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MIM WORKING PAPER SERIES 17:7



*MIM Working Papers Series No 17: 7*

**Published**

2017

**Editor**

Anders Hellström, [anders.hellstrom@mah.se](mailto:anders.hellstrom@mah.se)

**Published by**

Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM)

Malmö University

205 06 Malmö

Sweden

Online publication  
[www.bit.mah.se/muep](http://www.bit.mah.se/muep)

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## **“Almost the Same, but not Quite”: Mimicry, Mockery and Menace in Swedish Transnational/-racial Adoption Narratives**

### **Abstract**

This study uses Bhabha's concept of mimicry to explore how the transnational/-racial adoptee is discursively shaped in Swedish adoption narratives against a pro-adoption, colour-blind backdrop. Through an analysis of three Swedish adoption texts, the study explores the process and implications of the adoptee's body being translated from complete otherness into (almost) Swedishness. The study 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. The adoptee's mimicry is prone to turn into menace, where they pose a threat to the identity of the white Swede and white Swedishness.

### **Key Words**

Transnational/Transracial Adoption; International Adoption; Mimicry; Deconstructive Narrative Analysis; Sweden

### **Author Biography**

Richey Wyver is a doctoral candidate in Sociology at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. He studied at Malmö University between 2011 and 2016, completing a BA and MA in International Migration and Ethnic Relations. His current research explores the phenomenon of Swedish collective international transracial adoption desire, examining the role of literature, culture, media and the imagery of the adoptee body in reproducing and justifying adoption desire.

### **Acknowledgements**

This paper is an amended version of my MA IMER thesis of the same title, which was awarded the 2016 MIM Masters Essay Award. I would like to thank Anders Hellström

and Nahikari Irastorza for their much appreciated feedback on the original version, and for giving me this opportunity to publish my work as a working paper.

### Contact

[rwyv004@aucklanduni.ac.nz](mailto:rwyv004@aucklanduni.ac.nz)

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 *Background*

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, of being somehow excluded from Europe's history of colonialism and Nazism, and of being the "Third World's benefactor" is the world's biggest demand country (per capita) of non-Western children on the international adoption market (Heinö, 2009:303-304; Hübinette & Tigervall, 2009:336). Since the 1950's over 55,000 children, predominantly children of colour from countries in 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 largely unproblematised in Sweden.

Although international adoption to Sweden constitutes a steady migration flow, and raises questions of identity, race, racism, ethnicity, migration industries and human trafficking, it is notable by its absence from Swedish migration research. This absence could be explained by the ethical sensitivity involved in studying adoptive family relations, but also by the fact that it is 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 adoption in his work (Hübinette, 2011). It could also be indicative of a myth that transnational adoptees are simply not migrants.

To begin to address this absence, with this project I aim to place the adoption question as central to the IMER discipline by considering international adoption as a

form of (forced) migration, the adoption industry as a migration industry, and the adoptee as a migrant. Concurrently, I aim to contribute to an emerging postcolonial critique of the international adoption phenomenon. My main focus will be on issues relating to the imposed identity of the adoptee, and how the demand and desires that fuel the adoption industry shape how the transnational/-racial adoptee is depicted in the imaginations of the adopting family, the adoptee themselves and the receiving nation. By taking Hübinette's notion of international adoption as a contemporary colonial reality that is propelled by massive racialized power imbalances between supply and demand countries as a starting point (2005:27, 28), I will examine how the construction of transnational/-racial adoptees in Sweden can be understood in terms of Homi K. Bhabha's concept of mimicry (1994). I will explore the idea that the adoptee's body is "civilized" through adoption as s/he is translated from a foreign, Other body of colour into an (almost) white Swede, yet s/he becomes trapped in a tense, oppressed and threatening existence as a mimic (white) Swede: s/he is split between being *almost* the same, but not quite, and *almost* different, but not quite. This study will focus on transnational/-racial adoptees, i.e., intercountry adoptees who cannot generally pass as white in Sweden. While there are exceptions, the transnational/-racial adoptee should be seen as having been raised within a white Swedish family, with whom he or she has no biological relationship.

### ***1.2 Aims and Research Questions***

The over-riding aim of this project is to use Bhabha's concept of mimicry (1994) in tandem with the concept of colonial translation (Young, 2003) to explore the process of the construction of the transnational/-racial adoptee as a "mimic" Swede, and what this mimic identity entails and implies. My focus is on the discursive and semiotic aspects of the problem, and I will address the research questions below through a deconstructive narrative analysis of a selection of contemporary and classic Swedish adoption-related texts.

- (i) How can the process of translation be understood in the adoption narratives?
- (ii) How is mimicry manifested in the adoption narratives?
- (iii) How is the transnational/-racial adoptee discursively constructed as a "mimic Swede"?

(iv) How can the process of mimicry turning to menace be understood from the adoption narratives?

### ***1.3 Previous Research***

Adoption knowledge in Sweden, and Scandinavia in general, has traditionally been produced by, and arguably for, white adoptive parents: from psychological research (for instance, Kats, 1975; and Lindblad, 2004), to sociological and anthropological research (Yngvesson, 2002; and Howell, 2006). It is notable that much of this research tends to serve a secondary purpose of justifying, even promoting adoption. An exception is the work of Tobias Hübinette, who is a Korean adoptee and has produced a commendable body of work challenging dominant adoption narratives, even touching on areas of taboo in what is an overwhelming pro-adoption discourse: for example structural and “colour-blind racism” (with Tigervall<sup>1</sup>, 2009), fetishism (2014), and criticism of the adoption industry and adoption desire itself (2005).

In recent years, Swedish adoption scholars have paid increasing attention to the sustained and systemic racism against adoptees of colour, and the psychological problems adoptees face. Lindblad and other psychologists have highlighted the increased risk of suicide and social maladjustment in Swedish transracial adoptees (Lindblad, Hjern, & Vinnerljung, 2003), and Lindblad has also touched upon the racialized sexual abuse of female adoptees from East Asia (Lindblad & Signell, 2008), an area that urgently needs further investigation. Rooth, an economist, uncovered widespread labour market discrimination against adoptees of colour when using adoptees as a research group that is culturally Swedish yet visibly “non-Swedish” (2002), while Hübinette and Tigervall have explored adoptees’ experiences of everyday racism, and suggested a link between racism, colour-blindness and anti-racist myths (which effectively result in the impossibility of talking about or understanding racism), and suicide and social maladjustment (2008; 2009).

Hübinette has been instrumental in establishing international adoption as an issue of colonialism/postcolonialism, and his seminal work, “Comforting an Orphaned Nation”, explores the adoptee through Bhabha’s concepts of hybridity and third space (2005). Pal Ahluwalia, a prominent postcolonial scholar, also addresses adoption in his

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<sup>1</sup> Who, again, is a white adoptive mother

article “Negotiating Identity: Post-Colonial Ethics and Transnational Adoption” (2007), cementing adoption within a postcolonial framework of study and using Bhabha’s mimicry to introduce the concept of the adoptee as a quintessential “mimic”, trapped in an “almost the same, but not quite” existence. American adoption scholar Kit Myers stresses the need to read adoption as a colonial/post-colonial object of study, and touches upon the relevance of mimicry in adoption narratives too (2014). However, neither Myers nor Ahluwalia fully address the move from mimicry to menace (where the mimic poses a threat to the colonizer and colonizing mission), which is something that I intend to explore further in my research. Myers’ main contribution is to introduce the “violence of love framework”, within which he explores adoption narratives of “love” as creating, perpetuating and concealing violences of racism, trauma and inequality (2013).

## 2. Method

### *2.1 Philosophical Approach: A Postcolonial Perspective, Underpinned by Critical Realism*

My project, which is a qualitative study of a theory-driven, deductive nature, is underpinned by the philosophical approach of critical realism, and approaches the research problem from a postcolonial perspective.

Critical realism (CR) is an emerging philosophy, associated with Marxism and Postcolonial studies, which offers a counterweight and challenge to dominant social constructivism ideas. CR targets underlying structures and mechanisms as objects of study. At the heart of CR lies the belief that there are real worlds, but these have been obscured, repressed or deleted by false realities (or, in Marxist terms, false consciousness): that is, realities, interpretations and belief systems that have come about as a result of massive power inequities, be they through class oppression, race oppression or a result of colonial projects (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009:42). Moses and Knutsen describe CR’s<sup>2</sup> understanding of reality as consisting of a series of layers, and that while this multiple “realities” notion is in accordance with constructivism, proponents of CR fundamentally believe in a naturalist foundation (2012:12).

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<sup>2</sup> Moses and Knutsen name Critical Realism “Scientific Realism”.

Although Moses and Knutsen do not effectively describe how CR is used in social science research, they posit it as a sort of “third way” between constructivism and realism, in that it blends the most attractive elements of the two approaches (2012:12).

The realities of CR should not be confused with strictly positivist realities: CR fully acknowledges the existence of social constructions; however, these constructions are approached in an objective manner. The fact that something is defined and constructed socially does not make it any less real; in essence, social constructions are also social realities. This objectification of constructions enables the researcher to address problematic concepts such as “race” in a more meaningful way than a constructionist would be able to. Treated as a (social) reality, race can be examined as a mechanism that can have causal effects, enabling investigations into and challenges to race-based discrimination, for example (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009:42).

Critical realism does not concern itself with individualism, that is, studying at the actor level; nor, for that matter is it focused at the collective level: the focus is on the structures and mechanisms that lie behind phenomena. The individual level is not seen as a useful way to see structural problems, and techniques such as interviewing are generally not seen as appropriate for this approach (1998, cited in Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009:43).

Critical realism is, above all, a radical, dynamic philosophy. The critical element of it involves bringing structural imbalances of power to light, analyzing and criticizing conceptions of phenomena that are either accepted as concrete, stable facts by Positivists or as volatile subjective constructions by constructivists. At the very heart of CR lays a core belief in the researcher as an activist: as Alvesson and Sköldberg put it, “what is important is not just to explain the world, but also to change it” (2009:39).

