Mimicry, Mockery and Menace in Swedish International Adoption Narratives

Richey Wyver
University of Auckland

Sweden is one of the world's leading demand countries on the international adoption market, with Swedes having adopted more foreign children per capita than anywhere else on earth. The international adoption project, largely unproblematised in Sweden, takes place in a discursive setting where fantasies of 'colour-blindness' and of being 'post-race' see adoptees being both desired for their (racial/ethnic) difference and having this difference strongly disavowed.

This article utilises Bhabha's concept of mimicry to critically discuss how the international transracial adoptee is discursively shaped in Swedish adoption narratives against a pro-adoption, colour-blind backdrop. Through an analysis of three Swedish adoption texts, the article explores the process and implications of the adoptee's body being translated from complete otherness into (almost) Swedishness.

The article suggests that mimicry emerges as a process beginning with the adoptee being desired as a body of difference that can potentially become an almost Swede. The adoptee, with a difference that is visible but disavowed and a sameness that is over-communicated but misrecognised, becomes trapped in a constant negotiation of identity, as they slip between being desired as an authorised version of otherness and being an isolated subject of racism, alienated from belonging to a recognised minority or marginalised group.

The adoptee's mimicry is prone to turn into menace, posing a threat to the identity of the white Swede and meanings of white Swedishness, and potentially even to the mission of adoption itself. This may go some way to understanding violent reactions to adult adoptees' critical reflections on the structural problems of international adoption.

'I do not belong anywhere. Too brown to be Swedish, too Swedish to be anything else'. (Martin Öberg, Swedish Sri Lankan adoptee, 2014)

Introduction

It is something of an irony that Sweden, a country which has long nurtured a national identity based around myths of tolerance and anti-racism, and of being somehow excluded from Europe's history of colonialism and Nazism, is, per capita, the world's biggest demand country of non-Western children on the international adoption market (Heinö 2009, pp. 303-304; Hübinette & Tigervall 2009, p. 336). Since the 1950s over 55,000 children, predominantly from South and East Asia, Africa and South America, have been adopted to Sweden (Statistiska Centralbyrån 2012). While the relentless demand for children of colour from the Global South by white adults in the West, and the controversial workings of the adoption industry invoke criticism from feminist, postcolonial and anti-racist standpoints (see, for example, Hübinette 2005; Trenka, Oparah & Shin 2006), international adoption remains very much a non-controversial practice in Sweden. Indeed, it is even something of a taboo to critically address the adoption phenomenon in Sweden: the most prominent Swedish critical adoption scholar describes being exposed to physical threats and being ostracised from the academic community for highlighting structural problems with international adoption (Hübinette 2011).

In this article I aim to contribute to an emerging postcolonial critique of the international adoption phenomenon, by exploring how narratives of adoption and adoption desire can be understood in terms of Bhabha's concept of mimicry (1994). I will examine the process of the construction of the international transracial adoptee as a 'mimic' Swede in adoption narratives, and discuss what this mimic identity entails and implies. My interest is in the discursive and semiotic aspects of the problem, which I will approach through an analysis of three contemporary and classic Swedish adoption-related texts: *Längtansbarnen: Adoptivföräldrar berättar* [The Longed for/ Longing Children: Adoptive parents tell their story] (Weigl 1997); *Adoption: Banden som gör oss till familj* [Adoption: the ties that make us a family] (Juusela 2010); and *Gul utanpå* [Yellow on the Outside] (Lundberg 2013).

My focus here will be on international transracial adoptees, i.e., intercountry adoptees who cannot generally pass as white in Sweden. While there are exceptions, the international transracial adoptee should be seen as being raised by white Swedish parents, with whom he or she has no biological relationship.

Mimicry and Adoption

To begin with a broad understanding of mimicry, it could be seen as a form of colonial desire, regulation and discipline, built around a discourse constructed on an ambivalence, and dependant on constant slippage (Bhabha 1994, p. 122). The mimic is a colonised body that is desired and constructed to play a role of a 'reformed, recognisable Other', being almost the same as the colonisers, but not quite (1994, p. 122). Mimicry is an effective tool of colonial discipline, as the mimic is permanently split between not being quite the same, and not being quite different: that is, they are never *quite* part of the colonisers, but they can never *quite* identify with the colonised. Mimicry depends on ambivalence: it must, Bhabha notes, 'continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference' (1994, p. 122); it is by fixing the mimic in a perpetual frantic slippage between two poles of non-recognition of almost sameness and almost difference, that mimicry becomes most effective. While Bhabha describes mimicry as 'one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial control and knowledge' (1994, p. 122), its ambivalent nature poses a threat to the coloniser and the authority of the colonising mission: mimicry is 'at once resemblance and menace' (1994, p. 123).

As an example of mimicry as a system of discipline and control, Bhabha introduces Macaulay's Minute, written during British colonial rule in India, which aimed to create a reformed colonial subject through creating, 'a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect' (Macaulay 1935) cited in Bhabha 1994, pp. 124-125). Macaulay's class of interpreters are shaped to become what Bhabha describes as, 'Appropriate objects of a colonialist chain of command; authorised versions of otherness' (1994, p.126).

Bhabha also exemplifies mimicry through Grant's (1792) text proposing a system of partial reform in English civilising missions in India. Grant's proposal was built around the formation of colonised Indians as subjects with an English style sense of identity and behaviour; subjects formed through English language mission education, partial Christian subjects versed in the 'imitation of English manners', as Grant puts it (1792, cited in Bhabha 1994, p. 124). This partial reform, this formation of partial Christians, partial Englishmen, is, however, expected to be empty: Grant's goal was to create subjects whose 'imitation of English manners will induce them to remain under our protection' (Grant 1792, cited in Bhabha 1994, p. 124).

The mimic learns to disavow itself from ideas of difference, of Otherness, while developing sameness in excess. However, this sameness carries only a partial presence and limited meaning, and is prone to 'mockery', where the version of sameness becomes a grotesque exaggeration. The ambivalence of mimicry fixes the mimic as a partial, incomplete, virtual presence, meaning that the coloniser's

presence, which is dependent on that of the colonised, also risks being trapped in an uncertainty of slippage and ambivalence. The ambivalent nature of the mimic menaces as they return the partial gaze, disrupting the mythical wholeness, authority and authenticity of the coloniser and the colonising mission (1994, p. 123).

