

Becoming Diversity

– Critical perspectives on an anti-racist discourse in
contemporary Swedish media



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A critical analysis of the present global constellation – one which offers no clear solution, no ‘practical’ advise on what to do, and provides no light at the end of the tunnel, since one is well aware that this light might belong to a train crashing towards us – usually meets with reproach: ‘Do you mean we should do nothing? Just sit and wait?’ One should gather the courage to answer: ‘YES, precisely that!’ There are situations when the only truly ‘practical’ thing to do is to resist the temptation to engage immediately and to ‘wait and see’ by means of a patient, critical analysis.

Slavoj Žižek

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Abstract

This thesis focuses the Swedish anti-racist campaign "Vi gillar olika" that was launched in relation to the Swedish election 2010, where the anti-immigration party *Sverigedemokraterna* gained parliamentary representation. "Vi gillar olika" is pronounced as a "call to the silent majority to take a stand against xenophobia" and "for diversity". This thesis analyses the discourse with the aim of problematising the idea of "diversity" as well as the idea of "xenophobia". In a broader sense it seeks to problematise a popular understanding of "anti-racism" and questions the inherent "goodness" in seemingly "good deeds". It posits the questions: How is difference and diversity understood in the discourse? How is racism and anti-racism understood? How does "Vi gillar olika" communicate its society? The thesis explores how, by projecting racism to the margins of the Swedish society and celebrating difference as a social good, the majority society as represented by "Vi gillar olika", is brought forth as both anti-racist and diverse. Applying critical theory, mainly as formulated by Sara Ahmed, the thesis discusses how "Vi gillar olika" as a (re)negotiation of the space Sweden can be seen as a (re)negotiation of the space of whiteness, and how violence can be seen to structure the project.

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Just as racism and whiteness according to Sara Ahmed is “ongoing and unfinished” – the same seems to be true also for the conversation that this thesis is an expression of. A conversation demands participants and some names especially should be dropped here. Maja Lundkvist, Adrian Nählinder, Sara Westin and Julia Willen: For your infinite support, for listening and talking, questioning and inspiring; and for reading – thank you! Sara deserves an extra thank you, for all the time and effort you have invested in reading this text.

Prologue

When I was a teenager I never wanted to use my glasses. I did not like the way I looked wearing them, nor did I appreciate how they conveyed the world to me. I had gotten used to being surrounded by the softness of a world without distinct edges and the sharpness frightened me and made me feel self-conscious. I learnt to recognize people from a distance by the way they walked and held their body. I guess I imagined I came through for others in that same fuzzy way. Nowadays I wear contact lenses, but I somehow miss that edgeless world of poor eyesight. Sometimes when I cross the square of Hjällbo – where I live – and meet “veiled women” and “dark-eyed” teenage boys; and myself, a “Swede”, mirrored in the storefront of ICA, I squint at the sight of it and the unkind exactness of the world is blurred through my eyelashes. Unable to tell the difference between darkness’ of eyes and veils from veils or sometimes hair, I imagine the squinting prevents me from feeling with the categories through which I see.

INTRODUCTION

I am not trying to be difficult, but only to draw attention to a difficulty without which no 'I' can appear

Judith Butler

The difference is the articulation of space and time

Jacques Derrida

When the Swedish anti-immigration party *Sverigedemokraterna* won parliamentary representation in the election of 2010, the autumn streets congested with anti-racist marches and Facebook with anti-racist posts and status updates, yet I did not participate. The sight of people with angry “fight-the-racists”-signs and faces did not evoke my fighting spirit but made me feel rather sad. I heard people obsessively chanting that if 5,7% of the Swedish electorate had voted for *Sverigedemokraterna* one should not forget that this had to mean that 94,3% of the Swedish population were not racists, and I felt that something was lost. A symbol of a hand started to appear wherever I looked, and in the palm of the hand, letters formed a sentence that threw itself at me: *Vi gillar olika*. “We like different”. It made me feel uneasy. It was a stopping hand and it seemed to insist: you are either with me or against me, in front of me or behind me. You either step in here with those who like different or you stay out there with those who don't. And people stepped in. The hand extended their faces on Facebook profiles: they were behind it. I felt the urge to scream at those hands that were held up like shields against an outside evil: *No, wait!* This thesis holds that scream, or turns it into words.

