where are you from?”, followed, inevitably, by, “No. Where are you really from?” when the adoptee explains they are from Sweden. The dialogue will then proceed to personal questions about adoption, root-searching and even the adoptee’s relationship with their parents. Hübinette and Tigervall found this the most prevalent form of everyday racism presented by their informants, describing it as, “the constant bombardment of questions regarding the national, regional, ethnic and racial origin of the adoptees” (2009:344). Lindblad and Signell also identified intimate questioning’s prevalence, with one of their informants noting that the questioning addresses, “a lot of personal matters I would certainly not ask an ordinary Swede about.” (2008:51). Likewise, Lundberg points out that all of his adopted friends often

find themselves subjected to intimate questioning (2013:26), and expresses the impact it has on his own day-to-day life. He describes the lump in the throat he gets when introducing himself to someone, dreading the leading “where do you come from?” question (2013:25). He presents the following dialogue, by way of example:

Stranger¹¹: Where do you come from?
Patrik: Malmö
Stranger: Ok. But where do you come from originally?
Patrik: Sölvesborg. In Blekinge.
Stranger: No you don't!
Patrik: Yes, I promise!
Stranger: But you know what I mean.
Patrik: No
Stranger: Don't play dumb. You understand what I mean.
Patrik: Aha. I was adopted from Korea when I was 9 months old.
Stranger: North or South Korea?
Patrik: South Korea
Stranger: That's lucky, in North Korea they're communists.
Patrik: Yes... I was certainly lucky there!
Stranger: Do you speak Korean?
Patrik: No
Stranger: Have you met your real parents?
Patrik: My real parents live in Sweden.
(Adapted from Lundberg, 2012: 25, 26)

The opening question in itself carries significant meaning about belonging and non-belonging. Trenka, Oparah & Shin argue that while appearing to be an innocent question, where do you come from? “carries the implicit rejection ‘you are not like us’ and underlines the assertion ‘you do not belong here’” (2006:7, 8). Essed (1991:190) discusses the same question as an everyday racism experienced by black women in the Netherlands; beneath the question, she explains, is the desire for an explanation, “what are you doing here?”. The question stems firstly from a racial categorization: this is a black woman; then an assumption: this black woman does not belong here (1991:190).

Returning to Lundberg's dialogue, first we can swiftly dismiss any argument that the stranger did not make a racial categorisation of Lundberg: despite the conversation being in Swedish, the only signifier of Lundberg's national identity (mis)read by the stranger was his skin colour. His persistence in demanding to know Lundberg's origin showed that he did not believe for a moment that he could be accepted as a true (white) Swede.

¹¹ My addition of names.

Intimate questioning carries the false dichotomies of Swedish = white; Asian looking = foreign, and begins by denying, and then deconstructing, the Swedish ethnic and national identity of the adoptee, leading the adoptee on a journey back to their place of “belonging”, the place of “real parents” and real mother tongue. In terms of Czarniawska’s strategy of identifying peculiarities (2004:97), I’d argue that here the very nature of the dialogue is peculiar. It is absolutely unthinkable that a dialogue like this would be socially acceptable if both participants (strangers to each other) were white Swedes or if the racialised roles were reversed.

As the interrogation proceeds the questions become increasingly personal. It seems that the objectification of the adoptee is relevant here, built both on the notion of Asians being accessible and available objects, but also on the notion that the adoptee is public property. Hübinette and Tigervall note that large-scale international adoption in Sweden has actually been seen as a project of the liberal-left, and has (perhaps ironically) actually strengthened the nation’s self-image of being excluded from the history of colonialism and anti-Semitism (2009:336). A belief in adoption as a structure of anti-colonialism, anti-racism and liberal-leftism could create an idea that the adoptee has been rescued by the Swedish nation, and therefore “belongs”, as a (grateful) commodity, to the nation as a whole; consequently, the adoptee’s life story is seen as public property – a perception that is fuelled by the popularity of adoption related entertainment, such as the widely viewed TV show, *Spårlöst*¹².