Pal Ahluwalia makes the connection between adoption and mimicry, positioning the transracial adoptee as the quintessential mimic:

> [T]ransracial adoptees grow up in cultures and societies that problematize their very difference—these children grow up thinking and trying to be the same as everyone else, only to be confronted by racism which challenges their conception of self. As 'mimic children', these adoptees are the same but not quite. (2007, p. 61)

The problematisation of difference is particularly relevant in the Swedish context, where a powerful pro-adoption discourse combined with national post-racial myths and a discourse of colour-blindness makes the establishment of a positive identity as a Swedish person of colour something of an impossibility for international transracial adoptees, as does the fact that they are often raised as the only non-white person in a white environment. The adoptee's difference is problematised by the adoptee and adopter, the pro-adoption discourse, the colour-blind discourse, racism *and* anti-racism. Yet the international transracial adoptee is desired for that difference, and their difference is always visible.

While I began by noting the irony of Sweden's role in the international adoption trade, Korean-American anthropologist Elena Kim describes adoption itself as 'at root, tragically ironic' (2010, p. 76). Kim contrasts the sense of shared humanity adoption can produce with the creation, reinforcement and magnification of massive inequalities between supply and demand countries, and the simultaneous production of, 'closeness and distance, identification and difference, common humanity, and base inequality' (2010, p. 76). Similarly Bhabha stresses the irony that lies at the very heart of the civilising mission of colonialism, which exists within a discourse which, in his words, 'speaks in a tongue that is forked' (1994, p.122). It is within this ironic discursive setting that mimicry emerges.

Perhaps the greatest irony of Swedish international/transracial adoption is that it is widely seen as not a racist project, but an *anti-racist* one. While I, in line with other post-colonial scholars, have approached adoption as a colonial-esque industry, dependent on a belief in racial hierarchies and white supremacy and the maintenance of understandings of meaningful racial difference, it actually serves as an integral part of constructing the Swedish national myths of anti-racism and exemption from European colonial projects. Indeed, the process which involves the removal of children from families of colour in the Global South to create families for white men and women in the west can actually be seen as being a key element of Swedish myths of international solidarity and being the 'Third World's benefactor'. Mass

scale international adoption, perhaps surprisingly, is traditionally a project of Sweden's liberal-left, and while adoption tends to be used as a 'cure' for infertility, at the same time adopters look to not only rescue children of colour, but also to create 'multicultural' families (Hübinette & Tigervall 2009, p. 336).

Desire for an Authorised Version of Otherness

Kerstin Weigl's *Längtansbarnen* is an autobiographical account of a white Swedish woman adopting children of colour from East Asia, interspersed with interviews with other adopters and adoption professionals. It can be seen as a guide for prospective adopters too, as it closely details the whole adopting procedure. The author is an adoptive mother of two girls from East Asia, and a prominent journalist who has written widely on adoption. The book follows Weigl's journey from dealing with infertility to adopting transracially and provides a valuable insight into the desires and fantasies of the white adopter. The title can be seen to capture both the idea of *longed for* children (by the adoptive parents) and children that *long for* something—presumably being 'rescued' by white Swedish parents.

In my reading of Weigl's text, the key theme is the problematic desire for the exotic body, and the desire to civilise this body into a mimic Swede. The desire for the adoptee as a mimic emerges with the first mention of adoption in the text, when Weigl's partner raises the adoption question/solution, and Weigl reflects,

> It's just as good as a real child isn't it? Us and our little dark kid. (1997, p. 15)

This captures both the desire for sameness—it will be *our* kid; and simultaneous difference—it will be our *little dark* kid, the darkness of the kid contrasted with the 'Us'. But the sameness is not total: it is not a *real* child. Nor, for that matter, is the difference: it is, after all, *just as good as* a real child.

In the passage that follows, Weigl describes herself fantasising over children of colour while looking through an adoption agency magazine, which features photos sent in by adoptive parents of their adopted children.

> Without taking off my coat I sit down at the kitchen table. Expectation warms my stomach. On the last page [of an adoption agency magazine], a portrait gallery of pictures of happy children at Swedish pine tables, in sandboxes, dressed as Lucias, sometimes also as teenagers, with dark eyes under a white student cap.
>
> I love those pictures. I need pictures to keep the fantasy going, to have faith that the child can become real. 'Child porn', says Sigge. He smiles at my hunger.

I read: '... Our charmer Sebastian, born July 24th, came home with us from Hanoi 28th October.' […] I scrutinize the little face. Isn't he a little puny? And a guy too, maybe I would prefer a girl. Boys who will just grow to 1.60 metres tall, and just wear size 39 shoes, would they have a chance with a Swedish girl?

'This is our wonderful daughter Josephina, she came home with us 3rd September from Cali, Colombia.' God, so small and cute. And black. Would you dare? [...]

But this one: 'Our dream princess Maria, born June 3rd, came home with us 21st July.' Her! I would like to have one like that! So little, so cute. A little Vietnamese.

Look, I say, and show Sigge.

It is the exotic children I want. More beautiful than something we could create ourselves. A tight Vietnamese profile, with the distinctive cheekbones. Or maybe an explosive South American, smooth and coffee coloured? (Weigl 1997, pp. 58, 59)

Weigl's descriptions of both the children and her anticipation carry great, and largely undisguised, sexual meanings that would surely be unthinkable in discussing white Swedish children. From her images of the exotic child placed in white Swedish settings—and literally *white* Swedish settings—which serve to highlight the exotic appearance and difference of the child: the white Lucia dress, the white student cap, the paleness of pine tables and sand; to Weigl's physical stimulations of 'hunger' and stomach warming expectations; to the sexual undertones of 'expectation' and 'fantasy'; to the less subtle sexual references, 'It's the exotic children I want'; 'Child porn'; we are left with an uncomfortable insight into the fetishisation (and, one might add, the fantasies of hyper-sexualisation) of the child before it has even been chosen, let alone arrived in Sweden.