The election

The Swedish 2010 election caused quite a bit of trouble. In addition to the usual nail-biting on the night watch of September 19th, awaiting the distribution of votes between the seven more or less established political parties – or rather, between the ruling rightwing coalition and its left equivalent – the question asked with dread was whether or not anti-immigration party *Sverigedemokraterna* would enter Swedish parliament. One had watched for years

Europe fortifying itself with rightwing politics and restricted immigration laws and feared the time had come for Sweden.

The result came with confirmation; polling 5,7% of the vote, thereby winning 20 parliamentary seats and the balance of power, the 2010 election proved historical for *Sverigedemokraterna* as well as for Swedish politics in general. The image of Sweden was in crisis, it was said, and the election was labelled a “political trauma”.¹ Media abounded with headlines on the event and one of the two bigger tabloids, *Aftonbladet*, won great avowal for its anti-racist campaign *Vi gillar olika* that already on its first day wooed over 100 000 supporters.² What the campaign rose up against was, and is still, the presumed emerging racist or right-wing trend in Swedish society, embodied by the outspoken anti-immigration politics of *Sverigedemokraterna* and the widespread support for the party’s project. Targeting the Swedish (potentially) anti-racist majority, the campaign urges this collective to “stand up against xenophobia” and “for diversity” by supporting the campaign.

Problem area

“We like different.” What does it mean, really? Who are those “we” that like different? Who or what is “different”? What does it mean to “like”? How does liking translate into politics or practice? Something about the rhetoric of *Vi gillar olika* bothered me. I felt that there was something flawed with the campaign that so many embraced as the good option in a time that was suddenly perceived as one of crisis.

Just as the supporters of *Vi gillar olika*, I am also sincerely troubled when faced with the contemporary Swedish political reality. Unlike *Vi gillar olika* however, I do not believe that it is the party *Sverigedemokraterna* that constitutes the biggest problem. Consequently, I am not sure how *Vi gillar olika* contributes in making our society a better or less racist one. I am interested in looking at what, if not this, it does “make” or do.

I am grounded in post-colonial/post-Marxist/post-structuralist and Queer thought. As a basis for my thesis lays the assumptions that racism is closely related to the practice of

¹ Annie Nyberg, “SD:s valresultat politiskt trauma”, *tv4nyheter.se*, 2010-09-20:
http://www.nyheter.se/1.1821035/2010/09/20/sd_s_valresultat_politiskt_trauma

² Jan Helin, “Vi gillar olika. I natt blev det ännu viktigare att säga”, *Aftonbladet blogg*, 2010-09-20:
<http://blogg.aftonbladet.se/janhelin/2010/09/vi-gillar-olika-i-natt-blev-det-annu-viktigare-att-saga>.
Aftonbladet is a former leftist newspaper that still today is seen as left in comparison to its main competitor *Expressen*

making difference through social categories, and something that we all (in different ways, and to different degrees) participate in (re)producing and practicing.³ When I say “society” I mean particularly my own (Swedish) society – the society in which *Sverigedemokraterna* work – but also a “Western”, post-colonial and capitalist society in which racism has been constructed as an integrated part. Slavoj Žižek argues that the inherent “goodness” in seemingly “good” deeds must be questioned, and that the concept of “violence” as popularly understood needs to be questioned as well.⁴

[V]iolence is not a direct property of some acts, but it is distributed between acts and their contexts, between activity and inactivity. The same act can count as violent and non-violent, depending on its context; sometimes, a polite smile can be more violent than a brutal outburst.⁵

Suggesting that violence can be viewed from two different perspectives; one that makes *objective* violence visible and one that presents only *subjective* violence, Žižek claims we must change positions in order to get a better overview. To be able to grasp the objective violence, Žižek argues that one must take a step back, because it consists of what is popularly referred to and understood as non-violence: the very ground on which one must stand to identify subjective violence – referring to the kind of violence that is often understood *as* violence; direct, physical or verbal such.

Objective violence is the “violence inherent to [the] ‘normal’ state of things,” Žižek claims; “a violence that sustains our very efforts to fight violence and to promote tolerance”.⁶ As a well-meaning project aiming at “fighting violence” in the form of racism and “promoting tolerance” in the form of anti-racism and diversity, *Vi gillar olika* itself can thus be seen to be structured by a certain violence.

We are all racists

Racism is metaphysics, Oivvio Polite denotes, it is an ordering principle of the world that tells us what is in it: a story we are all invested in – holding very different positions

³ The same goes for classism, sexism, and other kinds of social categorisation aiming at stratification.

⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: six sideways reflections*, London: Profile books, 2009

⁵ Ibid, p 180

⁶ Ibid, p 1

depending on who, what and where we are.⁷ Thus it is a kind of metaphysics; a rationale, a way to make the world meaningful and a way to live in it.⁸ According to Polite, racism should not primarily be understood as an evaluative quality, as is often done, but as the mere ordering through making difference as social categories. This translates into Žižek's objective violence, and especially what he refers to as the "symbolic violence" that is inherent to language and, as such, to social categorization as expressed in language.⁹ Polite states that we all subscribe to social categories as a way to understand the world, hence we are all racists: "I am a racist," and "[y]ou are also a racist".¹⁰

This is my point of departure for this thesis, and my reading is literal. Thus I would argue that I, who write this thesis, am also a racist in the sense that I see, think and feel through and with the social categories that inhabit the world I live in and that I come to be in, as category. I can not choose not to do this. Like this; I look at my child. It "is a boy". I shift, and think through that other name; "girl", and I see that "his" face and body turn into "hers". Or – to use an example closer to the problem of his thesis – like this; I am at the playground outside of my house with a friend and her child. There are other kids there playing, and among them a little girl, seven or eight years old maybe. She is black and her little face is framed by a blue veil. She seems far away from me. After a while she starts talking to me in distinct British English, and something about this makes me feel as if she is suddenly closer to me, almost superior because she can express herself freely in a language that carries with it a certain status. Both I and this girl are invested in the Western, post-colonial and capitalist, Swedish society and in the racist rationale, but we hold different positions.

Sara Ahmed states that "[c]olonialism makes the world 'white', which is of course a world 'ready' for certain kind of bodies".¹¹ Sweden has suffered from a self image that positions it outside of the European colonial history. As Diana Mulinari, Suvi Keskinen and Salla Tuori have observed, this image is flawed and "North-European countries have taken,

⁷ Oivvio Polite, "Remember that you're white", *White Like Me. Utvalda texter om rasism 1992 – 2007*, Danger Bay press: Stockholm, 2007

⁸ Polite, "Ras, språk och ordning", *White Like Me*, 2007

⁹ Žižek, *Violence*, 2009, p 55. When I refer to language, here and elsewhere, I refer not only to what is explicitly "said" but also to the silences of language and to how language relates to thoughts and emotions.

¹⁰ Polite, "Remember that you're white", *White Like Me*, 2007, p 55, 57

¹¹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others*, Duke University Press, 2006, p 111

and continue to take, part in (post-)colonial processes [...] in which (post)colonial imaginaries, practices and products are made to be part of what is understood as the 'national' and 'traditional' culture of the Nordic countries."¹²

Having said this, I – inhabiting a white body that the “white world” is “‘ready’ for” – will also be invested differently in the racist rationale of Polites’ than the black, veiled girl. I will, generally speaking, be privileged by it, while she, generally speaking, will not. That her capacities in the English language will position her higher in the Swedish social hierarchy than she would have been had she not had them, does not throw this logic over but rather consolidates it.

When difference is highlighted in the discourse of *Vi gillar olika* it gets reproduced as a social “fact”, and when it is uncritically celebrated it conceals the unequal distribution of privileges that is inherent to the logic of making difference.

“It can’t do any harm”

A friend of mine explained what went through her head when she, after having debated a little with herself, decided to support the cause of *Vi gillar olika*. She thought to herself (and I believe she shares this thought with many others): “Well, at least it can’t do any harm”. I wonder if it does not risk doing just that. Can “harmless” actions like these perhaps be violent?

Sometimes when we do things that seem obvious or easy, we assume we have agreed upon something, while the stuff that makes up this something stands unquestioned. This risks doing harm to the realm of the political.¹³ I believe we all need to be reflected on as objects and subjects constituted by and constitutive of the world we try to change. If we do not like the world we see unfolding before us, we need to try to change it. This is the first point I will make and I am obviously not going to meet huge resistance here.