This idea of digging in layers of “truths”, and looking for buried realities, along with the idea of research as activism, appear to be in line with Ahluwalia’s definition of postcolonialism: “a counter-discourse that seeks to disrupt the cultural hegemony of the West, challenging imperialism in its various guises” (2010:3). With the adoption phenomenon based around an industrial scale one-way transportation of children from the global south to white westerners, and with its history and knowledge written by the white westerners (or from a white Western gaze), and with the industry powered by a desire for the exotic body, accentuating and cementing ideas of white supremacy, “West is best” and notions of racial hierarchies, the issue is ready for examination

from a postcolonial position. Accepted narratives need to be challenged, disrupted and re-examined, the question of whether adoption is a product (and producer) of imperialism needs to be asked.

I believe that approaching the phenomenon of international adoption in Sweden with this philosophical orientation would be ideal in a number of ways. Firstly, most adoption research has focused on individual experiences; any criticism of adoption (in media, in forums, discussions, conversations) tends to fall very quickly into anecdotal arguments and counter arguments, based solely on individual interpretations of experiences (Kim, 2010:256). To truly challenge international adoption as an institution, one needs to move away from analyzing the individual, and examine the mechanisms of desire, fetishism, civilizing missions and racism that drive commercial adoption demand.

A critical analysis of structures also has ethical advantages. Adoption is a deeply sensitive issue, affecting real people. Many adoptees are vulnerable (in Sweden, transnational/-racial adoptees are significantly over-represented in suicide attempts, completed suicides, depression, drug use and criminality (Lindblad, Hjern, & Vinnerljung, 2003); therefore, an inexperienced researcher may be advised against carrying out any obtrusive research. It should also be remembered that an overwhelmingly pro-adoption discourse and powerful adoption lobby make criticizing adoption a taboo in Sweden (Hübinette, 2011), and individual informants may be unable or unwilling to reflect outside the established narratives of adoption.

### *2.3 Method and Methodology*

In the spirit of the both critical realism and postcolonial theory, I have decided to explore my source texts using deconstructive narrative techniques as defined by Czariawska (2004). Deconstructive narrative analysis provides the tools to look for meanings and structures behind and beyond texts, has a focus on uncovering and analysing power imbalances and underlying mechanisms, and can be used to link narratives presented as individual stories to wider structural societal narratives and discourses.

To guide my reading, and to provide a deeper analysis and increase the reliability of my study, I employed a systematic coding technique by using guidelines presented by Berg and Lune in their description of qualitative content analysis (2012:349). My

methodology makes no distinction between visual texts (such as photos) and written texts, and I have used the same analytical techniques, reading both images and words as narratives. I also made minimal distinction between different voices (adoptee, adopter, narrator), being concerned with what is said, rather than who said it. Likewise, I did not make a clear division between the three texts as I analysed them.

## *2.4 Coding*

Textual analysis can be something of a subjective approach, and as my interest is in the semiotic aspects of the problem, my focus here is very much on how the text can be interpreted and its underlying meanings, rather than the author's intention. To ensure that the methodology, research, and the conclusions are as scientifically rigorous as possible, I have decided to combine the deductive narrative analysis of my selected texts with a system of coding. Coding is a vital step in the research process, with Payne & Payne arguing that in qualitative studies coding "lies at the heart of the research" (2004:36). In addition to being a link between data collection and analysis, coding helps me to strengthen the reliability of my research by employing a systematic, scientific method; if I were to simply choose examples from the texts to support my arguments instead, I would be (justifiably) prone to accusations of what Berg and Lune call "exampling" or "cherry-picking" (2012:371, 372). By employing a thorough, systematic coding process and analysis I also gave myself an opportunity to be exposed to new and unexpected patterns that exampling would miss.

I began with an inductive reading of my texts, noting in the margins any key themes, patterns, narratives that begin to emerge (Payne and Payne refer to this step as "the preliminary analysis" (2004: 39)). I then used these notes to tentatively create categories for coding (for example, "experiences of racism"; "mirroring"; "disavowal from country of origin"). The categories were intentionally loose, flexible, open to expansion, splitting, and change throughout the analysis process. New categories, even if they were unrelated to my theoretical framework were allowed to emerge at any time. My next reading was a more deductive one, colour-coding the texts to fit narratives to the categories, and cross-referencing the texts. An important technique I employed was ensuring that I stopped and reviewed my coding and categories at regular intervals. I also ensured that categories included elements that contradicted my theories, to increase the validity of the study. Once I had coded the texts, I examined

the relevant narratives in depth through a combination of my interpretations of the mimicry and translation and the deconstructive narrative analysis techniques outlined below.

## **2.5 Deconstructive Narrative Analysis**

As with postcolonialism, deconstructive narrative analysis seeks to disrupt, and to read “against the grain”. Norris sums up the spirit and aim of the approach particularly clearly: *“To ‘deconstruct’ a text is to draw out conflicting logics of sense and implication, with the object of showing that the text never exactly means what it says or says what it means”* (Norris, 1988:7)

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). I used this to 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 (Czarniawska, 2004:97 [adapted from Martin 1990:335]).

A major question in narrative analysis is the extent to which individuals can control the production of their own narratives (Czarniawska, 2004:5). My own position on this, in line with Critical Realist ideas, is that published narratives, such as those examined in this study, are products of societal power mechanisms, and should be not be read as pure, free accounts of experiences. This is particularly relevant when examining Swedish adoption stories, which are likely to follow strict narrative guidelines within the confines of the pro-adoption discourse.

By analyzing published texts, I can uphold my ethical obligations on one hand, whilst being able to examine narratives in real depth on the other. Furthermore, I believe that deconstructive narrative analysis provides the tools to dig beneath the surface of the narrative, and this is very much in accordance with both CR and postcolonial studies. By combining deconstructive narrative analysis with qualitative content analysis coding techniques, I believe I have been able to add a level of objectivity and to increase both the reliability and scientific integrity of the study.

## 2.6 A Note on language

I have used the terms transnational/-racial adoptee, adoptee of colour and adoptee interchangeably, to mean an adoptee of colour raised by a white Swedish family, and adopted through the commercial adoption industry. I have chosen “transnational/-racial” rather than international (say), to clarify that the adoption process transgresses both national and racial boundaries. This is also the term favoured by contemporary adoption scholars Myers (2013) and Chen (2013; 2016). I have endeavoured to use neutral adoption language (Myers, 2013:55) avoiding, where possible, terms that promote the adoption industry or demean the victims of the industry. For instance, I have replaced *birth mother* (which many mothers who have lost children to adoption find offensive), with *mother of loss*. Where appropriate I have replaced the more commonly used term *receiving country* with *demand country*, as “receiving” removes agency from countries like Sweden, placing the agency instead with the “sending country” counterpart (I have replaced *sending country* with *supply country*). The “receiving/sending” dichotomy is problematic in many ways, not least as it contradicts the fact that the adoption industry is demand-driven, with demanding parents vastly outnumbering available infants, a fact that is agreed upon by even the staunchest of pro-adoption advocates, including Norwegian anthropologist and adoption scholar (and adoptive mother) Signe Howell (2006: 20).

Language relating to race, physical differences and ethnic differences is always open to critical discussion, and as such I will briefly explain my choices. I have used “person of colour” to describe a non-white person of any racial or ethnic origin, and ensured that I use the qualifier “white” when speaking about Swedes who are not of colour, to avoid the pitfall of perpetuating notions of Swedishness equating whiteness. Except in cases where I want to create the effect of exclusion I have avoided the term “non-white” as it reifies the notion of whiteness being the norm. I have also tried where possible to avoid the “colour-blind” yet hyper-racialized language which I critically address in section 4.3, where meaningful allusions are made to racial difference (such as “dark”, “dark haired”, “looking different”, “not looking Swedish”), yet at the same time difference is disavowed.

All translations from the Swedish originals are my own, and while they have been discussed with two native Swedish speakers, the reader is asked to bear in mind that all translations are political in a sense, and can be open to different interpretations.

## 2.7 Source Texts

After a careful selection process, I settled on the texts listed below to analyse. Given the time and space limitations of the project, I decided that a maximum of three main texts would be appropriate, allowing me to go into significant detail in my analysis whilst also giving an indication of the broader picture. My selection criteria was firstly to cover the “life span” of the adoptee as much as possible, that is to cover the initial desire for the adoptee to the adoptee as an adult; to get a mix of adopter and adoptee voices; and to keep a focus around autobiographical/biographical texts.

To choose the specific texts, I combined the following factors: popularity of text, visibility in libraries and bookshops; fame of author; citations in other texts; on recommended reading lists, particularly that of *MfoF*'s website ([mfof.se](http://mfof.se))<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, I discussed my selection with adoption researchers and activists. It is important to explain and justify the selection of material, to avoid accusations of picking specific texts to support my arguments, and as such, I have given a brief explanation for the inclusion of each text below. I have indicated the nature of each book and its author, but will elaborate in more detail in my analysis.

- 1) **Kerstin Weigl, *Längtansbarnen* [the Longed For/Longing Child] (1997).** Both a guide for prospective adopters and an autobiography of an adopter's own experiences. First published in 1997, the book has been reprinted twice (in 2001 and 2004). It is listed as recommended reading on *MfoF*'s website, and cited in their parenting course literature (Socialstyrelsen, 2007). The book is highly visible in libraries, and was in the parenting section of the three state libraries I visited<sup>4</sup>. The author, Kerstin Weigl, is a white adoptive mother to two girls from East Asia.

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<sup>3</sup> *MfoF* (Myndigheten för familjерätt och föräldrarskapsstöd [Family Law and Parental Support Authority]) is the Swedish government body that oversees international adoptions. Until January 2016 it was *MIA* (Myndigheten för internationella adoptionsfrågor).

<sup>4</sup> I visited Malmö City Library, Lund City Library, Lund Klostergården Library, and the libraries of Malmö University and Lund University in July 2015 and again in September 2015 to observe the prominence and positioning of adoption books.

She a prominent journalist who has written widely on adoption from an adopter's perspective.