The passage also shows the acceptability of racially categorising and stereotyping the adoptable body within the colour-blind and post-race setting. The 'puny' East Asian boy; the small and cute—but dangerously black the Colombian girl; the little, cute East Asian girl; the explosive South American boy (1997, pp. 58-9).

The desire for the adoptee as a mimic emerges through the images of the child in Swedish rites of passage, and also in the child's expected sexual encounters, with Weigl's ruminations on the Vietnamese boy's future 'chances' with a Swedish girl arguably reflecting the notion of the de-sexualised East Asian male (Hübinette, 2014). The expectation for the adoptee to desire and have heterosexual relationships with white Swedish girls is important here too: they are, as mimic Swedes, meant to be (almost) Swedish in choice of partners and performance in rituals, but not quite—they get to wear the white graduating cap, but look out from under it with dark eyes. The adoptee's body becomes both a fetish object of exotic difference and desire, but at this at the same time this

is disavowed: the child is meant to display its exoticism, but to still be 'just as good as a real (White Swedish) child'.

A similar rejection of the de-sexualised East Asian male adoptee is echoed in an account by one of Weigl's adopter informants:

> At first I thought only of having girls, not for my sake, but for theirs, when they are teenagers. It's probably tougher being a boy if you are a shorty. (1997, p. 96)

The idea that the boy's height would see him rejected by Swedish girls (and in a colour-blind discourse it is possible that his height is being used to stand in for his 'race' in this context) disregards the possibility that he may want to have relationships with non-Swedish (or non-white Swedish) girls or boys, or other East Asian youngsters. Were that to be the case, then it could be an indication of him not being suitable for shaping into a mimic (white) Swede, as it would imply that rather than being almost the same, his difference is total, or almost total.

The same informant explains why she did not want a white child, saying that she had friends who had adopted children that could, in her words, 'blend in' (1997, p. 96):

> But for me it is the exact opposite in some ways. My adoptive children don't have the same genes as me, so why pretend? (1997, p. 96)

So while she strives for a sameness that allows the child to not be hindered by being a boy who is shorter than a white Swede, she also strives for a difference: a child that stands out and is noticeably different from her mother and those around her.

I would suggest that the desire for the transracial adoptee is not a desire for a body of Otherness per se. The adoptee is desired as an Other body that can be translated into a mimic Swede. The child is desired at once for its ability to communicate sameness (the white student cap) and difference (the dark eyes). The production of excess, both in sameness and difference is another feature of mimicry (Bhabha 1994, p. 122), and in these examples the contrast between the fetishised 'exotic' child and the very 'Swedish' settings, communicates both excessive sameness and highlights difference at the same time.

Translating and Renaming the Transracial Body

Robert Young describes the colonial civilising process as being built around a violent system of 'translating', the grafting of a copy of the colonising culture over the colonised one (2003, p. 140). The copy of the colonial culture is a mimic *version* of the colonial culture, not an exact replica, but simplified and adapted to shape the coloniser's needs. The translated version of the culture does not give the colonised access to full (for example) Britishness, but a semblance of it; it is captured by the difference between English and Anglican, for instance

(Bhabha, 1994, p. 125). The translated version of culture at once prevents the colonised from having an authentic belonging and identity with their own culture, and from achieving authentic belonging within the coloniser's culture, leaving them trapped in a split, inauthentic, mimic existence.

Young outlines the importance of renaming in the translating process, describing it as 'an act of power and appropriation' which also serves to desacrilise geographical sites in colonised areas (2003, p. 141). Renaming is also a feature of the adoption civilising process, with the changing of the adoptee's foreign name to a white Swedish name being the normal practice. As with the renaming of sites, it acts as a means of domination, appropriation and desacrilisation: renaming disregards any meaning in the adoptee's original given name, and disregards the possibility that the name could be auspicious; it also disregards the significance of the adoptee's language. Placing a (white) Swedish name on the adoptee of colour also condemns her to a lifetime of being forced to explain her non-white presence, with a name that does not match her appearance (see, for example, Höjer & Höjer 2010, p. 109). The name change can be seen an act of claiming ownership: the new name indicates that the child no longer belongs to its mother, its community, its people, its nation; the child now belongs to its adoptive parents, its adoptive family, Sweden.

Renaming the adoptee truly captures the nature of mimicry. The name disavows the adoptee's difference, yet leads to heightened visibility and draws attention to the difference through the perceived 'mismatch' of name and body. At the same time this mismatch creates excessive sameness, even mockery, as it communicates Swedishness strongly, often through quintessentially Swedish names.

This mismatch and mockery is captured in Mary Juusela's book, *Adoption: Banden som gör oss till familj* [Adoption: The ties that make us a family] (2010). Juusela is an Indian adoptee, and her book is a collection of interviews with 29 adoptive families comprised of adult adoptees, their parents, and sometimes their siblings. The book was supported by the adoption agency *Barnen framför allt* (BFA), and published by major publishing house Norstedts. The author is fairly well-known as an author, journalist and lecturer.

One of Juusela's Korean adoptee informants is (re)named Gunnar. His father, Kalle, explains, 'He already looked different and if we could give him a more Swedish name so that he could be as normal as possible we would do it' (2010, p. 198).

The idea that Gunnar looked 'different', reifies the false dichotomy that Swedishness equals whiteness, and that whiteness is the norm. Giving him a very Swedish name so that he could be 'as normal as possible' implies that white Swedishness is normal, non-whiteness abnormal. So Gunnar's difference begins as total (he 'looked different' and his name was Young-Min), and the difference is disavowed by renaming, and

excess is produced by choosing 'a more Swedish name'; however, Gunnar is still not *quite* the same, as he can only attempt to be 'as normal as possible'.

That is not to say that the much less common practice of keeping the child's original 'foreign' name is somehow a solution. Instead, it produces an excess of difference, contrasting with both the adoptee's feelings of Swedishness and their position of belonging within the family. In Juusela's text, there is one example of adoptive parents not renaming their children. The adoptive father, Jörgen, explains the decision to keep his daughters' original Indian names, Manorama, Manish and Manjubala by saying,

> When we adopted Manorama, and also her sister, we decided to keep her Indian name and she was given Maria as a middle name. We thought that at a job interview people could be shocked if they were waiting for an 'Anna' and a Manorama came instead. (2010, p. 162)

His rationalisation recognises his daughters' difference, and in that sense avoids the dominant narrative of disavowal of difference. However, at the same time it disavows sameness, conceding that a Swede can only be white, and does not affect the daughters' mimic existence, as there is no 'Indian' presence behind their name: they are still trapped in a not quite same/not quite different split.