My second point comes as a question. Is it perhaps sometimes better – in this striving for change – to do *nothing* than to do *something*, especially when something means *anything*? Žižek, within the same conversation that was referred to above, suggests that there is a widespread feeling of constant urgency in contemporary (Western, capitalist) society. This feeling

¹² Suvi Keskinen, Salla Tuori & Diana Mulinari (ed’s), *Complying with colonialism: Gender, race and ethnicity in the Nordic region*, Ashgate publishing, e-bok, 2009, p 1f

¹³ Drawing on Chantal Mouffe’s notion of the political that will be attended to below.

urges us to act and to act now – and if we do not act, the feeling is still always that we should. This “fake sense of urgency” as Žižek terms it, has as a side effect a prevention of thought.¹⁴ Instead of reflecting on what has created a certain situation – the *urgency* – and on what might need a more thorough analysis; the urgency stands without context as something that needs immediate attention so that everything else can and must wait.¹⁵ However, it is the “everything else” that needs to be attended to, which Žižek argues as the violent context that produces the urgency. Therefore one should halt and take a step back instead of running ahead.

According to contemporary, liberal, post-political reason, as argued by Chantal Mouffe, political conflict has gone from a struggle between left and right to a struggle between “right and wrong”; thus playing on the moral register instead of the political.¹⁶ The liberal worldview presents a perspective on the political as harmony, she states, and this means to deny the antagonism of the political in the name of rational consensus. Diversity, to post-political reason, constitutes a “harmonious, conflict free ensemble”, Mouffe observes.¹⁷ Antagonism is inherent to politics as such, and a move towards consensus means a move away from politics as a tool for conflict-solving and societal change, she argues. Thus, the post-political reason can be seen as inherently a-political.

“It doesn’t matter what you vote for, as long as it is not SD [*Sverigedemokraterna*]!” a comment on the *Vi gillar olika* log on Facebook reads, accompanied by many similar posts from the day of the election.¹⁸ Thus, *Sverigedemokraterna* become the morally “wrong” option and everything else seems “right”, or at least morally defensible. *Vi gillar olika* seems to provide a space for diversity as the “political harmony” that Mouffe predicts of the post-political turn, by depicting *Sverigedemokraterna* as the only real obstacle to this harmony. While doing so, any conflict within “diversity” as a presumed societal state; within the presumed non-racist majority, and between other political agents than *Sverigedemokraterna* and the rest of us, will be obscured. Racism, for example, or other forms of structural

¹⁴ Žižek, *Violence*, 2009, p 5

¹⁵ Žižek, *Violence*, 2009

¹⁶ Chantal Mouffe, *On the political*, London: Routledge, 2005, p 12

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p 19

¹⁸ “kvittar vad man röstar på så länge det inte är SD!” Comment by the signature Kerstin Wohlrahe on the first log post (“Här kan du läsa mer om kampanjen”), “Vi gillar olika”, Facebook 2010-09-19: <http://www.facebook.com/vigillarolika?sk=wall&filter=2>

violence, will be very hard to conceptualize from within the diverse collective if the space that this collective assumes form in is depicted as one of harmony.

Aims

I see the immediate activity that the government entry of *Sverigedemokraterna* gave rise to – here, exemplified by the campaign *Vi gillar olika* – as an utterance of the running ahead that Žižek criticises, and I would like to see this thesis as a halt and a step back, to get a better view on the bigger picture and the violence that reside there. *Vi gillar olika*, a campaign “against racism and intolerance” typically wants to “do something”, and by definition is doing something, at the same time as it risks preventing a critical analysis of the very urgency that it inhabits and in the name of anti-racist consensus, obscure conflict within itself.

My aim is not to come up with a solution – but quite the contrary, to try to refrain from doing so. This thesis is my contribution to Žižek’s notion of “‘wait and see’ by means of a patient, critical analysis”.¹⁹ *Vi gillar olika* is a familiar story, and “as all familiar stories it deserves close and careful reading”, Sara Ahmed contends.²⁰ Through deconstructing the discourse they uphold – in a “critical analysis” – I hope to bring to the surface some of the underlying assumptions that make up the common-senses of our social realities as expressed in the discourse of *Vi gillar olika*. Through applying a perspective on whiteness to the case, I want to integrate trouble in the story of *Vi gillar olika*, to borrow a word from Judith Butler.²¹

There seems to be at least two *others* to *Vi gillar olika*, one that is known and evicted as other (*Sverigedemokraterna*) and one that is included, implicitly, as “different” (*olika*) in the “we” who “like different”. I want to study both these mechanisms of othering, to see how they refer back to the narrator self in a resurrection of whiteness. “Colonialism makes the world ‘white’”, Sara Ahmed claims in what was referred to above. This is, we are told, a world that is “ready” for certain (“white”) bodies, but it also “puts certain objects within [...] reach” of these bodies.²²