- 2) **Mary Juusela, Adoption: *Banden som gör oss till familj* [Adoption: The Ties That Make Us a Family]** (2010). Written by an Indian adoptee, the book is a collection of interviews with 29 adoptive families comprised of adult adoptees, their parents, and sometimes 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 adoption advocate, and has also published a book about root searching, called *Adoption: Den stora återresan* [Adoption: The Great Homeland Journey], 2013). Juusela's book was the most visible of all adoption books, and was prominently displayed in all the libraries I visited: indeed, it was even positioned on its own display stand in Malmö University library and two of the three public libraries I visited.
- 3) **Patrik Lundberg, *Gul Utanpå* [Yellow on the Outside].** (2013). Autobiographical novel about the life of a young man growing up as a Korean adoptee in Sweden, and his first journey to Korea as a 24 year old. It is marketed as a young adult novel and published by a major publishing house (*Rabén & Sjögren*, an imprint of *Norstedts*) and was very well-received. Lundberg is becoming increasingly prominent as a journalist and author, and is often visible in adoption debates. I chose this book for its contemporary nature and popularity.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1 Theoretical Overview

The theory most central to my project is Bhabha's mimicry (1994), but I also draw upon Young's work on colonial translation and civilizing missions (1995; 2003). In the proceeding sections, I will give a critical introduction to each theory in turn. The relevance of the Swedish colour-blind discourse became increasingly apparent during my research, and as such I will also provide a critical definition of colour-blindness and its role in popular Swedish imagination.

### 3.2 Mimicry

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, 1994:122). The mimic is a colonized body that is desired and constructed to play a role of a “reformed, recognizable Other”, being almost the same as the colonizers, but not quite (1994:122); or, “almost the same, but not white” (1994:131). It 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 colonizers, and can never *quite* identify with the colonized. Mimicry depends on ambivalence: it must, Bhabha notes, “continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (1994:122); it is by never quite allowing the mimic to establish herself as the same or different, leaving them caught in a frantic slippage between two poles of non-recognition, that mimicry becomes most effective. However, the ambivalent nature of mimicry leaves the colonizer and the authority of the colonizing mission under threat: mimicry is “at once resemblance and menace” (1994:123).

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 1994:124,125). Macaulay's class of interpreters are shaped to become what Bhabha describes as, “Appropriate objects of a colonialist chain of command; authorized versions of otherness” (1994:126).

Bhabha also exemplifies mimicry through Grant's (1792) text proposing a system of partial reform in English civilizing missions in India. Grant's proposal was built around the formation of colonized 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 1994:124). 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 enduce them to remain under our protection” (Grant 1792, cited in Bhabha (1994:124).

The mimic learns to disavowal itself from ideas of Otherness (blackness, Asianness, and non-Swedishness for instance), 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. With no authentic identity of difference behind the mimic, and a partial and excessive inauthentic sameness identity, the mimic is trapped in a fixed presence of not quite sameness, and not quite difference, and is permanently split, in a constant and frantic state of slippage between almost sameness/almost difference, and in a state of constant negotiation.

The menace of mimicry comes from its challenge to norms, with mimics posing a threat to both “normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers” (1994:123), and the mimic poses a constant threat to the colonizer. The ambivalence of mimicry fixes the colonized as a partial, incomplete, virtual presence (1994:123), meaning that the colonizer’s presence, which is dependent on that of the colonized (the colonizer’s self shaped in relation to the colonized’s Otherness), is also trapped in an uncertainty of slippage and ambivalence. The ambivalent (neither/nor) nature of the mimic menaces as they return the partial gaze: that is, their slippage and slippage between (not quite) sameness and (not quite difference) leaves the colonizer in an ambivalent, uncertain space, as they are not able to construct their Self in relation to the mimic’s ambivalent partial presence. The mimic’s partial presence denies the colonizer their mythical wholeness, disrupts their authority and authenticity, and, in a sense reveals them as just as much of a “mimic”.

### *3.3 Translation and Civilizing*

*“Translation is a way of thinking about how languages, people, and cultures are transformed as they move between different places” (Young, 2003:29)*

Robert Young describes the civilizing process as being built around a system of “translating” (2003), and this will concept will be a key component of my theoretical framework. Put very simply, translating is the grafting of a colonizing culture over a colonized one: as Young explains, “Under colonialism, the colonial copy becomes more powerful than the indigenous original that is devalued. It will even be claimed that the copy corrects deficiencies in the native version” (2003:140).

The copy of the colonial culture is a *version* of the colonial culture, not an exact replica, but simplified and adapted to shape the colonizer's needs. This notion of translated cultures can be linked to mimicry, as, in a sense they become mimic cultures: almost the same, but not quite. The translated version of the culture does not give the colonized access to full Britishness (for example), but a semblance of it; it is captured by the difference between English and Anglican, for instance (Bhabha, 1994:125). The translated version of culture at once prevents the colonized from having an authentic belonging and identity with their own culture, and from achieving authentic belonging within the colonizer's culture, leaving them trapped in a split, inauthentic, mimic existence.

Young stresses that translation must be seen as a violence, and central to colonizing missions. He argues that “[t]ranslation becomes part of the process of domination, of achieving control, a violence carried out on the language, culture, and people being translated. The close links between colonialization and translation begin not with acts of exchange, but of violence and appropriation, of ‘deterritorialization’” (2003:140,141).

While Young himself does not make the connection between translation and mimicry, my reading of the two theories identifies a strong link between the two, with the cultural disruptions of translation, the imposition of “versions” of one culture (a mimic culture, one could say) to correct “flaws” in others as outlined above, as creating the ironic discursive settings that mimicry emerges from: the translating process creates the almost the same, but not quite settings and subjects. In my usage of translation, I plan to both consider the translations of versions of cultures (and so on), and the translations of the body: I want to examine both what is imposed on the adoptee and how the adoptee themselves are translated from being the “orphaned body” (say) to the mimic Swede.

### *3.4 Swedish Colour-blindness*

Colour-blindness, which 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” (Frankenberg, 1993:142), has a special place in national myths of Swedishness. Indeed, Swedish colour-blindness is perhaps unique, in that it has been taken on as a political project, with the word “race” (“ras”) becoming a taboo word, and being removed

from legislative documents. In a country where public statistics are multiple and readily accessible, there are no statistics kept on racial or ethnic backgrounds. The idea behind Swedish colour-blindness is that it removes the notion of race as a biological, essential division of humans, and distances modern society from unsavoury race-based histories. It is vital, I believe, to consider the importance and the impacts of Swedish colour-blindness while carrying out IMER research in general, and transnational/-racial adoption research in particular.

Colour-blindness has been instrumental in the development of Swedish national myths of being “anti-racist” or even “post-race”: an equal society where people are not categorised by skin colour or physical characteristics associated with racist biology. Heinö argues that Swedes regard themselves as, “democratic, liberal, equal, tolerant, and individualist” people, who highly value and realize the values of, “anti-racism, universalism, secularism and gender equality” (2009:303-304).

Despite the celebration of colour-blindness in Sweden, significant problems arise from colour-blindness, both as politics and as a discourse: for instance, Osanami Törngren argues that, “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 can also result in a denial of racism, a belief that structural racism does not exist, and the myth that if we do not see race, then we cannot have racism. This problem is raised by Hübinette and Tigervall, who find that colour-blindness simply conceals traditional racialized thinking, and prevents race-based discrimination from being seriously addressed (2009:359). Their research find 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).

The idea of colour-blindness meaning that race-based thinking is communicated in alternative ways, which allow it to be denied and accepted, also emerges in Osanami Törngren’s research (2011). Comparing Swedish attitudes towards inter-racial marriage/relationships between White Swedes and adopted and non-adopted members of other racial categories, she found that attitudes towards the adoptees (supposedly Swedish in everything but colour) and non-adoptees showed little variation. This

challenged the myth of Sweden being a nation that does not “see” colour, and where colour is not a significant factor in categorizing (2011). Both Hübinette and Tigervall, and Osanami Törngren’s research indicates that race is effectively still being read, and read meaningfully, but a different vocabulary is being used to communicate this meaning.

### *3.5 Working with the Ambivalence of Bhabha*

While Bhabha’s theoretical work centres around ambivalence and slippage, Young (1990) brings attention to the ambivalences and slippages in Bhabha’s writings themselves, suggesting the possibility of Bhabha intentionally rejecting a “consistent meta language” and “static concepts” to avoid the problem of his analyses “ending up repeating the same structures of power and knowledge in relation to its material as the colonial representation itself” (1990:146).

Young points out that although Bhabha may initially give the impression that concepts such as mimicry are somehow static, and may “hold good for all historical periods and contexts”, Bhabha himself actually treats them as fluid, ambivalent, and slipping into one another (1990:146). I believe that this is an important factor to be taken into consideration when approaching Bhabha: to treat mimicry as a straightforward universal concept that can be taken from the cultural and historical context of British colonial rule, e.g., in India, and shoehorn it into the postcolonial phenomenon of international adoption in present day Sweden, would be a gross misunderstanding of Bhabha’s motives. Mimicry is not a concrete theory which one can simply apply to different scenarios, and it should be kept in mind that my definitions of mimicry are very much my own interpretations of Bhabha’s writings: other scholars may well interpret mimicry differently, or focus on different aspects of it. For clarity, I have kept my theoretical focus on mimicry as described in Bhabha’s essay *Of Mimicry and Man* (in Bhabha, 1994).

I have approached what I see as the intersection between translation and mimicry by reading translation as part of a process that constructs (or reconstructs) the mimic. That is, the colonized body is *translated* from absolute Otherness, a body that is fully different, into a mimic.

## 4. Analysis and Discussion

### 4.1 Analysis: An Overview

The following section presents and discusses the findings of my analysis, and is divided into eight further subsections. It loosely follows the main narrative categories that emerged from my analysis, and is intended to reflect the notion of mimicry working as a process, moving from desire to mimicry to menace. I will begin by presenting a discussion on the desire for the adoptee as a mimic (4.2), before moving onto the ironic discursive background that mimicry emerges from (4.3). Sub-sections 4.4 to 4.7 explore the translation of the adoptee's body, the (over)communication of Swedish and disavowal of difference, and the adoptee's neither/nor position. 4.8 discusses the movement from mimic to menace, and 4.9 summarizes and presents a model of mimicry as a process.