Among Juusela's interviews there is one account of *re*-re-naming as a form of resistance, which is interesting to consider. Cecilia, adopted from Chile, temporarily reverted to her original name, Fresia, during a period of difficulty and arguments with her parents (2010, p. 103). This became deeply upsetting for her adoptive parents, who even contacted their adoption agency for advice. Her adoptive father recalls:

> Cecilia's reactions were normal for a teenager, whether she was adopted or not. I was most sad that Britt [adoptive mother] was so unhappy and Mattias [brother, non-adoptee] was so angry. (2010, p. 103)

With her name changed back to her Swedish name, Cecilia says she now dismisses it as an identity crisis, like everybody has (2010, p. 103). Both her father's quote and Cecilia's dismissal exhibit a denial of adoption trauma, linking the 'identity crisis' of the adoptee with that of a non-adopted teenager; and this denial can be seen as a disavowal of difference. It is interesting to consider the menace of the name change, that this was something that made her parents 'sad' and her brother 'angry'. It is as if she moved from being almost the same to being almost different, and by showing an interest in her country and background and attempting to identify as Chilean by reclaiming her name, for her family this difference threatened to be almost total. The idea of the adoptee as a mimic Swede attempting to disavow sameness and assert difference may also pose a threat to the adoption mission itself: Bhabha suggests that one of the ways that mimicry threatens to undermine the

colonial civilising mission is with the mimic's movement between '*mimicry*—a difference that is almost total, but not quite—to *menace* a difference that is almost total but not quite' (1994, p. 131).

Cecilia's reclaiming of her name also undermined the translation process of adoption, her move from Chilean Other to mimic Swede, by communicating that her Swedishness was inauthentic. Yet, as things turned out, her Chileanness was inauthentic too: removing the mask of the Swedish name did not reveal a Chilean essence beneath. Bhabha argues that mimicry's threat lies in there being no presence behind the mask of mimicry (1994, p. 126), which is a point I will explore further below.

The Limits and Excess of Translated Swedishness

The versions of Swedishness permitted in the adoption narratives tend to be limited, rather clichéd and over-communicated. In the Juusela text, for instance, it is notable that most adoptee interviewees stress their Swedishness, many of them with some intensity; phrases such as 'I am 100% Swedish' are prevalent, often combined with a distancing from their country of origin or from other immigrants. Sarita, adopted from India, declares:

> I am Swedish, full stop! There are no ties or roots to India, and I don't feel like an Indian. (2010, p. 96)

This sentiment is echoed by many other adoptees, including Christine, also adopted from India:

> I was not interested in learning about India, I was Swedish and was interested in Sweden. (2010, p. 117)

Christoffer, adopted from India:

> My home is in Sweden and my parents are Mum and Dad, there is nothing else. [...] Absolutely, a hundred percent Swedish in all regards. Although I'll always look Indian, it is nothing I identify with. (2010, p. 136)

Although there are informants that express an interest or feel a connection to their country of origin, it seems essential that they stress their Swedishness first. For example, Anna, adopted from Sri Lanka, reflects,

> Although I felt Swedish and knew that this was where I belonged, I was interested in Sri Lanka and its culture. (2010, p. 153)

The idea of adoptees being torn between being Indian or Korean (say) and being Swedish is simply absent from all of my source texts. Dominant however, is the narrative of feeling completely Swedish and being split because of appearing to be linked to the

country/race/ethnicity of origin (or, as with Lundberg, with the wrong country of origin). Most common in the Juusela interviews is adoptees stressing their Swedishness, but being 'mistaken' for immigrants: 'immigrants' being a vague undesirable 'Other' group, from which the adoptees see themselves as being completely separate.

In Signe Howell's study of adoption in Norway, she notes that many supply countries require an annual report on the adoptee for the first three or four years. Examining these reports, she found that adoptive parents tended to send accompanying photos of their children in places that epitomise ideals of Norwegianness, and are often taken on national days of celebration and ceremony: Christmas and the national day, for instance. Howell describes the choice of clothing as, 'relentlessly Norwegian', often involving the *bunad*, the Norwegian traditional national costume (2006, p. 75). Howell, a white adoptive mother herself, sees this as part of a seamless kinning process, where children with, in her words, 'a non-Norwegian physical appearance' become typical Norwegian children. However, my own reading is that it is very much in line with Weigl's 'dark eyes under white student caps' fantasies, where the exaggeration of the Norwegianness of the clothing/setting sharply contrasts with the appearance and background of the child, stressing at once their difference and *not quite* sameness.

The natural choice of the adoptive parents to choose simplified and clichéd signs of Norwegianness also concurs with Juusela's '100% Swedes': the Swedishness permitted for the adoptee is strictly limited, and has to be communicated at full volume. This could be an indication of the mimicry of the adoptee moving to mockery: rather than mimicking normal, everyday Swedishness in its subtleties and variations—or indeed in its *invisibility*—the adoptee *mocks* Swedishness, communicating a gross exaggeration of shared ideas of national identity.

28-year-old Gunnar's parents are adamant that his Korean origins should not affect his, or their, Swedishness:

> The fact that he comes from Korea shouldn't identify him. We are both Swedes, we live in Sweden and we adopted as we wanted to have a child. The fact that Gunnar comes from Korea should not be something that changes us. Why should it? (Juusela 2010, p. 198)

His mother adds,

> Searching for his origins isn't something that interests Gunnar. He is Swedish and belongs to Sweden and beyond that he doesn't need to know anything else. (2010, p. 199)

The assertion is decisive, and leaves no space for ambiguity or complexity in Gunnar's Swedishness. He is simply, as he says himself, 'completely Swedish' (2010, p. 201).