The project of *Vi gillar olika* can be seen as a (re)negotiation of what the space Sweden

¹⁹ Žižek, *Violence*, 2009, p 6

²⁰ Sara Ahmed, *The cultural politics of emotion*, New York: Routledge, 2004, p 1

²¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, New York; London: Routledge, 1999

²² Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 2006, p 111

should be and look like. I want to explore if it can also be seen as a (re)negotiation of the space of whiteness and if “diversity” can be seen as an object within the reach of whiteness. Furthermore, I want to investigate how this hypothetical white space relates to or holds *Sverigedemokraterna*. This thesis treats *Vi gillar olika* as a representative of the broader discursive framework of multiculturalism as tolerance, and thus situates itself within the critique of this framework.

Thus, this thesis analyses the discourse of *Vi gillar olika* with the aim of problematising the idea of “diversity” as well as the idea of “xenophobia”. In a broader sense it seeks to problematise a popular understanding of “anti-racism” and questions the inherent “goodness” in seemingly “good deeds”.

Research questions

Through posing the following three questions to the data I intend to reach into a broader discussion on the research problems and suggest a way to understand the case in relation to whiteness as privilege in the Swedish contemporary society:

How is difference and diversity understood in the discourse of Vi gillar olika?

How is racism versus anti-racism understood in the discourse?

How does the campaign depict its society?

The campaign context

Sverigedemokraterna

Sverigedemokraterna officially formed in 1988 and has a history of connections to the right-wing extra-parliamentary political sphere. In particular it is traced back to the well-known organisation *Bevara Sverige Svenskt* (Perserve/Keep Sweden Swedish) that was active in the 1980’s, working against immigration, for repatriation and “solidarity among Swedes”.²³ *Bevara Sverige Svenskt* was dissolved in 1986 when parts of it reformed together with what was then *Framstegspartiet* and eventually became *Sverigedemokraterna*. However the device lived on throughout the 1990’s, and the shorter *BSS* can still be seen to decorate the surfaces of some public spaces.²⁴

²³ “Bevara Sverige Svenskt”, *Wikipedia*, accessed 2011-09-05, http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bevara_Sverige_Svenskt

²⁴ Often accompanied by its negation: *BSB*, *Bevara Sverige Blandat* (Perserve/Keep Sweden Mixed)

Sverigedemokraterna of today calls itself a nationalistic party and distances itself from racism. However, working against what they call “mass immigration” and for “assimilation and the strengthening of the Swedish culture”, the central project is still to “preserve” what is assumed to be a more homogenous Swedish society.²⁵ The rejection of multiculturalism – which is proclaimed “an ideology that leads to fragmentation, exclusion and segregation” – is an important standpoint.²⁶ The campaign *Vi gillar olika* positions itself against this critique of multiculturalism.

Vi gillar olika: “The choice is yours”

The campaign was first launched in *Aftonbladet* on the morning of the election day 2010, September 19th – thus, before any results were clear – formulated then as a plea to the Swedish citizens to not vote for *Sverigedemokraterna*:

WE LIKE DIFFERENT ... because we don't like xenophobia. Now the choice is yours.
Don't make Sweden colder.²⁷

To this device a hand symbol reading “*Vi gillar olika*” was attached. This symbol was first used in 1984 by the French anti-racist organization *SOS Racisme* and its campaign *Touche pas a mon pote*. In 1985 it was adopted in a Swedish equivalent and the white hand – often in the form of small pins attached to bags and clothing – that read *Rör inte min kompis* (Don't touch my friend) are estimated to have circulated in over a million in the Swedish 1980's society.²⁸ The *Vi gillar olika* campaign of today invokes this 25 year old and widely acknowledged campaign, thus relating to a ready-made discourse and a sentiment familiar to many Swedes. It is obvious that the symbol as used today by *Vi gillar olika* is intended to impart what the symbol of *Rör inte min kompis* did and that the device “*vi gillar olika*” is intended to mean the same as “*rör inte min kompis*”:

Do you recognize the hand? We borrowed it from the 1980's. It said “*Rör inte min kompis* then”. It was a call to the silent majority to take a stand against racism. We

²⁵ *Sverigedemokraterna*, “Det Sverigevänliga partiet”, accessed 2011-08-15, <http://sverigedemokraterna.se/vara-asikter/det-sverigevanliga-partiet/>