### 4.2 Desire for the Authorised version of Otherness: “It’s the Exotic Children I want”

“A tight Vietnamese profile, with the distinctive cheekbones. Or maybe an explosive South American, smooth and coffee coloured?”(Weigl, 1997:58, 59)

Kerstin Weigl’s *Längtansbarnen* is an autobiographical account of a white Swedish woman adopting children of colour from East Asia, which is 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. It follows Weigl’s journey from dealing with infertility to adopting, and with her honest account of her experiences and decisions, it also provides a valuable insight into the desires and fantasies of the white adopter. The title can be seen to capture both the idea of a *longed for* child (by the adoptive parents) and the child that *longs for* something - perhaps the rescue 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 civilize this body into a mimic Swede, “a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994:122). 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" (1997:15)*

The quote 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 fantasizing 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 24<sup>th</sup>, came home with us from Hanoi 28<sup>th</sup> October.’ Lucky them, the kid was just three months old. 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 3<sup>rd</sup> September from Cali, Colombia.’ God, so small and cute. And black. Would you dare? [...]*

*But this one: ‘Our dream princess Maria, born June 3<sup>rd</sup>, came home with us 21<sup>st</sup> 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, 1997:58, 59)<sup>5</sup>*

Weigl’s descriptions of both the children and the 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: “expectation warms my stomach”; “my hunger”; to the sexual undertones of “expectation”, “fantasy”; to the less subtle sexual references, “It’s the exotic children I want”; “Child porn”; we are left with an unpleasant, but transparent understanding of the fetishization (and, one might add, the fantasies of hyper-sexualisation) of the child before it has even been chosen, let alone arrived in Sweden.

Weigl also gives us an understanding of the acceptability of choosing a child as an exotic commodity, and the acceptability of racial categorizing, profiling and hierarchical structuring through her stereotyping. The Asian (Vietnamese) boy: “Isn’t he a little puny?”; the Colombian girl: “God, so small and cute. And black. Would you dare?”; the East Asian girl: “So little, so cute. A little Vietnamese”; The South American boy: “explosive, smooth and coffee coloured” (1997:58,59).

We can see the desire for the adoptee as a mimic through the images of the child in Swedish rites of passage: entering the sandbox, being Lucia and graduating from school. The desire for mimicry is also found in the child’s expected sexual encounters: “Boys who grow to 1.60 metres tall, and wear just size 39 shoes, would they have a chance with a Swedish girl?” (1997: 59); a question which arguably reflects the notion of non-sexuality of the East Asian male (Hübinette, 2014), and carries the possible reflection of Weigl herself as the Swedish girl. 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, performance in rituals, but not quite – they get to wear the white graduating cap, but look out from under it with dark eyes. Sebastian from Hanoi may not be suitable as a mimic Swedes, as his “puniness” and the expected growth of someone of his “race” may not be compatible for reproducing Swedishness.

The same rejection of the de-sexualised Asian male 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*” (1997:96)

The idea that the boy’s height would see him rejected by Swedish girls (and in a colour-blind discourse it is possible that “height” is being used to stand in for “race” in

this context) completely disregards the possibility that he may what to have relationships with non-Swedish (or non-white) 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” (1997:96): *“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?”* (1997:96).

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 who does not “blend in”.

While Weigl chooses to adopt from Vietnam, the revelation of a massive adoption corruption scandal closes the country temporarily for adoptions. Weigl then turns her attention to China, and eventually adopts her first daughter from there. Throughout the book, Weigl refers to her daughter as “my little China Girl”, linking this to David Bowie’s song “China Girl”: *“My little China Girl. I hum my rock idol David Bowie’s “My Little Chinagirl [sic]”* (1997:102).

The choice of the song is very relevant, as not only is the video for the song widely known for its problematic play on the fantasy of the hyper-sexualisation of the Chinese female (China Girl, 1983) the lyrics also capture the desire to rescue and reshape the East Asian body into an almost whiteness, which has, I would argue, parallels with the desires of the transnational/-racial adoption project. The narrator (in the song) promises the Chinese girl material objects (“I’ll give you television”); Almost whiteness (“I’ll give you eyes of blue”); and access to power, (“I’ll give you a man who wants to rule the world”) while dominating her and erasing her original identity: “You shouldn’t mess with me, I’ll ruin everything you are” (Bowie, 1983).

It is also very telling that Weigl has added both the possessive “my” and the diminutive “little” to the original title of the song. This concurs with her depictions of East Asians in her text. For instance, while white Swedish adoption professionals and medical professionals are depicted as powerful and dynamic (for instance, Ingrid Stjerna, social worker and adoption specialist (2010:42), and the infertility doctor Weigl calls “The Witch” (2010:10)), Weigl calls the Chinese adoption facilitator

“Sweet Little Miss Wong” (1994:126). This, I would suggest, reifies the narrative of the submissive, hyper-sexualised Asian female.

When after the long process of adopting, Weigl’s daughter is settled in Sweden. Weigl watches her sleeping, and reflects, “*A beloved Chinese girl under an Ikea squirrel duvet. That is science fiction*” (1997:170).

The Chineseness of the girl is contrasted with the Swedishness of the *Ikea* duvet, with *Ikea* representing the quintessential Swedish company and signifying a typical Swedish setting, and the squirrel motif perhaps signifying nature (and clean, fresh air, healthy living, countryside) of Sweden, arguably even in contrast to images of post-Communist industrialism and pollution in China. The exotic body is encased in a signifier of sameness/Swedishness, at once over-stressing its sameness, while drawing attention to its excessive difference. The need to stress that she is a “beloved” Chinese girl could be read as implying that without adoption she wouldn’t have been loved, or that other Chinese girls are not loved, which ties in with racist myths of Chinese families favouring boys and rejecting and abandoning girls.

I would suggest that the desire for the adoptee is not a desire for an Other 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). Bhabha suggests that mimicry is the “desire for a reformed, recognizable other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (1994:122), and I would argue that this desire is echoed in Weigl’s text. Bhabha adds that mimicry must also represent difference and that this representation should also be a “process of disavowal” (1994:122), and in Weigl’s text we can see the difference emerging through “the little China girl” and the disavowal coming from the Swedish settings, and the expectation for the child to also fit Swedish ideals of appearance, desires and culture. The production of excess, both in sameness and difference is another a feature of mimicry (1994:122), and in this example, the contrast between the “exotic” child and the very “Swedish” settings, communicate both excessive sameness and highlight difference at the same time.

#### *4.3 The Irony of “Colour-blindness” and the Adoption Project*

While I began by noting the irony of Sweden’s role in the international adoption trade, anthropologist Elena Kim describes adoption itself as “at root, tragically ironic”

(2010:76). Kim contrasts the sense of shared humanity adoption can produce with the creation, reinforcement and magnification of massive inequalities between sending and receiving countries, and the simultaneous production of, “closeness and distance, identification and difference, common humanity, and base inequality” (2010:76).

Similarly Bhabha stresses the irony that lies at the very heart of the civilizing mission of colonialism, which exists within a discourse which, in his words, “speaks in a tongue that is forked” (1994:122). It is within this ironic discursive setting that mimicry emerges.

Perhaps the greatest irony in Swedish transnational/-racial 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 mothers of colour in the Global South<sup>6</sup> to create families for white 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 with adopters looking to not only rescue children of colour, but also to create “multicultural” families (Hübinette & Tigervall, 2009:336)<sup>7</sup>.

The anti-racist myths of adoption are powered by the colour-blind and “post-racial” discourses, where national myths of Swedishness are associated with a tolerance stemming from not seeing race. However, in my analysis it became clear that there is an irony at the heart of colour-blindness, and that the declarations of not seeing colour/race are intertwined with coded expressions of hyper-racialization. This was particularly visible in Indian adoptee and journalist Mary Juusela’s 2010 book, *Adoption: Banden som gör oss till familj*. The book itself is comprised of 29 interviews between Juusela and adoptive families, that is, adult adoptees with their parents and sometimes siblings. Each interview appears as a mini life history of the adoptive family, and gives the impression of taking place in a cosy living room setting. Czarniawska

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<sup>6</sup> Or countries perceived as being of the Global South

<sup>7</sup> Having said that, one must not lose sight of the fact that infertility remains a major reason given for international adoption, as is the case with most of the adopters in my source texts.

advises examining silences in texts (2004:1997), and as such it is worth contemplating the families that *were not* interviewed. At the start of the project, Juusela asked 65 families to participate; over half dropped out during the project (2010:10), with Juusela explaining, “*Many chose not to participate as there are too many problems within the family regarding the adoption. Exactly what these problems are nobody wanted to reveal, other than that they are about broken family ties*” (2010:10).

The missing participants are not mentioned again, and the interviews, on the surface at least, generally paint the picture of adoption as a happy success story. The fact that the focus of the project did not change after so many families dropped out is perhaps indicative of the power of the pro-adoption discourse in Sweden.

The desire for the body of difference but almost sameness emerges predominantly through a fascinating false dichotomy of colour-blindness and hyper-racialization, which was prevalent throughout the interviews, particularly in physical descriptions by the adoptive parents of their adult children and of their selection process. The colour-blindness/hyper-racialization narrative tends to follow along the lines of the adoptive parents stressing that they don’t see colour/race or difference, be it visible or biological, and that where the child came from doesn’t matter; then throughout the interview they constantly make reference to the adoptee’s “racial” differences in a remarkable number of ways. The impression of frantic slipping between colour-blindness and racialization takes place, in which the adoptive parents (and, indeed, the adoptee and interviewer) become trapped in a fixation with difference and sameness simultaneously.

In Juusela’s interview with the Kjellberg family (2010:99-110), a white adoptive mother and father, and biological son and adopted daughter (Cecilia, from Chile) this colour-blindness/hyper-racialization narrative is particularly clear. For instance, the adoptive parents, the interviewer, the adoptee’s brother and the adoptee herself manage to use no less than twelve different ways of alluding to the adoptee’s “racial” difference in the space of just two pages, while emphasising her sameness and how they see no differences. The parents also point out that they turned down the chance to adopt from Africa, but chose to adopt from South America instead: “We didn’t want to adopt from Africa because we believed that it would be harder for the child to be accepted in society at that time” (2010:100). Which suggests that they understood that a child from Africa would be blacker than one from South America, and not suitable for translation into an almost white Swede, if not by the family, but by society.