Bhabha states that to be effective, mimicry needs to perpetually produce slippage, difference and excess (1994, p. 122), and in the source texts I found that the excess came from the versions of Swedishness which were strongly communicated, and were devoid of subtleties and ambiguities. Adoptee Swedishness becomes a mockery of Swedishness, where it over-communicates, over-emphasises and over-simplifies; where the adoptee's Swedishness even leans towards becoming a grotesque exaggeration of clichéd ideas of white Swedishness.

Disavowel and Distancing

Mimicry entails a complex dual process of producing excess sameness, and representing and articulating excessive difference; but a difference that is constantly disavowed (Bhabha, 1994, p. 130). While the excess of sameness emerges from exaggerated, simplified versions of Swedishness, the excess difference comes from the striking physical difference between adoptee and parent, and adoptee and peers; this difference, along with historical, cultural and biological differences, is disavowed, often quite aggressively.

Disavowal in the source texts takes numerous forms, but most dominant was the actual disavowal of difference between adopters and adoptees, strengthened and legitimised by the colour-blind discourse, disavowal of immigrant status, and disavowal of national origin (and, in Lundberg's case, disavowal of wrongfully perceived national origin). In adopter narratives, the desire for the adoptee as a fetishised exotic body is clearly communicated; yet this desire, along with the visible difference between the adoptee's body and those around them, is strongly disavowed, often under a colourblind narrative of 'not seeing race'.

Many of Juusela's informants, both adoptees and their family members, make a very clear distinction between adoptees and immigrants. To continue with Gunnar's family, Juusela states,

> In the late 1970's Ulla and Kalle [Gunnar's adoptive parents] lived in the wealthy suburb of Saltsjöbaden, completely without immigrants, but with a number of adoptive children. (2010, p. 194)

Kalle, Gunnar's adoptive father adds:

> Life in Stockholm was not as hard then as it is today. The immigrants back then came from Finland and Norway. There were jobs for everyone, and nobody was xenophobic. (2010, p. 195)

The two quotes not only indicate a divide between 'immigrants' and adoptees, but Kalle's assertion also makes a distinction between 'good' white immigrants (from Norway and Finland) and 'bad' (non-white?) immigrants. They also link the idea that life is harder today than it was

for non-white immigrants, and place the responsibility for discrimination with the immigrants themselves.

Sarita, who has lived with her husband in Malmö for three years, describes her position as an adoptee living among immigrants:

> There are many, many immigrants in Malmö and had I known I wouldn't have moved here or to the house we now live in. My Dad is an immigrant (from Italy) and I am adopted, so it is not about being an immigrant, but rather that I don't identify as one, but am still seen as an immigrant because of the way I look. (2010, p. 95, 96)

In Sarita's case, she acknowledges a link between adoptee and immigrant, but stresses that she does not identify as an immigrant. The problem of being identified as an immigrant among immigrants diminishes the possibility of the adoptee having an exalted and privileged position in comparison to other immigrants, and leaves them perceived as totally different as 'an immigrant' rather than almost the same as an adoptee.

Hanna, adopted from India, also describes being identified as an immigrant when she moved to what Juusela describes as an 'immigrant suburb' in Stockholm (2010, p. 220). Juusela explains that Hanna has always seen herself as Swedish, but in the suburb she found that others did not (2010, p. 220). Hanna herself says,

> Suddenly I was considered to be an immigrant like all the others. It felt strange to me, as I don't see myself as an immigrant. (2010, p. 220)

Throughout Juusela's text 'immigrants' appear as a non-defined group of Others that are feared and undesired, from which the adoptees strongly distance themselves. Across all the source texts, the adoptee is generally simply not seen as an immigrant at all. If the adoptee is a mimic Swede, the immigrant is very much condemned to a negative category of absolute difference. Interestingly, it is the misidentification of the adoptee as an immigrant by other immigrants and people of their country of origin that seems to infuriate many of Juusela's informants most. For instance, Hanna describes being misidentified by African people:

> I could get annoyed when African men came up and asked if I was from Ethiopia. When I said I was not from there, they became almost angry with me, and more racist than anyone I've met. It was a strange world where I did not belong as an adoptee. (2010, p. 220)

The 'immigrant' group, those that are *totally* different, are often mentioned as the source of racism, either by their very existence (as with the quote from Gunnar's father, above), or by their actions. 'Racism' becomes, as with Hanna's quote above, exemplified by a person of colour or an immigrant misidentifying the adoptee as another person of colour or immigrant rather than as a version of a white Swede.

While actual racism is a strong theme running through all of the adoptee narratives, it is not often described as racism, and is rarely attributed to Swedish structures or even to actions of white Swedes. Racism is instead positioned elsewhere: for instance, in Lundberg's text racism is a key theme, and yet the only time he uses the word 'racism' is when he experiences it outside Sweden (2013, p. 124). Not only does this enable him to align himself with the Swedish anti-racist/post-race myths, but also makes a clear distinction between 'anti-racist' Swedes and 'racist' Others.

I would suggest that this 'immigrants as racist' narrative is a way of strengthening the adoptee's position as belonging within white Swedishness, and further disavowing their own immigrant status. The perception is that foreigners or immigrants do not understand the Swedish adoption phenomenon, post-racism and colour-blindness, and are thus further excluded from real Swedishness, unlike the adoptee.

In Lundberg's book, the narrator does not need to distance himself from immigrants per se, but from Korea and China/Chineseness. The key theme of the book, an autobiographical novel, is one of identity, and the mismatch between a racial identity imposed by others and the narrator's own perceptions of his racial and national self-identity. The text follows the author's trip to Korea as a 24-year-old exchange student, where he explores his background and meets his Korean family for the first time. However, running parallel to the root-searching narrative is the narrative of Lundberg's life in Sweden, one of everyday racism, much of which is manifested through his being mis-identified as Chinese. Lundberg strives to emphasise his Swedishness throughout the text, and endeavours to communicate his distance from Chineseness and Koreanness. With Korea, he does this by repeating narratives of 'crazy Koreans', comparing irrational Korean culture with rational Swedish norms.