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ “*Vi gillar lika ...för vi gillar inte främlingsfientlighet. Nu är valet ditt. Gör inte Sverige kallare.*” Jan Helin, “*Idag är valet ditt*”, *Aftonbladet*, 2010-09-19, <http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article7810020.ab>

²⁸ *Rör inte min kompis*, “*historia*”, accessed 2011-08-10, <http://www.rorinteminkompis.se/historia>

need the hand again. For diversity. Now we have a party in Swedish parliament that says that everybody has to be alike to merge with the Swedish nation. We do not like xenophobia. We like different.²⁹

As in the original context of the hand symbol in the 1980's, the campaign *Vi gillar olika* was meant to be a "call to the silent majority to take a stand against racism" – "for diversity".³⁰ It warns against the populist rhetoric of *Sverigedemokraterna* and the idealization of a homogenized Sweden is proclaimed "a dangerous dream that pleads to our fear".³¹ When it became clear that *Sverigedemokraterna* had won parliamentary representation, the campaigns point of departure changed from "Today a party that [...] can enter Swedish parliament" to "We now have a party in Swedish parliament that" but the message was and is still the same and a statement against xenophobia and racism: "We like different... because we don't like xenophobia".

From September 19th and the following couple of months, the *Aftonbladet* site of *Vi gillar olika* published actively on the topics of diversity and anti-racism within the framework of the campaign itself; presenting images of famous Swedes, political leaders and regular people proclaiming their support for the campaign. A series of articles was published, signed by both *Aftonbladet* journalists and others, all in different ways describing the profits of the diverse society and the dangers of xenophobia. The *Aftonbladet* site bears the sign of Jan Helin, editor in chief, and it also links to his (*Aftonbladet*) blog where the campaigns' extended proclamations can be found, together with posts referring observations on the politics of *Sverigedemokraterna*, diversity, racism, and reflections on the success of the campaign. Today the campaign in general is less active but the *Aftonbladet* site still shows updated numbers of campaign supporters and one is invited to sign it.

Facebook

Already on its first day, the campaign moved in on Facebook (*Aftonbladet* being the author), where it is still active. The message here is the same as on *Aftonbladet*, hence: "A party that

²⁹ "Känner du igen handen? Vi har lånat den från 1980-talet. Då stod det 'Rör inte min kompis' i den. Det var en uppmaning till den tysta majoriteten att ta ställning mot rasism. Vi behöver handen igen. För mångfalden. Nu har vi ett parti i Sveriges riksdag som säger att alla måste vara lika för att uppgå i den svenska nationen. Vi gillar inte främlingsfientlighet. Vi gillar olika.", "Vi gillar olika", *Aftonbladet*, accessed 2011-03-14, <http://www.aftonbladet.se/vigillarolika/>

³⁰ Ibid, "en uppmaning till den tysta majoriteten att ta ställning mot rasism", "för mångfalden"

³¹ Ibid, "Det är en farlig dröm som vädjar till vår rädsla."

says that everybody has to be alike to merge with the Swedish nation has entered Swedish parliament. It is a dangerous dream that pleads to our fear. We do not like xenophobia. We like different.”³² In addition to signing the campaign on *Aftonbladet*, the Facebook page can be “liked” in order to support the project of the campaign. One can choose to display the hand symbol as an attachment to one’s profile picture and especially in the beginning this was very common.

Vi gillar olika on Facebook naturally has a more dialogic character than *Vi gillar olika* as it performs in *Aftonbladet*. *Vi gillar olika* (that is, *Aftonbladet*) governs and moderates the Facebook page but those that have “liked” the page can post in its log. *Vi gillar olika* will often invite adherents to post and comment, they will often be urged to share information about anti-racist activities such as marches or share stories about how the hand symbol has been made visible in different settings.³³

Vi gillar olika can of course freely erase posts that they feel are offensive or in other ways not wanted. This has drawn some critique to the campaign that is accused of liking difference but not those of different opinions (such as those who voted for *Sverigedemokraterna*), and other Facebook pages have been launched, paraphrasing the *Vi gillar olika* motto as “*Vi gillar olika åsikter*” (*We like different opinions*),³⁴ and the more popular “*Vi gillar lika*” (*Vi like alike*) which has a more explicit attachment to *Sverigedemokraterna*.³⁵