5.4 Everyday Racism 3: The Speaking of English

Sometimes it happens, very often in summer-time, that I am addressed in English, for example in department stores. The shop assistants always act sheepishly when I answer in Swedish. (Trotzig 1996:60)

David and Bar-Tal identify language as being of special importance in distinguishing between collective groups, and claim that it has taken on even greater significance than ever with the rise of nationalist ideologies (2009:368). In contemporary, post-race, colour-blind Sweden, where individuals are (officially) neither categorized nor judged by colour, it is arguably the most important signifier of nationality and ethnicity (Hübinette & Tigervall, 2009:349); so it is of great relevance that Swedes adopted from Korea often find that other Swedes address them in English, rather than Swedish. Each time this occurs, they are categorised as being outside the national/ethnic collective, not belonging to Swedishness and not fully entitled to the privileges it carries.

Incredibly, it is often not just the initial acknowledgement that is English, but conversations are actually *carried on* in English, despite the adoptee speaking in Swedish. As Hübinette and

¹² *Without a Trace*. A prime time entertainment show where adoptees are helped by a TV crew to find their biological families.

Tigervall note, “Some of the adoptee informants also testify that when they are sometimes hailed in English, and they answer in fluent Swedish, the white Swedes continue speaking in English with them, as if a neurological blockage is activated when a non-white person behaves perfectly like a Swedish person” (2009:349).

Examples of this can be found in both Lundberg and Trotzig: Trotzig describes a Swedish father of a friend of hers always talking English to her, even though she unfailingly speaks to him in Swedish (1996:92). Lundberg, describing moving from small town Sölvesborg to Malmö in his early 20s, and noticing he is treated as an Asian in a city where nobody knows him reflects, “everywhere I went people started speaking to me in English” (2013:24).

An especially clear example of the speaking of English can be found in Höjer and Höjer: presented in comic strip format, it is unable to avoid the ambiguities of the race of the perpetrator, and is unable to be colour-blind in quite the same way a piece of text can:

Lisa Sjöblom, a Swede adopted from Korea, walks into a shop:

Lisa: Ursäkta! Säljer ni frimärken? (Excuse me, do you sell stamps?)

White shop assistant¹³: Oh, no... I'm so sorry but we don't have any stamps...

Lisa: Alltså, jag pratar svenska! (Actually, I do speak Swedish!)

White shop assistant: Ojsan! (Oops!) I'm so sorry, but I thought you were a foreigner!

(Sjöblom, in Höjer & Höjer, 2011:108)

The shop assistant may argue that lots of Asian people visit Sweden, or study in Sweden, and do not speak Swedish. However, Sjöblom initiates the conversation in Swedish, and the shop assistant continues talking in English after it has become clear that Sjöblom can speak Swedish. His real message is clear: you are not of my national collective; you are a foreign body; you do not belong. Despite the evidence Sjöblom is speaking as a native speaker, by choosing to reply in English, the white Swede is dismissing the possibility that an Asian woman could be Swedish.

Deconstructing the dialogue, using Czarniawska's guidelines (2004:97), the peculiar element is surely the absurdity of two Swedes meeting, in Sweden, holding a conversation in a language that is foreign to both of them, or one of them endeavouring to hold a conversation in the foreign language; and the fact that the shop assistant continues the conversation in English even after Sjöblom has explained to him that she speaks Swedish. We can identify the false dichotomy, yet again, as being Swedish = white; Asian looking = non-Swedish. Finally, by imagining the customer being white, we can confirm the truly racialised nature of the encounter, and a similar racialised power imbalance to that seen in the intimate questioning dialogue above: the white shop assistant gets to be the real Swede, whereas Sjöblom is forced to prove her Swedishness.

¹³ The shop assistant is shown to be Swedish in the first panel of the comic, where he is seen talking Swedish to the previous customer.

The initial hailing of the adoptee in English could be put down to a misreading of signs: in the racial categorising process that takes place, the ethnic signifier (Eriksen, 2002:29) of the adoptee's skin colour, proves to be more significant than any other (place, clothes, body language and so on); the white Swede identifies someone of an ethnicity and nationality that is different to their own, and makes the assumption that non-white = non-Swedish; Non-Swedish = cannot speak Swedish. So they address them in English. The practice of addressing them in English is given meaning by the racist notions of Chineseness (or other Asianness). This racism becomes everyday racism through its repetition, and its covert nature lets it go unchecked, and works to legitimise the underlying structural racist truths (Essed, 1991). Yet there is an added complication here: why, once the adoptee has established their Swedishness through responding in Swedish, does the white Swede proceed in English? Why does Hübnette & Tigervall's "neurological blockage" become activated?