When he arrives in Korea for the first time, the narrator posits himself as a typical Swede abroad: he expresses his frustration that Koreans do not speak English well enough (2013, p. 29; p. 33); he is apprehensive about the food and the lack of vegetarian options, and ridicules the Koreans' misunderstandings of his vegetarianism (2013, p. 48; p. 140). He continuously reports absurd elements of his observations of Koreans: for instance, his female fellow students are 'dressed in Hello Kitty clothes from top to toe' (2013, p. 116), or dressed-up and wearing make-up at the breakfast table (2013, p. 32); and people are out shopping while dressed as comic book characters (2013, p. 35). These observations arguably tie in with Swedish notions of Korea, and create Koreans as something for the white Swedish reader to laugh at, while having the feeling that they are sharing the joke with the narrator—Korea is just as ridiculous to him as it is to them.

While distancing himself from Koreanness, Lundberg also strives to emphasise his Swedishness by communicating, or perhaps over-communicating, the shared common attitudes and values of

Swedishness. He does this through regular comparisons between the 'sane' way of doing things in Sweden and the 'insane' norms of Korea: for instance, through differing attitudes towards gender equality, prostitution, homosexuality and child-rearing (2013, p. 134; p. 84; p. 64-65; p. 101). He also communicates a pining for almost clichéd representations of Swedish culture: for example, watching Donald Duck on Christmas Eve, and eating pea soup (2013, p. 114). It is of interest that the representations are ones that carry a meaning of Swedishness only for Swedes, thereby further emphasising his insidership.

Also prevalent in Lundberg's text is the use of sinophobia as a means of distancing the narrator from the 'Chineseness' that much of his experiences of racism in Sweden stem from. The sinophobic narrative is mainly communicated through Lundberg's relationship with his Chinese room-mates, who begin as objects of ridicule, and, throughout his stay in Korea, they, and China, develop into a ridiculous enemy; an enemy whom Lundberg, representing Sweden, is continually bravely standing up to, educating and outwitting. For instance, he challenges his room-mates over Chinese government censorship, ridicules their initial misunderstanding of the toilet system (2013, p. 46) and threatens the room-mates with violence on more than one occasion (2013, p. 75; p. 137). The narrator's sinophobia is contrasted with his accounts of his own experiences of racism in Sweden, where he is often called, or treated as, Chinese. He recounts racist rhymes and jokes about his 'Chineseness', being called Chinese in arguments with friends and strangers (2013, p. 21), and being labelled as Chinese by customers at his job in a casino (2013, p. 27).

White on the Inside?

Lundberg's title, *Gul utanpå* [Yellow on the Outside], refers to a passage where the narrator describes himself as being likened to a banana:

> Once I was compared to a banana—yellow on the outside, white on the inside. (2013, p. 47)

It sums up the main message of the book: that Lundberg feels Swedish inside, he *is* Swedish, but his outer Korean appearance conceals it and is constantly misread. However Swedish he feels, Lundberg's daily encounters in Sweden are characterised by everyday racism and being treated as an East Asian Other. From being spoken to in English by other Swedes (2013, p. 24; p. 190), to being called 'fucking Chinese' (2013, p. 27), to being nicknamed Bruce Lee at work (2013, p. 195), to being forced to explain his non-whiteness through intimate questioning by strangers (2013, p. 25), he leaves the impression of living a tense, fraught existence, never quite allowed to belong; it is as if his Swedishness is constantly being interrupted. Despite his strong self-identification as Swedish, he says, 'I have been called Chinese daily for twenty-five years' (2013, p. 208).

Lundberg sees himself as a chameleon, and highlights his broad range of acquaintances: 'from Christians to petty criminals' (2013, p. 160), and Nazis, it seems—the book opens with him at a skinhead party (2013, p. 9), and he also boasts Sweden Democrat leader Jimmie Åkesson as a former student-teacher and great influence on his writing (2013, p. 19). He portrays himself as being able to fit into a variety of groups and roles, some of them sharply contrasting: 'I am a feminist, but at the same time I like standing in a group of supporters yelling that the other team are a bunch of wimps' (2013, p. 161); yet he also gives the impression that he never quite fits in completely. When, growing up, he gets to be among other youngsters that, in his words, 'don't look Swedish' (2013, p. 22), the children of immigrant families in a suburb of his home town, they see him as completely Swedish: '[to them] I was just a Swede, a Svensson with a house and a car' (2013, p. 23). His vegan friends call him 'Pat the brat', and his football friends call him 'Communist' or 'Redskin' (2013, p. 143).

This chameleon, or perhaps failed chameleon, existence is explored by Trinh (1989), who argues that the role of the colonised is to,

> '[b]e *like* us.' The goal pursued is the spread of a hegemonic dis-ease. Don't be us, this self-explanatory motto warns. Just be 'like' and bear the chameleon's fate, never infecting *us* but only yourself, spending your days muting, putting on/taking off glasses, trying to please all and always at odds with myself, who is no self at all. (Trinh, 1989, p. 52)

Trinh's chameleon certainly echoes Bhabha: Be *like* us, but don't *be* us: Be *almost* same, but not quite. American adoption scholar Myers, who is adopted from Hong Kong, finds that Trinh's description resonates with his own experiences of straining to be *like* those around him: 'I felt like a (failed) chameleon. The task of silencing myself and putting on masks, trying to 'please all' produced 'myself who was no self at all'' (2014).

Bhabha also addresses the role of masks in mimicry, explaining that a menace of mimicry emerges from the fact that there is no concealed essence hidden behind the mask (1994, p. 126). The body translated into mimic, I would argue, is deprived of ever being able to return to an authentic self. The mimic adoptee body is not a palimpsest-like body where a Korean, Chinese, Indian (etc.) presence/essence lies concealed behind the translation of Swedishnesss, which could be revealed and retrieved by removing the Swedishness.

The idea of a concealed original identity, however, is not actually raised in the source texts. In fact, quite the opposite happens: a narrative runs through the texts with the notion that there is a white/Swedish essence hidden underneath, and that the mask concealing it is the adoptee's non-white appearance, which carries no real racial, ethnic or cultural meaning, but is just a misplaced skin colour. For instance, Lundberg describes himself at one point as, 'a Swede in a body with an abnormal skin colour' (2013, p. 22).