When I write this – in November 2011 – the campaign *Vi gillar olika* has 528 666 supporters/signatures, and the Facebook page has 517 841 “likes”.³⁶ The number of signatures has not changed for at least the last 3 months (it was the same in August) but the number of “likes” still increases almost daily and has had a few particular upswings, especially after the killings in Oslo in July 2011. There has also been some withdrawal of

³² “Ett parti som säger att alla måste vara lika för att gå upp i den svenska nationen har kommit in i Sveriges riksdag. Det är en farlig dröm som vädjar till vår rädsla. Vi gillar inte främlingsfientlighet. Vi gillar olika.”, *Vi gillar olika, Facebook, “info”*, accessed 2011-08-10, <http://sv-se.facebook.com/vigillarolika?sk=info>

³³ C.h. “Hur har du eller andra gjort kampanjen synlig på din arbetsplats, i din skola eller på andra ställen? Har ni hittat något bra sätt att synas? berätta här!”, *Vi gillar olika, Facebook, “log”*, 2010-09-26, <http://sv-se.facebook.com/vigillarolika?sk=wall&filter=2>

³⁴ *Vi gillar olika åsikter, Facebook*, accessed 2011-07-12, <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Vi-gillar-olika-%C3%A5sikter/161418600537015>

³⁵ *Vi gillar lika, Facebook*, accessed 2011-07-12, <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Vi-gillar-lika/119473264773566>

³⁶ “*Vi gillar olika*”, *Aftonbladet*, 2011-11-11; *Vi gillar olika, Facebook*, 2011-11-11

“likes”, partly by those who have felt themselves to be censored but also in relation to a drive that *Vi gillar olika* did for the Stockholm Pride Festival in August 2011.³⁷

Political “slacktivism”?

Activism must imply a possibility for change and often there is a cost involved. If I want malaria to be extinguished it will not help to join a group on Facebook – I might actually have to donate money for research or mosquito nets.³⁸

When initiatives like *Vi gillar olika* or other internet-based campaigns are criticised the critique often comes in the form as of the quotation above, concerning the lack of “real” engagement. It demands little or nothing of the participant to “click” to sign or “like” something on the internet, it is said. Activist Micke Kazarnowicz, quoted above, states that “slacktivism” or “clicktivism” as it has been called is an act of egoism and only serves to make the participants feel good about themselves.³⁹ Instead one should do something that involves ones body – activism as popularly understood – or something that costs, in money or energy. American social scientist Jodi Dean argues along the same lines that certain forms of clicktivism can in fact have negative consequences for the political engagement, preventing “real” political activity.⁴⁰

The counter-critique has it that stating an opinion openly as done through social media, “signing” or “liking”, does have the important effect of raising the awareness of a certain political issue. Jimmy Mannung at Swedish Amnesty takes the example of how Facebook users displaying the picture of Troy Davis helped raising the question of the death

³⁷ *Vi gillar olika* added the rainbow colours of the Queer flag to its hand symbol during the Pride week. Some of the supporters opposed to this and felt they had agreed to a different project, one that had nothing to do with sexuality or gender.

³⁸ “Aktivism måste innebära en möjlighet till förändring för någon och oftast är det en kostnad förknippad med det. Om jag vill att malaria ska utrotas hjälper det inte att gå med i en Facebookgrupp – jag kanske faktiskt måste donera pengar till forskning eller myggnät.” Micke Kazarnowicz, quoted in Kristina Lundkvist, “Det är rätt att göra uppror. – fast helst på nätet.”, *Dagens Nyheter – Kultur*, 2011-10-16, <http://www.dn.se/kultur-noje/det-ar-ratt-att-gora-uppror--fast-helst-pa-natet>,

³⁹ “Clicktivism” refers to “The act or habit of using the internet as a primary means of influencing public opinion on matters of politics, religion or other social concerns.” according to *Urban Dictionary*, accessed 2011-10-29, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=clicktivism>.. “Slacktivism”, according to the same source, means: “The act of participating in obviously pointless activities as an expedient alternative to actually expending effort to fix a problem.”, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=slacktivism>.. Thus, “slacktivism” implies a higher degree of passivity.