Cecilia's brother, who is most vocal about the *sameness* of his sister, appears angry when she speaks of her difference, of her life as an adoptee and of her experiences as a person of colour. "*I didn't understand why she didn't see that we never saw her as adopted, strange or different and I wanted her to stop blaming the adoption*" (2010:102).

Juusela stresses that Cecilia's adoptive parents did not see her difference either: "*The fact that Cecilia's black mop of hair stuck out in the otherwise light surroundings was nothing Hans or Britta [adoptive parents] thought about*" (2010:101).

In a colour-blind discourse where "race" cannot be mentioned and differences should be ignored, the "black mop of hair" becomes a code that carries racial meaning. With "light surroundings" meaning the white space Cecilia was raised in, the difference is communicated as stark and clear. Yet this is then contradicted by the claim that the adopters didn't even think about it. In fact, in the account that follows, the not seeing difference idea is contradicted repeatedly, as the family tell their story and describe Cecilia (in her presence). Her difference is expressed through a wide array of descriptions: for instance, "black" (2010:101); "so brown" (2010: 101); "visible differences" (2010:101); "from another country" (2010:101); "her [Chilean] temperament" (2010:102) "I remember how proud you were at playschool that you were *Indian*" (2010:102); "A boy at school called Cecilia a  *fucking Turk*" (2010:102); "her *origin*" (2010:102); "dark" (2010:102); "[not] blonde and blue-eyed" (2010:102); "she looked different/exotic" (2010:102)<sup>8</sup>.

What emerges is that despite the strong disavowal of difference, and the colour-blind plea of not seeing difference, the seeing of difference simmers under the surface of almost every utterance, and permeates every aspect of their family relationship (in the interview, at least). An avoidance of saying anything that might hint at "seeing" race, does not mean that they do not see race – merely that they find innovative codes to express it. Against this backdrop of an ironic split of sameness/difference, the mimic adoptee, Cecilia, finds *herself* split, torn between not quite achieving sameness, "I was the only one who was dark" (2010:102), and a desire for sameness, "I wished I was blonde and blue-eyed like everyone else" (2010:102); and yet with her family's powerful denial of her difference, she is not able to achieve that difference either.

A similar example can be found in the interview with the Lidbeck family (2010:28),

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<sup>8</sup> My italics

who also slip frantically between colour-blindness and hyper-racialization. This is a family who “don’t see race”, but turn down a child offered to them for adoption when they learn he is *not* of colour, stressing that as “light-skinned” children have no trouble finding adoptive families, they wanted to take care of a child who was difficult to place (2010:30). Even in the same utterance, we find the mother contradicting herself with accounts of not seeing colour: in one breath she tells her (non-adopted) daughter Sara, “*When Petra [adoptee] came you told everyone that she was your sister. You never said she was brown, but that she had freckles*” (2010:31).

In her next sentence she describes a game she and Sara played: “*Petra crept under my t-shirt, and then she was born. Sara stood by and shouted "look a little brown arm. There must be a brown little girl!"*” (2010:32)

There is a clear dominant narrative of adoptees being desired for their potential as mimics, where adopters are drawn to their translatable difference, and the difference for which the adoptee was chosen is at once disavowed and communicated through “colour-blindness”. However, in Weigl’s text we also come across another type of adopter: those who desire exclusive sameness. These adopters, who chose children for their whiteness, tend to also dismiss the subtle codes of colour-blindness, with their quotes inclined to include problematic and often racist language. For instance, one adoptive father says: “*I didn’t feel like having a black child, that is a child with Negroid features*” (1997:67)

He then goes on to say that he felt he was seen as a racist by the course leader of his parenting group for his views (1997:66). Similar sentiments and language are repeated by adopter couple, Christer and Christina Wesström: “*We did not want a coloured child, not what they call a Nigger*” (1997:69). Christer explains, “*Even worse are those in the middle, those who are just dark, a little bit dirty as people say. They are very likely to be beaten up*” (1997:70).

These examples seem to reflect an idea of a dichotomy of good *transracial* adopters and bad, *racist* adopters who reject transracial adoption. The latter appear as bad apples, placed outside the anti-racist/ multi-cultural colour-blind utopia of transnational/-racial adoption. Whether the author herself has selected particular quotes to emphasize is impossible to say (and not important to this type of analysis). What is clear, however, is that there are adopters who do seem to desire absolute or near sameness. It is interesting to note that the “racist” parents, or the ones that are

perceived as racist, show an awareness that transracial adoptees will face racism, alienation and racial isolation, and even that they themselves would struggle to identify with the child. This awareness is not apparent in the accounts of the adopters who do choose to adopt transracially in any of the source texts: As Christer opines, “*That isn’t racism. It’s more about identification. It is harder to identify yourself with a child who is completely different. And identification is important*” (Weigl, 1997:70).

It is also important to note that racist, racial or problematic language is not limited to the adopters who choose to adopt white children. Weigl herself does not shy away from using the n-word (1997:110), nor, perhaps worryingly, do some of the adopters of black children. Some of the “good” adopters who choose to adopt transracially do tend to also use the same problematic language, but with “good intentions”: that is, good intentions that are built on notions of racial hierarchy, white supremacy and echo the language of colonial civilizing missions. For instance, Björn Frennesson, an adoptive father of three sons from Haiti, Dominican Republic and Portugal (and a biological son), tells Juusela:

For us it was no big deal to adopt an African child. I grew up with children's books about little black nigger boys, and probably had little missionary visions that I would take care of a poor black child from Africa. Today, one realizes that it was a bit of a silly thought (Juusela 2010:127).

To sum up, there appears to be an almost ironic dichotomy with two polar opposites: a colour-blind anti-racism that does not see difference, and an overt racism that sees difference. However, deconstructing the texts it becomes clear that the “colour-blindness” runs concurrent to a hyper-racialization, and there is a frantic discursive splitting between the two, which serves to reveal the inauthenticity of white claims of being “post-racial” and not seeing difference. The fact that the desire for the transracial adoptee emerges within the discourse of “not seeing difference/race” makes a mockery of “colour-blindness” when the adoptee is chosen for her racial difference. On the other hand, the adopters who desire absolute sameness in their adoptees identify the sameness by openly seeing difference, and, in the Weigl text, are positioned as outside the transracial adoption community. Indeed, the polar opposites are made clear in Weigl’s title of the chapter that discusses racial choices: “Black or White?” (1997:63), and another discursive irony is revealed: the whites that desire the body of colour become the progressive, multi-cultural, anti-racists; the whites that do not

become the racists.

These movements between racism/anti-racism, colour-blindness/hyper-racialization, sameness/difference, along with the irony of a transnational/-racial adoption project that is positioned within an anti-racist discourse rather than a racist one, and the ironies of adoption itself create a discursive setting which, like Bhabha's colonial civilizing discourse, speaks with a forked tongue (1994:122). It is from this backdrop that mimicry and the adoptee as a mimic Swede emerge.

#### *4.4 Translating and Civilizing the Transnational/-Racial Body*

The need to translate and civilize the adoptee's body has been a key feature of transnational/-racial adoption throughout history, and is best summed in a quote from Richard Pratt<sup>9</sup>, a central figure in the systematic mass removal and assimilation of Native American children in the USA in the late 1800s: "Kill the Indian in him, and save the child." (Tomkins, 2010, cited in Myers, 2014). The child can only be "saved" if his Indian (Native American) "race" is removed, and replaced with a version of whiteness.

Young argues that "[t]ranslation becomes part of the process of domination, of achieving control, a violence carried out on the language, culture, and people being translated. The close links between colonialization and translation begin not with acts of exchange, but of violence and appropriation, of 'deterritorialization'" (2003:140,141). It could well be argued that the transnational/-racial adoption fits neatly into this description, with the separation of child from mother as an initial act of violence, and the forced removal of the child from its country and people as the deterritorialization.

The violent civilization of the body, combined with its sudden, dramatic, permanent placement as an isolated non-white body in spaces of exclusive whiteness in Sweden, subjects the adoptee of colour to the spittage so central to Bhabha's work on hybridity and ambivalence as well as mimicry (1994). From the moment the adoptee is placed on Swedish soil, she is subjected to demands to fulfil an array of dramatically contrasting roles, expectations and identities: she is at once an orphan and someone who has living

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<sup>9</sup> Pratt founded the Castle Indian School in Pennsylvania in 1879. The school being the first of over a hundred used in the systematic removal and assimilation of Native American children in the USA (Myers, 2014).

parents<sup>10</sup>; a wanted child and an unwanted child; a child separated by arguably the greatest trauma of all (the primal wound<sup>11</sup>), who is expected to be a cure for the trauma of infertility; a rescued child who is also a replacement child; a product of an (imagined) illicit, irresponsible act of sexual passion, and a product of reproductive failure and paperwork; part of a racist project and part of an anti-racist project; a subject of racism and racial categorising and a subject of post-race myths and colour-blindness. While all of these contribute to a shattering of the adoptee's self, and condemn her to a life caught between, a life of constant slippage, the split "racial" and ethnic identity of the adoptee is of particular interest: the adoptee is required to be both a white Swede, or an *almost* white Swede among white Swedes, and yet at the same time a commodified, exotic fetish object – an East Asian body, say.