I would argue that the interrogator becomes somehow threatened by the non-white presence in their white Swedish space: this being that they have categorised as Asian/Chinese, is acting and speaking as if it were a white Swede; it is trying to gain access to the prerogatives and privileges of white Swedishness (Blumer, 1958, cited in Essed, 1991). Armstrong (1982) introduces the concept of symbolic border guards: codes of dress, behaviour, customs and language used to mark the boundaries of the imagined community of a nation (Anderson, 1988); yet, conflicting sharply with the ideology, discourse and myth of colour-blindness discussed above, these examples show that the only symbolic border guard revealing the adoptee as an outsider is their Asian skin: the boundaries to Swedishness are strictly racialised (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992). To defend these boundaries, the white Swede is compelled to take up a border guard role herself, acting to correct the misguided national/ethnic self-identification of the adoptee; steering them to their true place of belonging: outside the Swedish national collective. In this instance, they do so by rejecting the adoptee's Swedish language, and replacing it with the language of foreigners, of those belonging outside the boundaries of Swedishness.

5.5 Defending Racialised Boundaries

Analysing the different forms of everyday racism experienced by Lundberg, Trotzig and other adoptees, a pattern begins to emerge. The bulk of the everyday racism seems to be based on the ideology that Swedishness is white, and exclusively white. The practices of everyday racism identified in this study seem to be aimed at denying the non-white adoptee access to true (white) Swedishness. The adoptee's non-white presence as matter-out-of-place demands an explanation: where are you from? (what are you doing here?); and a correction: your body is Chinese, so you are Chinese, not Swedish; you are not Swedish, so we will speak English. To refer back to Blumer's definition of prejudice, everyday racism is used here to defend white superiority and prevent non-whiteness from making claims on the entitlements of the superior race (Blumer 1958, cited in Essed, 1991).

In a country of significant labour market and geographical segregation, a country of vast socio-economic inequalities between white and non-white citizens (see, for example, Pred, 2000), adoptees find themselves in the strange position of inhabiting white spaces, but inhabiting non-white bodies. Adopted predominantly by families in the middle and upper stratas of society (Hübinette & Tigervall, 2009:338), they move in spaces (both geographical and meta-physical) generally exclusively white. With this in mind, that pressing urge for white Swedes encountering adoptees to question, humiliate, or educate to protect the boundaries of Swedish whiteness, could perhaps be explained to an extent by Bhabha's concept of mimicry, in that the adoptee is expected to be "almost the same, but not quite" (1984:85-92); or perhaps "almost the same, but not white" (1984:90). When the adoptee oversteps the mark, becoming too similar to the white Swede, their non-whiteness threatens. When the adoptee claims to be from Sweden; when the adoptee denies her Chineseness; when the adoptee takes on what should be the most important ethnic signifier in colour-blind Sweden – speaking Swedish as if it were her native language; when the adoptee, in effect, makes some propriety claim to white Swedishness (Blumer, 1958); then they become a threat by blurring the racialised boundaries of (white) Swedish belonging.

5.6 The Denial of Racism

A recurring problem faced by Essed's informants, particularly by those in the Netherlands, was the denial of racism (1991:5-7). Whites refused, or were unable to see, clear experiences of racism as being racism. My research suggests that Swedes adopted from Korea may deny, or fail to recognise, racism that they experience themselves. At no point does Lundberg call any of his racist experiences in Sweden racism; the only two occasions upon which he identifies racism take place abroad: in Ireland (labour market discrimination) (2013:24) and in Seoul (2013:124). Similarly, Hübinette and Tigervall found that even when their interviewees presented clear examples of racism, they tended to doubt that their experiences could be categorized as such. They see this as being, "an expression of the Swedish silence around race, whereby there is always this suspicion that the bad treatment may have been caused by something other than the non-white body" (2009:343), in line with the Swedish myth of being a place where race is insignificant (2009:344).

Hübinette and Tigervall (2009:350) link the denial of racism to the colour-blindness project, which constructs the myth that racism is something of the past or something that happens elsewhere. It can also be attributed, I would argue, to a lack of general knowledge of racism. Essed asserts that a general knowledge of racism would entail shared understandings of the following aspects: the nature of contemporary racism; agents of racism; processes of racism (and their reproduction); structuring factors; historical and regional context; stereotypes; strategies (1991:105).