The alienation of the adoptee from her physical imagery is not so much that she sees a white face in the mirror, but that she *feels* white, as Sarita, one of Juusela's informants adopted from India, exemplifies,

> I've always known how I look but when I really looked at myself in the mirror and saw that I was brown, it was pretty tough because I felt as light as my sister. (2010, p. 94)

Sarita's example indicates that the ambivalence of mimicry is not just about slipping between almost Swedishness and almost foreignness, but about slippage between whiteness and non-whiteness. It also concurs with Lundberg's 'white on the inside' analogy, as Sarita distinguishes between *looking* 'brown' and *feeling* 'light', which would place the lightness on the inside, and the darkness as a mask. This dominant narrative in the texts, running concurrently with notions of normalisation of adoption and distancing from roots, almost posits the adoptee as someone who was 'born in the wrong race'—a white person who has been born in an Asian body perhaps. Indeed, when Lundberg looks through a guest book at his adoption agency in Korea and sees greetings from hundreds of adult adoptees who have returned to search for their roots, he describes them as, 'Hundreds of Westerners in Korean bodies' (2013, p. 42).

This sentiment is echoed by another of Juusela's informants, Christian, who is from Colombia:

> I was different from my friends, even though I was the same as them inside. Sometimes I wished I was as blond and blue eyed as my other friends. (2010, p. 144)

Lundberg's mimic status sees him trapped in a partial presence in constant negotiation between not quite Swedishness (which is his excessive, over-communicated Swedishness) and not quite difference (his misrecognition as Chinese), while Juusela's informants are caught between their (excessive) Swedishness and (mis-)recognition as 'immigrants'. Still, the result is the same: a body trapped in a constant neither/nor state, where difference is seen but denied, and sameness becomes excessive mockery, or is unrecognised by others or by *Others.*

From Mimicry to Menace

The adoptee begins as a desired body of difference that is translatable into a mimic Swede. This mimicry produces and is produced by both the communication of excess Swedishness and a disavowel of difference, which contrasts with the adoptee's visible difference and confines them to a limited version of Swedishness. From this tense setting, mimicry becomes menace: the mimic poses a threat to the coloniser; the adoptee becomes a threat to the white Swede, white Swedishness, and the colonising (or adopting) mission itself.

A menace of mimicry comes from its challenge to norms, with mimics posing a threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers' (1994, p. 123). In the Swedish adoptee context, this threat comes in the shape of a body of colour in an exclusive white space, speaking perfect Swedish and identifying as Swedish, challenging meanings of Swedishness and blurring boundaries of belonging. Mimicry also moves to menace when the mimic returns the colonizer's partial gaze, producing a 'partial vision of the coloniser's presence' (1994, p. 126). The ambivalence of mimicry fixes the colonised mimic as a partial, incomplete, virtual presence, meaning that the coloniser's own presence, which is dependent on that of the colonised, is also trapped in an uncertainty of slippage and ambivalence (1994, p. 123). Mimicry becomes subversive to the whole colonial mission as it slips into mockery, where the coloniser becomes the observed, and the colonised the observer (1994, p. 127). To be clear, mimicry's menace is not an active resistance: instead it is an unintentional, discomforting and unwanted by-product of mimicry, coming more from the fear of subversion than from actual subversive acts.

The mimic adoptee is in constant slippage between their exalted, privileged position of being almost white and their problematic position as an almost non-white person: they have access to the exclusive spaces of whiteness and Swedishness seldom afforded to other non-Western immigrants; and yet they are degraded and discriminated against as an exoticised Other, out of place in white spaces, but not able to identify with other oppressed groups (see, for example, Lindblad & Signell 2008; Hübinette & Tigervall 2009). In other words, although the adoptee is the model Other, the authorised version of Otherness, they still find themselves subjected to the racism, fetishism and degradation usually afforded to *unauthorised* versions of Otherness. I would argue that this contradiction can be explained to some extent by the threat the adoptee poses, the menace of the mimic.

Lundberg presents a dialogue between himself and a white Swedish stranger, which is surely familiar to transracial adoptees—the 'where are you really from?' interrogation. Hübinette and Tigervall (2009) highlight adoptees in Sweden as being continuously subjected to this intimate questioning, describing it as the 'constant bombardment of questions regarding the national, regional, ethnic and racial origin of the adoptees' (2009, p. 344), and it is also noted to be overtly prevalent in adoptees' lives by Lindblad and Signell (2008, p. 51). It is possible to follow the dialogue to explore the unsettling threat the mimic adoptee poses to the white Swedish interrogator:

> Stranger: Where do you come from?
>
> Patrik: Malmö
>
> Stranger: Ok. But where do you come from originally?
>
> Patrik: Sölvesborg. In Blekinge.

[…]

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: Do you speak Korean?

Patrik: No

Stranger: Have you met your real parents?

Patrik: My real parents live in Sweden

(2013, pp. 25-26. My addition of names for clarity.)

The opening question alone carries significant meaning about belonging and non-belonging. While it may appear at first to be an innocent question, Trenka, Oparah & Shin argue that it 'carries the implicit rejection 'you are not like us' and underlines the assertion 'you do not belong here' (2006, pp. 7-8). Essed, who discusses the 'where are you from?' question as an everyday racism experienced by black women in the Netherlands, argues that behind the question is the desire for an explanation: 'what are you doing here?' (1991, p. 190).

The stranger begins by first denying, and then endeavouring to deconstruct Lundberg's Swedish ethnic and national identity, leading him on a journey back to his place of 'belonging': the place of 'real parents' and real mother tongue. This process of deconstructing the adoptee can be interpreted as punishment, a disciplining act to put the adoptee in his correct place; not as a Korean note, but as a mimic Swede: Lundberg is forced to confess he is not a full Swede, then forced to confirm his *almost* Swedishness through his not speaking Korean, and his 'real parent' comment.

What is it that compels the white Swede to discipline and deconstruct the transracial adoptee? The adoptee, a body of colour in a white space, presents himself as the same as the white Swede. On a broader level, this challenges the white Swede's notions of boundaries of belonging, of norms and values of Swedishness; it brings their own identity as a white Swede into question. Bhabha notes that '[t]he desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry ... is a final irony of partial representation' (1994, p. 126): in the white Swede's interaction with the adoptee of colour, their desire to be authentic, that is to be the authentic holder of Swedishness, and to be the holder of authority, is challenged.