As I suggested above, the desire for the transnational/-transracial adoptee is not the desire for the exotic Other body *per se*, but the desire for the body of Otherness that can be translated, civilized even, into a *not quite* Swedishness, while maintaining an almost difference, an *almost* exotic Otherness. This translation of the body from total Other to mimic Swede is illustrated in the photos at the centre of the Weigl text (1997: unpaginated). The central pages of the book are filled with photos of adoptive families in domestic, typically Swedish settings; yet strikingly, the centrefold (as it were) features a full-length image of two naked Black girls standing in a bath-tub. It makes uncomfortable viewing, in that their nakedness seems inappropriate, unnecessary, and out-of-step with the surrounding images of fully dressed children. One of the girls appears to be about 10 years old, and it seems an invasion of privacy and an affront to her dignity to display a full-frontal naked picture, with her full name in a widely-published book. The fact that she and her sister are black, and that the book is intended for a white audience (not to mention that the parents, writer, photographer and publisher are all white), adds to the idea of the racialized fetishism of the adopted body.

Interestingly, the photo is the first of a series of three images that depict a translating and civilizing project taking place on the children's bodies. On the proceeding page, we see the two girls being dried by their white adoptive parents with

<sup>10</sup> See Joyce (2013) and Kim (2010:261-267) for discussions of the "orphan myth" that lies at the heart of the demand driven adoption industry.

<sup>11</sup> The primal wound is the lifelong trauma inflicted on victims of adoption loss by the separation of child from mother shortly after birth. See Verrier (1993).

clean white towels, then in a clean white kitchen, clothed (or *semi-clothed*) and being fed. As with Weigl's written descriptions of her desired child, the whiteness of the settings contrasted with the "darkness" of the child is significant: the *white* towels, the *white* kitchen with *white* crockery. Astonishingly, through the course of the pictures, the children actually appear whiter, almost as if the cleansing and clothing process has scrubbed away their blackness. This shows remarkable similarities with the famous Pear's Soap adverts (reprinted in Hall, 1997:242), which depict a black child in a bath-tub being scrubbed white by a fully-clothed white child. The scrubbing and the soap, or in the Weigl case, the drying with fluffy white towels, represents the move from savagery and nature to civilization and culture: a perfect synonym, one might say, for the adoption mission. In the Pear's Soap image the *body* of the child has been turned white, however the head remains black: the civilizing project is not to create a white child, but to create a mimic child, *almost* white, but not quite.

Young outlines the importance of renaming in the civilizing process, describing it as "an act of power and appropriation" (2003:141), which also serves to desacrilize geographical sites in colonized areas. Renaming is also a feature of the adoption civilizing process, with the changing of the adoptee's foreign name to a white Swedish name being normal practice. As with the renaming of sites, it acts as a means of domination, appropriation and desacrilization: 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, 2010:109). 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, to Sweden.

Renaming the adoptee is an example of where translation and mimicry intersect, as renaming 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 very specifically Swedish names.

In Juusela's text, one Korean adoptee is renamed 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*" (2010:198)

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 not renaming the child is somehow a solution. Instead, it produces the excess of difference, contrasting with the 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 keeping original names, which is rare. The adoptive father, Jörgen, explains he 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 (2010:162)

His rationalization 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 (2010:103). This became deeply upsetting for her adoptive parents, who even contacted their adoption agency, Adoptionscentrum, 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*  
(2010:103)

With her name changed back to her Swedish name, Cecilia says she now dismisses it as an identity crisis, one like everybody has (2010:103). 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, something that disconnected her from her Swedish family, 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 also poses a threat to the adoption mission itself (if adoption is approached as a colonial mission): Bhabha suggests that one of the ways that mimicry threatens to undermine the colonial civilizing 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" (1994:131).

Cecilia's reclaiming of her name also undermined the translation process, revealing the inauthenticity of the translation 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 (1994:126), which is a point I will explore further below.

It is worth noting that another translation may well become common in future adoption narratives. That is a simplified and inauthentic version of the adoptee's lost culture could be grafted onto the adoptee. As criticism of colour-blindness, and the deletion of ties and history in transnational/-racial adoption increases, there is scope for adoptive parents to encourage some sort of cherry-picked version of partial Chineseness (for instance) for their child: a version that consists perhaps of food, Lunar New Year and dragons perhaps. In the material for this project, there was no real

evidence of this. However, Weigl does allude to this third translation when she reflects, “maybe we can also celebrate the birth country’s national day” (1997:182).

#### **4.5 The Limits and Excess of Translated Swedishness**

My analysis found that the versions of Swedishness permitted in the adoption narratives tended 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”* (2010:96). Christine, also adopted from India: *“I was not interested in learning about India, I was Swedish and was interested in Sweden”* (Juusela, 2010:117). Christoffer, adopted from India: *“[I am] Absolutely, a hundred percent Swedish in all regards. Although I’ll always look Indian, it is nothing I identify with”* (2010:136).

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, *“Although I felt Swedish and knew that this was where I belonged, I was interested in Sri Lanka and its culture”* (Anna, Sri Lanka, 2010:153)

The idea of transracial 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 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 (2006:75). Howell 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.

The parents of Gunnar (28 years old and adopted from Korea), one of Juusela’s informants, 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, 2010:198)

Juusela adds, “*Gunnar was even placed in a normal Swedish playschool and in a normal Swedish school*” (2010:198)

It is rather strange that this is stressed, as it is the case with all adoptees and other immigrants. Czarniawska suggests attending to elements of text that are peculiar or alien (2004:97), and the peculiarity of the statement makes it worth reflecting on for a moment. One wonders what other options there would have been, as there are no Korean schools, and there would be no obvious reason why he would be placed in an international school. Given that Gunnar was the child whose parents gave him a more Swedish name to make him “as normal as possible”, it could be argued that the “normal” here has been used as a substitute for “white”. This would suggest that there is an emphasis on distancing him from “immigrants” and stressing his position as an

(almost) white Swede. As was common throughout the texts, the disavowal of immigrant status (which I will examine further in the proceeding section) is intertwined with an excess of Swedish sameness. While the disavowal/excess production is present in most of Juusela's informants, and indeed in Weigl and Lundberg, Gunnar's account differs slightly in that it is a little more aggressive and defensive in tone. For example, his mother says, "*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*" (2010:199).

The assertion is firm and decisive, and leaves no space for ambiguity in Gunnar's identity. There is no space for any subtle deviations or complexities in his Swedishness. He is, as he says himself, "completely Swedish" (2010:201).

Bhabha says, "[I]n order to be effective, mimicry must continuously produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (Bhabha, 1994:122). In the source texts I found that the excess came from the translations of Swedishness which were strongly, even aggressively communicated, and were devoid of subtleties and ambiguities: the adoptees are "100% Swedish". The 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.

#### *4.6 Disavowal and Distancing*

Mimicry entails a complex dual process of producing excess, exaggerating and mocking sameness, and representing and articulating excessive difference; but a difference which is constantly disavowed (Bhabha, 1994:130). In the adoption narratives, while the excess of sameness emerges from exaggerated and simplified Swedishness, the excess difference comes from the striking physical difference between adoptee and parent, adoptee and peers which, 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).

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*” (Juusela, 2010:194)

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*” (2010:195).

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 that life is harder today than it was to 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 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.* (2010:95,96)

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 immigrant 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 (2010:220). Juusela explains that Hanna has always seen herself as Swedish, but in the suburb she found that others did not (2010:220). Hanna herself says, “*Suddenly I was considered to be an immigrant like all the others. It felt strange to me, as I don't identify myself as an immigrant*” (2010:220).

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 simply not seen as an immigrant at all. Instead, the adoptee is a mimic Swede – almost the same, but not quite, whereas the immigrant is very much a negative category of absolute difference. Interestingly, it is the mis-identification 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 mis-identified 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.* (2010:220)

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 he uses the word “racism” is when he experiences racism outside Sweden (2013:124). Not only does this enable him to align himself 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 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 27-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 misidentified as Chinese. One could say that his overall message is (as the title suggests) that he feels culturally and ethnically (white) Swedish, but is excluded from full Swedishness by other people's (mis)readings of his East Asian appearance. 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 (e.g., 2013:29, 33); he is apprehensive about the food and the lack of vegetarian options, and ridicules the Koreans' misunderstandings of his vegetarianism (2013:48; 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" (2013:116), or dressed-up and wearing make-up at the breakfast table (2013:32); and people are out shopping while dressed as comic book characters (2013:35). 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 laughing together with Lundberg.

The mocking depictions of Korea in a way enable Lundberg to tell his Swedish readers, "I am not one of Them; I am one of Us". While distancing himself from Koreanness, Lundberg also strives to emphasise his Swedishness by communicating (or perhaps over-communicating) the shared common attitudes, norms and values of Swedishness (David & Bar-Tal, 2009:364). This manifests itself through regular comparisons between the "sane" way of doing things in Sweden and the "insane" norms of Korea: for instance, he raises issues such as perceived differing attitudes towards gender equality, prostitution, homosexuality and child-rearing (for example, 2013: 134; 84; 64, 65, 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 (2013:114). It is of interest that the representations are ones that carry a meaning of Swedishness only for *Swedes*, thereby further emphasising his insidership. David and Bar-Tal identify one the generic features of collective identity as

"perception of the uniqueness of the collective and its distinction from other collectives" (2009:362), and I believe that Lundberg's depictions Korea and Koreanness, comparisons between Sweden and Korea, and the use of Swedish representations of Swedishness reflect this.

Also prevalent in Lundberg's text is the use of sinophobia, as a means of distancing the narrator from the "Chineseness" that many of his experiences of racism in Sweden stem from. The sinophobic narrative manifests itself 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, whom Lundberg, representing Swedishness, is continually bravely standing up to, educating and outwitting. For instance, he challenges his room-mates over Chinese government censorship, and when meeting one of them for the first time raises this issue: "*When I asked him about China censoring the internet he said that was a lie, and that they could see the whole internet. I decided not to ask any more questions*" (2013:31)

He also ridicules their initial misunderstanding of the toilet system (2013:46) and threatens the room-mates with violence on more than one occasion (2013:75; 137). The narrator's sinophobia is contrasted with his accounts of his own experiences of sinophobic racism in Sweden. He recounts racist rhymes and jokes about his "Chineseness", becoming called Chinese in arguments with friends and strangers (2013: 21), and being labelled as Chinese by customers at his job in a casino: "*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).

A final type of disavowal is one that concerns the adopters' relationship with the adoptees' countries of origin and other people from there. There was evidence of feelings of almost disgust towards the sending country in some accounts, as complex feelings of repulsion towards the people/place and attraction to the children intertwine.