Herein lies a great problem for racialised adoptees in Sweden: raised white in an "anti-rac-

ist” and colour-blind society, by white parents, in white spaces; raised in an environment where colonialism and Nazism are allocated to other states (Hübinette & Tigervall, 2009:336), and where the myth of tolerance and anti-racism leads to a culture of denial of racism; where non-white adoptees claim to be white on the inside to excuse the problem of their non-white bodies to themselves and to their group collective (Lundberg, 2013:47); where a declaration of experiences of racism may risk disbelief, belittlement, or claims of oversensitivity (Essed, 1991:115); it would be no surprise if their general knowledge of racism is worryingly poor.

Armed with a poor knowledge of racism, they see, or are obliged to see, (or perhaps claim to see as a coping strategy), sustained and persistent processes of everyday racism as being somehow less than racism. Maybe a burden of being adopted, or, as Lundberg stresses, a problem of looking Asian but being Swedish – yet not *racism*, not something that is part of a racist structure. Lindblad and Signell found that their informants lacked the “socio-cultural prerequisites and shared experiences for coping with violations related to racism” (2008:56); growing up colour-blind had deprived them of the opportunity to develop a general knowledge of racism.

Even if racism was more readily recognised by the adoptee, to challenge every act of racism – particularly the more subtle everyday racism practices – would be impossible. We must bear in mind that the adoptee is not part of a minority group as such. There is no civil movement to stand shoulder to shoulder with, and chances are the adoptee is the only non-white among white relatives and friends. As the everyday racism practices are, by nature, everyday and legitimate, then the adoptee, even if she has registered an act as racist, is unlikely to get the support needed, without the risk of distancing herself from her in-group. The adoptee could have developed survival skills: perhaps ignoring, laughing off, self-deprecation, or maybe an over-communication of Swedish national identity (as seen in Lundberg (2013)). Indeed the denial of racism may well be a coping strategy in itself. This is problematic though, as not only can it rationalise denial in the white majority group, but will also belittle other adoptees’ experiences of racism. A non-acknowledgement of everyday racism acts can not only reinforce the societal racist notions, but can actively build them, as I will discuss below.

5.7 The Problems of Coping

While the individual Swedish adoptee may argue she doesn’t regard the everyday racisms identified in this paper as racism; or that her coping strategies enable her to lead a happy life where racist experiences are laughed off or ignored; she is still perpetually part of, and a contributor to, the continuum.

Coping strategies may have negative effects in the longer term. For example, when Lundberg says that he is white on the inside, yellow on the outside; or when he portrays Chinese people as a ridiculous enemy (for example, 2013:28; 128, 129) or Koreans as crazy others (see, for example, 2013:37; 38); when he overcommunicates his Swedishness to distance himself from Asianness, he is demonstrating his way of coping: educating white Swedes that he is as Swedish as they are; as

white as they are; nothing like those strange Asians. Yet, in doing this, he adds more fuel to the negative portrayals of Asians in Swedish literature, which strengthens and legitimises the underlying societal racist notions, oiling the cogs of the everyday racism continuum¹⁴.

Ignoring or not noticing everyday racism, or not calling it racism, further legitimises it, making it an acceptable part of daily life; yet even fighting individual incidents, challenging them as being acts of racism, does not free adoptees (or, indeed, any discriminated group) from the system either. Essed argues:

The firm interlocking of forces of domination operates in a way that makes it hard to escape its impact on everyday life. Although individual Black women may work out strategies to break away from particular oppressive relations or situations, and frequently oppose racism, as members of an oppressed group, they remain locked into the forces of the system. (1991:51)

For the Swede adopted from Korea, the system of everyday racism is inescapable; while coping strategies or not seeing everyday racism may temporarily ease the individual's problems, they do not mean that racism does not happen, that society becomes less racist, that the continuum of the production and reproduction of racism is somehow stalled or slowed down or that its wider effects are diminished.

6 Conclusion

My initial research question was, *What is the nature of the everyday racism experiences of Swedes adopted from Korea? How does such racism manifest itself, and what are its implications?* I found that everyday racism is a persistent element in the adult adoptee's life, and can take myriad, often covert forms: particularly prevalent were the treatment of the adoptee as Chinese, the speaking of English to the adoptee (even when the adoptee is responding in Swedish) and intimate questioning about the adoptee's racial and ethnic origins. A common factor in these forms of everyday racism is that they all operate on the ideological basis that Swedish = whiteness (and, subsequently, Asian appearance = Chinese = non-Swedish). I have argued that the nature of everyday racism goes beyond the misread racial categorisation I had stipulated in my working hypothesis: it is used as a means of setting and protecting racialised boundaries, preventing the adoptee from entering privileged space reserved for white Swedishness. I have suggested that Bhabha's concept of mimicry may be relevant here, as the adoptee becomes a threat when she strays outside the "almost the same, but not quite" role expected of her (2002:118).