Their white Swedish self is produced in relation to the adoptee's Otherness. Yet, as the adoptee is a partial presence, their identity in constant frantic negotiation, the presence and authority of the white Swede becomes ambivalent too. Indeed, as the mimic adoptee returns the partial gaze, the *white Swede's* presence is revealed as being partial, their *own* self is revealed as fundamentally split; their authority and authenticity, dependent on the adoptee's difference, is shattered: in a sense, they too are exposed as something of a mimic. This imminent threat to the white Swede's identity and sense of belonging could provoke a desperate reaction to urgently try to reposition the adoptee, to fix them in such a place from which the white Swede can re-assert their authenticity. This example also captures the inevitability of menace. It does not matter how well the adoptee mimics white Swedishness, how perfectly (or how imperfectly, for that matter) they perform the role expected of them in the adoption project; their menace may be inadvert, but it is ever present

Mimicry also menaces when it turns to mockery, parody almost: when the observer becomes the observed, de-authorising authority by mimicking it (Bhabha, 1994, p. 127), challenging and radically revaluating 'the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, history' (1994, p. 123). From here the mimic Swede threatens to undermine the colonial civilising mission of adoption itself, threatening the very notion of adoption as a pillar of Swedish anti-racism and international solidarity. The fear of this menace could perhaps explain the reaction adult adoptees face when they voice criticism of adoption systems, or when they bring stories of child theft and corruption, trafficking, racism and abuse to light. On the rare occasions that a critically thinking adoptee voice is heard in the media, they are swiftly and ruthlessly crushed by a powerful pro-adoption lobby, including white adoptive parents and individual adoptees brought in to counter with *their* personal stories of contentment, gratitude, and love (Kim, 2010, p. 256). As Kim notes, when critically thinking adoptees attempt to discuss adoption issues, they are labelled as bitter, angry 'unhappy malcontents', who are pitted against 'happy, well-adjusted adoptee[s]'; and consequently discussions about macro-level, structural injustices and power relations in adoption are reduced to matters of individual psychology and life history (2010, p. 256).

With this crushing of adoptees' voices comes the final irony of the adoption mission: raised and schooled in white Swedishness, when adoptees turn those tenets of the Swedishness they are supposed to mimic—anti-racism, non-colonialism, feminism and left-leaning liberalism—to questions of adoption, the fear and violence they invoke almost beggars belief. The emergence of a reflexive, critical adoptee voice seems to inspire a desperate and irrational terror in areas of the white Swedish populace. Blogger Paula Dahlberg, who is adopted from Colombia, reports being subjected to shocking online abuse after publishing an article on the dark side of adoption (2014), while Korean adoptee Tobias Hübinette's critical research on adoption saw an organised protest at his doctoral thesis defence, and has led to him facing threats of serious violence and being ostracised from the

academic community (Hübinette, 2011). When the observed becomes the observer, when the researched becomes the researcher, the mimic adoptee poses arguably the greatest threat of all: a threat to split the very notions of Swedishness and make a mockery of the civilising mission of adoption itself.

Mimicry as a Process

From my analysis of the three texts, a pattern began to emerge of mimicry working as a process, which begins with the desire for the body of Otherness that is translatable into a mimic Swede. The adopted body is then translated into almost Swedishness, in a dual translation process. The body itself is translated from total difference to almost sameness/almost difference, and at the same time a translation of Swedishness is imposed on the body: a translation which is limited, exaggerated and prone to drifting into mockery.

As the translation into and of Swedishness takes place, a powerful disavowal of difference and distancing from racial, ethnic and national origins takes place, as the adoptee negotiates its almost white self in relation to non-white and 'immigrant' Others. This disavowal is intertwined with a communication of an excess of sameness: a 100% Swedishness.

Finally, mimicry moves into menace, as the almost (white) mimic Swede interacts with the white Swede, and the white Swede's self is revealed as split and inauthentic, as it tries and fails to establish itself in relation to the mimic Swede's almost Otherness, which is fixed as partial, frantically slipping and ambivalent. The mimic adoptee also threatens to challenge the very notion of Swedishness and the adoption project itself.

Conclusion

To sum up, I have suggested that the Swedish adoption project entails the largely unproblematised desire for the child's body of colour within an ironic discourse of 'colour-blindness' and anti-racist myths. It is from this ironic background that mimicry emerges, as the desire for the adoptee as a body of difference that can be translated into a mimic Swede. Mimicry renders the adoptee/mimic Swede condemned to a constant negotiation and renegotiation of their split identity, as they spin between being almost the same but not quite, to almost different but not quite.

My analysis of the three adoption texts identified what could be seen as a process of mimicry, which follows the translation of the adoptee from a desired Other body to a mimic Swede; then, through a complex process of communicating excessive sameness, and producing—but disavowing—difference, moves to menace, a potential threat to the white Swede and meanings of Swedishness.

Like Macaulay's translators and Grant's partial imitators (Bhabha 1994, p. 124), Weigl's 'dark eyes under white student caps' (1997, p. 58), Lundberg's nationalist 'white on the inside' adoptee (2013), and Juusela's '100% Swedes' (2010) are 'appropriate versions of otherness'; but they are also the part-objects that challenge the normal colonial discourses in which they would be 'inappropriate' colonial subjects. As almost model Others, *almost* repetitions of the coloniser, *almost* repetitions of white Swedes, they disrupt understandings of cultural, racial and historical differences and contradict notions of racialised national boundaries and hierarchies; at the same time they forever threaten to return the partial gaze, posing a constant threat to the white Swede, white Swedishness and potentially to the adoption mission itself. These non-white bodies, authorised matter-out-of-place in exclusive white space, are the mimics who 'menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 126).

Richey Wyver is a doctoral candidate in Sociology at the University of Auckland, with an interest in international adoption, migration and postcolonial theory. His current research is a critical exploration of the phenomenon of Swedish international transracial adoption desire, with a focus on how collective adoption desire is (re)produced, justified and controlled.

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