One adopter in Weigl, for instance, considering adopting from the Philippines, worries about the "ugliness" of Philippine people, and how the child she adopts could be ugly: "*And what if they're ugly ...? It is absolutely forbidden thought, but I with my job in the advertising industry, with its focus on aesthetics, have had that thought*" (1997:97). This concern is combined with her repulsion for the country itself:

“When I came to Manila, I thought, ‘what have I done?’ It was so unbelievably poor and ugly” (1997:96).

Yet looking at the children, her feelings move from disgust to attraction:

“When we were in the Philippines and a whole school class came by, I stood and stared: how many are ugly? But they were in fact super cute, even the boys, actually” (1997:97)

This type of manifestation of desire through a combination of repulsion and attraction demonstrates another ironic split at the heart of the adoption phenomenon. I would suggest that it is part of the same spilt discourse that separates the (desirable) adoptee from the (undesirable) immigrant, and sets ridicule and distain for East Asian bodies against the desire for adoptable East Asian children.

#### **4.7 Alienation and Neither/Nor**

“I do not belong anywhere. Too brown to be Swedish, too Swedish to be anything else” (Martin Öberg, adopted from Colombia, 2014). Ahluwalia makes the connection between transnational/-racial adoption and mimicry, pointing out that,

[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 (2007:61).

The problematization 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 make the establishment of a positive identity as a Swedish person of colour something of an impossibility for adoptees of colour, as does the fact that they are often raised as the only non-white person in a white environment. The adoptee’s difference is problematized by the adoptee and adopter, the pro-adoption discourse, the colour-blind discourse, racism and anti-racism. Yet the transnational/-racial adoptee is desired for that difference, and their difference is always visible.

The development of the adoptee into the mimic Swede is captured perfectly in the Lundberg text. The title itself, *Gul utanpå* [Yellow on the Outside] refers to a passage where Lundberg describes himself as being likened to a banana: “Once I was compared to a banana – yellow on the outside, white on the inside” (2013:47).

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.

Yet, however Swedish he portrays himself, however Swedish he feels, Lundberg's daily encounters in Sweden are characterized by everyday racism and being treated as an East Asian Other. From being spoken to in English by other Swedes (2013:24,190), to being called "fucking Chinese" (2013:27), to being affectionately nicknamed Bruce Lee at work (2013:195), to being forced to explain his non-whiteness through intimate questioning by strangers (2013:25), 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" (2013:208). In many ways, Lundberg's narrative resounds with Young's argument: "[T]hough you may assimilate white values, you never quite can be white enough" (Young, 2003:23).

Lundberg sees himself as a chameleon, and highlights his broad range of acquaintances: "from Christians to petty criminals" (2013:160), and Nazis, it seems – the book opens with him at skinhead party (2013:9) and he also boasts Sweden Democrats leader Jimmie Åkesson as a former student-teacher and great influence on his writing (2013:19). 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" (2013:161); 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" (2013:22), 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" (2013:23). His vegan friends call him "Pat the brat", and his football friends call him "Communist" or "Redskin" (2013:143).

This chameleon, or perhaps failed chameleon, existence is explored by Trinh (1989), who argues that the role of the colonized 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, 1989:52). 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 the menace of mimicry emerges from the fact that there is no identity hidden behind the mask (1994:126). There is no concealed essence or what Cesaire called, "presence Africane" (Bhabha, 1994:126). 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 lays 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, especially exemplified by Lundberg's title, 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" (2013:22).

The "white on the inside" narrative combined, with the hyper-racialized irony of colour-blindness and fantasies of (excessive) sameness and disavowed difference, lead to questions like the one a black adoptee asks her white mother in Weigl's text: "Will I always be brown?" (1997:65).

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*" (2010:94)

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 places 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” (2013:42).

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*” (2010:144)

While Lundberg’s character is to all intents and purposes the quintessential mimic Swede, it could be argued that the white on the inside narrative, placing a white presence behind an Asian mask, is in discordance with the mimicry definition. However, one could also argue that the “white on the inside” narrative is part of the excessive sameness: not only am I as (or more) Swedish as other Swedes, I am as white as other Swedes (and, consequently, even more distant from non-white immigrants).

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 (excess) Swedishness and (mis)recognition as “immigrants”. Still, the same 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*.

Young argues that, “when an original culture is superimposed with a colonial or dominant culture through education, it produces a nervous condition of ambivalence, uncertainty, a blurring of cultural boundaries, inside and outside, and otherness within” (2003:23), and I would argue that this is true of the adoptee accounts in both the Juusela and Lundberg texts.

#### **4.8 From Mimicry to Menace**

Having established the construction of the adoptee as a mimic Swede, I will now turn to when mimicry becomes menace: when the colonized poses a threat to the colonizer; when the adoptee becomes a threat to the white Swede, white Swedishness, and the

colonizing (or adopting) mission itself. As a system of colonial control, mimicry depends on ambivalence: mimicry must, Bhabha notes, “continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (1994:122); by never quite allowing the mimic to establish herself as the same – or different – mimicry becomes most effective. However, as well as controlling and disciplining, the ambivalent nature of the mimic poses a continued risk to the colonizer and the civilizing mission itself: mimicry, Bhabha states, “is at once resemblance and menace” (1994:123).

A major menace of mimicry comes from its challenge to norms, with mimics posing a threat to both “‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers” (1994:123). In the Swedish adoptee context, the 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 colonizer’s presence” (1994:126). The ambivalence of mimicry fixes the colonized as a partial, incomplete, virtual presence (1994:123), meaning that the colonizer’s own presence, which is dependent on that of the colonized, is also trapped in an uncertainty of slippage and ambivalence. Mimicry becomes subversive to the whole colonial mission as it slips into mockery, where the colonizer becomes the observed, and the colonized the observer (1994:127). Finally, mimicry conceals what is behind the mask, so to speak. The ambiguity of the mimic places the colonizer in a tense, nervous position where they can never be sure what lies beneath the exterior; but there is *nothing*, no essence or fixed identity behind the mask of mimicry (1994:126).

The mimic adoptee is in constant slippage between her exalted, privileged position of being almost white and her problematic position as an almost non-white person: she has access to the exclusive spaces of whiteness and Swedishness seldom afforded to other non-Western immigrants; and yet she is degraded and discriminated against as an exoticized 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 authorized version of Otherness, she still finds herself subjected to the racism, fetishism and degradation usually afforded to *unauthorized* 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.

By way of example, I will attempt to explore the adoptee as mimic and menace through a dialogue that Lundberg presents, one which is commonly experienced by transnational/-racial adoptees in Sweden: the “where are you really from?” interrogation. This 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, perhaps inevitably, by “No. Where are you *really* from?” when the adoptee asserts that s/he is from Sweden. The dialogue then moves on to personal questions relating to adoption, root-searching and the adoptee’s relationship with their parents. Hübinette and Tigervall describe this as, “the constant bombardment of questions regarding the national, regional, ethnic and racial origin of the adoptees” (2009:344), and both they and Lindblad and Signell found this intimate questioning to be a prevalent form of everyday racism reported by their adoptee interviewees (2008:51). Lundberg himself notes that all of his adopted friends are familiar with intimate questioning, and describes the negative impact on his own day-to-day life (2013:26)

*Stranger*<sup>12</sup>: *Where do you come from?*

*Patrik*: *Malmö*

*Stranger*: *Ok. But where do you come from originally?*

*Patrik*: *Sörvästra Södermanland. In Blekinge.*

*Stranger*: *No you don’t!*

[...]

*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?*

[...]

*Stranger*: *Do you speak Korean?*

*Patrik*: *No*

*Stranger*: *Have you met your real parents?*

*Patrik*: *My real parents live in Sweden*

(Lundberg, 2013: 25, 26)

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<sup>12</sup> 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’” (2006:7, 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?”. This question starts with a racial categorization: this is a black woman; then continues with the assumption that this black woman does not belong here (1991:190).

Returning to Lundberg's dialogue, the stranger begins by first denying, and then deconstructing his 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. The 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, 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 adoptee of colour? 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” (1994:126): 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, his/her identity in constant negotiation, fluctuating frantically between almost (but not quite) difference, and almost (but not quite/white) sameness, 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 split; their authority and authenticity, dependent on the adoptee's difference, is shattered: in a sense they too are exposed as a mimic. This imminent threat to the white Swede's identity and sense of belonging could provoke a desperate reaction to deconstruct and

discipline the mimic adoptee, urgently trying to reposition him, to fix him in such a place from which the white Swede can re-assert their authenticity.

While not exclusive to adoptees, intimate questioning is interesting to examine in an adoption context, as it is so widely reported in accounts by adoptees, and is very much an acceptable “criticism” of adopted existence in Sweden; acceptable because it avoids structural challenges to adoption and focuses solely the behaviour of one isolated individual who is, in effect, challenging the normality of adoption. In recollections of intimate questioning, the *interrogator* becomes the threat to Swedishness in a way by challenging the assimilation project of adoption, and by challenging myths of colour-blindness. The adoptees, by recalling (and publishing) their own insistence that they are good Swedes, that, yes, they are from somewhere else, but they feel Swedish, that their white Swedish adoptive parents are their *real* parents and that those dark parents and that dark country they have been rescued from are not relevant, perfectly fulfil their mimic Swede duties, whereas the white Swede becomes the challenge to the civilizing mission of adoption. Effectively, these accounts of racism actually serve to strengthen the pro-adoption discourse, rather than challenge it.

Mimicry also menaces when it turns to mockery, parody almost: when the observer becomes the observed, de-authorising authority by mimicking it (Bhabha, 1994:127). From here the mimic Swede threatens to undermine the colonial civilizing 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. 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 (2010:256).

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. From adoptee writers hinting at the dark side of adoption being subjected to shocking online abuse (see, for example, Dahlberg, 2014b), to renowned scholars who dare to critically address the adoption phenomenon from a postcolonial-feminist perspective meeting protests at Doctoral dissertation defences, facing threats of serious violence, and being ostracised from the academic community (Hübinette, 2011), the emergence of a reflexive, critical adoptee voice seems to inspire a desperate and irrational terror in areas of the white Swedish populace. 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 civilizing mission of adoption itself.