I have attempted to explain the macro-level implications of everyday racism, noting its importance as an integral legitimising force to maintain structures of racial oppression. Every-

¹⁴ I should reiterate here that Lundberg the person should be separated from Lundberg's narratives. I am not for a moment suggesting that Lundberg the person has actively contributed to racist notions of Chineseness, but the narratives which emerge from his work, unintentionally, do.

day racism is also vital for communicating racist structures and ideologies, linking macro-level racist ideologies (i.e. “Swedishness is whiteness”) to micro-level interactions (i.e. “where are you really from?”).

I concur with Hübinette & Tigervall (2008, 2009) in finding that the colour-blind discourse and politics in Sweden is problematic, as it works as a repressing force, leading to a culture of denial of racism and a weakness in general knowledge of racism. Additionally, by finding that Swedes adopted from Korea are so clearly subjected to meaningful racial categorisation on a daily basis, and that this categorisation is based solely on physical features such as skin colour, my findings raise questions about the validity of notions of colour-blindness in Sweden. When non-white adoptees, legally, ethnically, nationally and culturally Swedish; raised and educated in Sweden; speaking Swedish as a mother tongue; are faced with routinised and systematic discrimination, we are forced to confront the uncomfortable fact that even if we do not talk about race, even if we believe that race does not exist, even if we know it is an unsavoury social construction, race *is* a social reality, which is used to categorise and exclude.

A further thought is that if adopted Swedes are subjected to such sustained racism, and find their identity as Swedes denied, as my study has indicated, what implications does this have for other non-white immigrants? Hübinette suggests that the experiences of adoptees from Korea gives the message to other non-Western immigrants that the struggle to “assimilate” or “integrate” is meaningless, as their non-White bodies will never be accepted as belonging (2007:155).

As with Hübinette and Tigervall (2008, 2009) and Lindblad and Signell (2008), my research has suggested that international adoptees are subjected to sustained, regular discrimination. However, my project has only focused on published texts by two adoptees from Korea and their experiences may not represent the internationally adopted population as a whole. Given the differences in sexualised racist notions of Asian men and women (see, for example, Lundberg, 2013:26) my analysis could perhaps have been extended to explore the gendered differences in experiences in the two narratives.

I believe that there is a need for further research in to the nature of adoption discourse in Sweden. My small scale study uncovered not only a lack of research on race and adoption, but also the potential problem of knowledge relating to international adoption being produced within in an environment where it is treated as an unproblematic, unquestioned practice; where almost every text is written by those in whose interests it is to not question adoption as a racist or colonial practice. Given the significant scale of international adoption in Sweden, there is the possibility that adoption related research, discussions and narratives could be limited by a pro-adoption discourse.

While it would be beyond the scope of this paper to meaningfully suggest how everyday racism against adoptees should be addressed, I would still like to leave the reader with a few thoughts on this matter. Lindblad and Signall suggest various coping strategies, the most viable being for the adoptee to build their general knowledge of racism (2008:56); whereas Hübinette

and Tigervall (2009) argue that issues of race and racism need to be taken seriously by adoption researchers and the adoption community, and that Sweden must move on from its colour-blindness project and allow racial discrimination to be spoken about freely.

In light of my research and my understanding of the nature of everyday racism, I would add that the structures and ideologies that construct the underlying societal notions of racism need to be held up to the light and challenged. A good place to start may be international adoption itself: part of a structure that constructs the notion that the Asian child can be moulded into a commodity that can be bought, sold, and shipped to the other side of the world; part of a structure that constructs the Asian both as an object that wants and needs to be rescued, and as an object that can be shaped to satisfy the needs of a white family; part of a structure that sustains and communicates massive inequalities in power between the white West and the non-white Third World, and creates a belief that West is always best. The practice of international adoption legitimises the idea that the Asian adoptee is an interchangeable object; readily available and pliant, and perpetually grateful for its “rescue” and its opportunity to live in Sweden. It is, I believe, time for serious discussion as to whether international adoption has a place in a country which wishes to see itself as progressive, anti-racist and outside colonialism; it is also time for the IMER field to recognise international adoption as a form of forced migration, and to take responsibility for researching its long term consequences and implications.

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