#### *4.9 Mimicry as a Process*

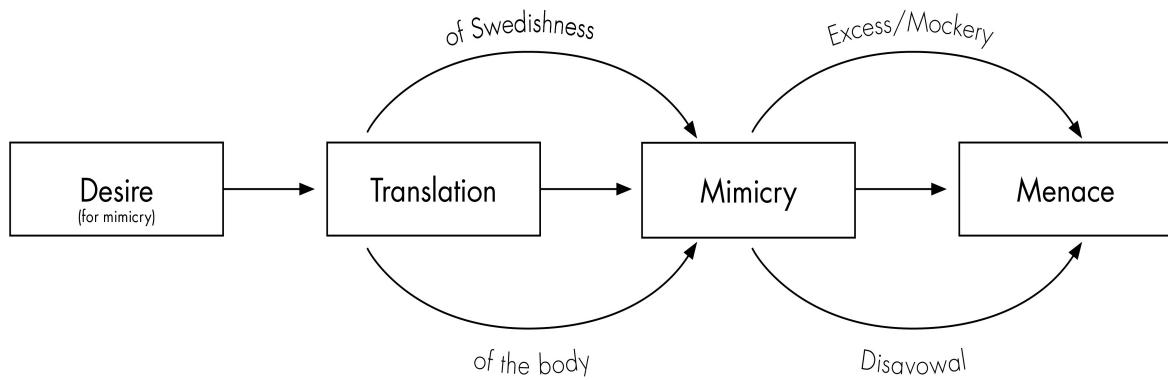
From my analysis of the three texts, a pattern began to emerge of mimicry working as a process, which begins with the desire for the body of Otherness that is translatable into a mimic Swede: a body that is almost the same but not quite, and almost different but not quite. The adopted body is then translated 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 the very notion of Swedishness and the adoption project itself. I have illustrated the process below:

*Figure 1: Mimicry as a Process*



The notion of mimicry as a process would benefit from being tested on a wider range of adoption narratives, and, given that there are instances in the texts where non-Swedes display aggression towards the mimic Swede adoptees, it would be interesting to examine whether these interactions could be examples of menace too, although I am inclined to suggest that these tend to be more complex cases of the adoptee's strong declarations of Swedishness being tested, and that within the pro-adoption discourse, attributing "racism", "biological essentialism" and discordance with the adoption project to Other is more permissible than doing the same to white Swedes, as it works to further disavow the adoptee's difference, race, ethnicity and origins, and strengthen their position as almost "us" – almost Swedish.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5. 1 Conclusion

To sum up, my deconstructive narrative analysis of the three adoption texts indicated that the Swedish adoption project is set within an ironic, split discourse of colour-blindness/hyper-racialization, racism/anti-racism, and desire for sameness/difference. It is from this ironic discursive backdrop that mimicry emerges, as the desire for 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 from being almost the same but not quite, to almost different but not quite.

A process of mimicry emerged from the narratives, 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, to a menace, where the adoptee poses a threat to white Swedishness and even to the adoption project itself.

Like Macaulay's translators and Grant's partial imitators (Bhabha, 1994:124), Weigl's dark eyes under white student caps (1997:58) and Lundberg's "white on the inside" adopted Swede (2013) 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 model Others, repetitions of the colonizer, repetitions of white Swedes, they disrupt understandings of cultural, racial and historical differences and contradict Swedish notions of national boundaries and hierarchies; at the same time they forever threaten to return the partial gaze, posing a constant risk to the colonizer and the colonial civilizing mission; these non-white bodies, authorized matter-out-of-place in exclusive white space, are the mimics who "menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority" (1994:126).

To conclude and summarize my findings, I will now return to my original research questions (I have merged the closely connected questions (ii) and (iii), to avoid repetition):

*(i) How is the civilizing process of translation depicted in the adoption narratives?*

I have suggested that translation is linked to mimicry, in that translation becomes part of a process of mimicry, which is particularly evident in the transition of the adoptee as being an object of desire to becoming a mimic Swede.

In transnational/-racial adoption narratives, two translations take place. The first is the translation of the adoptee's body, as it is moulded from an exotic/orphaned Other body to an almost white Swede. This first translation can also be seen as the adoptee being civilized. The translation of the body is not intended to produce a white Swede, but to produce a mimic Swede that is almost the same and almost different.

The second translation is the version of Swedishness imposed on the adoptee. The “Swedishness” the adoptee is permitted to display is a fixed and rather one-dimensional version, with clichéd signifiers and declarations of “100% Swedishness”. The articulations of this Swedishness show mimicry moving into mockery, and indicate the excess that mimicry constantly produces.

I predict that a third form of translation may emerge with a greater awareness of the dangers of colour-blindness and erasing adoptee’s origins. This translation would be of the country of origin’s culture, where Chineseness, say, is translated as a simplified and authorised otherness of lantern festivals and food, and placed as an extra layer on the adoptee’s translated body.

*(ii) How is mimicry manifested in the adoption narratives?*

*(iii) How is the transnational/-racial adoptee discursively constructed as a “mimic Swede”?*

Mimicry emerges firstly through the desire for the transnational/-racial adoptee as a “subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994:122). I have argued that transnational/-racial adoption is not so much the desire for the exotic body of complete Otherness, but for the exotic body of Otherness that is *translatable* into a mimic Swede.

In my analysis I identified a split discourse of colour-blindness/hyper-racialization, where adopters stress their “colour-blindness” while at the same time revealing their racialized desires and categorizations. This, along with the ironies of the Swedish adoption project itself, forms an ironic discursive backdrop for mimicry to emerge from.

The adoptees themselves are depicted as mimic Swedes through a narrative them of being completely, totally Swedish inside, but appearing to be an Other on the outside, and subjected to a continuous misrecognition because of this. Interestingly, my analysis found that much of this misrecognition was attributed to different groups of Others, e.g., “immigrants” in the Juusela text. In the narratives, it is the mis-recognition as well as constant questioning, and the adoptee’s feelings of alienation between their inner feelings of (white) Swedishness and outer appearance of “non-Swedishness” that produce an “almost the same, but not quite” body, fixed in constant slippage between almost *but not quite* sameness, and almost *but not quite* difference.

In deconstructing the narratives, I have suggested that the mimic Swede is shaped through the constant production of excess, difference and disavowal. The excess emerges from the mimic over-communicating their Swedishness, producing statements like, “I am 100% Swedish”, and even with a notion of the transracial adoptee being a (white) Swede trapped in the “wrong” body; it is also produced by excess difference, with the transnational/-racial adoptee’s hyper-visibility as a body of colour in white space. While communicating excess Swedishness, there is also a strong disavowal of difference as the adoptee distances themselves from their racial, national and biological origins.

Despite the adoptee’s strong feeling of Swedishness, their belonging and identity is constantly called into question, and they are in a permanent negotiation between almost sameness and almost difference as they find themselves subjected to discrimination, exclusion and racism.

I have suggested that the move from desired body of almost sameness/difference to a mimic Swede, and finally to a menace, can be envisaged as a process. The process begins with desire, follows a dual translation process on the body and of the body as the adoptee becomes a mimic Swede. Mimicry needs to constantly produce excess and difference, and the difference needs to be disavowed, and this develops into menace.

*(iv) How can the process of mimicry turning to menace be understood from the adoption narratives?*

I have suggested that the adoptee’s mimic existence poses a constant threat to white Swedes, meanings of Swedishness and the adoption mission itself, and that this could even go some way to understanding racism against adoptees, other factors notwithstanding, and the desperate need for adoptees who critically reflect on adoption to be quashed. I have argued that the mimic adoptee’s position involves as being fixed as a split self, caught between almost sameness and almost difference, and constantly negotiating between those two poles. This constant slippage means that as the white Swede attempts to establish his/her self in relation to the adoptee’s Otherness, the white Swedish self is thrust into the same slippage and ambivalence, and its authority and authenticity are split.

Given the limited scope of the study, it may not be appropriate to assert broader generalizations based on my findings. However, it is perhaps worthwhile to dwell for a

moment on what possible implications my inferences could have. My study suggested that no matter how hard the transnational/-racial adoptees tried to be Swedish, they always fell into the process of mimicry. Their difference, relentlessly disavowed but communicated by their appearance and by the desire that led to their adoption, prevented them from ever achieving more than *an almost but not quite* Swedishness, and left them trapped slipping between almost sameness and almost difference, with an identity in constant negotiation. There seems no avoiding, no escape from mimicry: even to resist by trying to achieve a difference that is total would be impossible, as there is no essence of difference to return to behind mimicry's mask. So, rather than ending with a concrete conclusion, solution or resolution, my study ends with a question: Is mimicry an *inevitability* of transnational/-racial adoption; and is the transnational/-racial adoptee condemned to a "mimic Swede" existence?

## **5.2 Closing Reflections**

Critical research on the Swedish transnational/-racial adoption phenomenon is controversial and challenging but urgently needed, particularly within fields such as IMER and Migration Studies. I believe that in some way my research has shown that there is scope to push the traditional boundaries of adoption studies and that this can be done from an IMER perspective. I have also made a very minor theoretical contribution in linking translation to mimicry and approaching mimicry as a process. While I have demonstrated how postcolonial theories such as mimicry can be applied in an analysis of adoption narratives, I am well aware of the limitations of my study. As I stated above, textual analysis is, by its very nature, rather subjective, and texts can be interpreted in different ways. Likewise, Bhabha's mimicry is also open to different interpretations. Nevertheless, I would argue that if another researcher were to follow the methodology and the theoretical interpretations in this paper, the findings would be likely to concur with mine.

An important question that arose during the project, and one that I would very much like to explore in further research, is whether mimicry can be used as active resistance. If the adoptee is *aware* that their mimic position poses a constant threat to the adoption mission and menaces white Swedishness, could this threat be consciously used to challenge adoption norms in an anti-racist, anti-colonial struggle against adoption desire and the adoption industry?

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