⁴⁰ Lundkvist, “Det är rätt att göra uppror. – fast helst på nätet.”, *Dagens Nyheter – Kultur*, 2011-10-16

penalty in the social consciousness.⁴¹

This thesis positions itself on the boundaries of these arguments, in the space in between yes and no. I do not think it is accurate to say that “clicktivism” or “slacktivism” performs nothing. Quite on the contrary, I believe it does do something to us and to our social imaginings and I am interested in looking at what. I do not think that political activity that puts the body of the activist to work is automatically better or costs more. I think physical demonstrations can be as little demanding as signing a campaign on Facebook, at least in terms of reflection. Thus, I do not think it is necessarily “better” when people physically march under the banner of *Vi gillar olika* than when they click to like the site on Facebook. My problem with the campaign concerns its message as such.

A few comments on the way

The I of we

I have not supported the campaign *Vi gillar olika*. Yet, in a sense, I could have. Many of my close friends have and out of the two opposing camps that make up the dramaturgy of the discourse – *Vi gillar olika* and *Sverigedemokraterna* – I would be identified as closer related to the former. I did not vote for *Sverigedemokraterna* and given the campaigns criteria for anti-racism I practice this. (That is, I do not share the opinion of *Sverigedemokraterna* that immigration should be severely cut and that immigrant groups should be assimilated in what is seen as a majority culture.) In addition I am a white Swede. Thus, *Vi gillar olika* is to some extent a story about me, although one that I am sitting very uncomfortable in. Having said this, I do not wish to talk down to the adherents of *Vi gillar olika* but acknowledge that most people who have supported the project have done so in a mere wish to do good. Since I am not sure it is such a “good” thing to do however, I believe it is important to understand why.

Furthermore, something else should be said about my position in relation to my theory. I am invested in this thesis as a white body, and this will affect my motifs as well as the outcome (and reception) of my text. Ahmed claims that whiteness research has suffered from a lack provided by the whiteness of critical whiteness scholars themselves. A pronounced aim within this field has been to make the unmarked and normative white identity position

⁴¹ Ibid

“visible”, in order to make the structures of racial privilege in which whiteness becomes invested visible as well.⁴² Ahmed, identifying as coloured and a later contributor to the field, has criticised the idea of whiteness being “invisible”, arguing that whiteness is only invisible to those who inhabit it. To those who do not, whiteness seems to be everywhere.⁴³ This raises an important critique on whiteness studies in that it risks making the white position central once again, only this time it is done openly and with the prefix of the “critical” it skips the detour around the “other”.⁴⁴ Ahmed states that for whiteness theory to be progressive, it needs to be more than a project that lets white people see themselves.

Whiteness studies, that is, if it is to be more than ‘about’ whiteness, begins with the Black critique of how whiteness works as a form of racial privilege, as well as the effects of that privilege on the bodies of those who are recognised (sic) as black.⁴⁵

This thesis does not in any obvious way “begin with the Black critique”. I am white, and it is I who formulate the critique. However, I am drawing from Ahmed, who has herself understood whiteness as a non-white person and who is mainly referencing the “Black critique” formulated by Audre Lord and bell hooks. In the sense that I am based in her theories I “begin” with Ahmed, but it must be said that to the extent that I am white, so is my critique.

Culture, difference and race

This thesis is not – and this should be made very clear – about whether or not there are cultural differences within Swedish contemporary society or the world or about what these possible differences could be. I am not interested in engaging in such a conversation since it seems to demand a “yes” or a “no” answer and is thereby a conversation going nowhere. The very idea of “cultural difference” seems to often operate on an idea of culture as something fixed and nation-bound. I find this deeply problematic. I somehow do believe in “cultural” differences – meaning that I do not believe that we are all the same underneath or within, but “culture” is much more complex than it is often made out to be. Culture is dynamic, relational and always changing. It is never just one thing and it cannot be captured

⁴² Ruth Frankenberg 1993, Richard Dyer 1997

⁴³ Sara Ahmed “A phenomenology of whiteness”, *Feminist Theory*, 2007: 2, p 157

⁴⁴ Sara Ahmed, “Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism”, *Borderlands*, Vol 3: 2, 2004

⁴⁵ Ibid, p 2

in any general name. What I want to talk about in this thesis is the meaning that is continuously being invested in the categories “culture” and “difference” rather than coming to terms with any “real” difference.

It has been argued that “race” especially in the aftermaths of the Second World War disqualified as a valid marker of human difference and that with it also “racism” as the practice of hierarchical differentiating based on race became outdated. Other markers of difference, such as especially “culture” have come to replace race, although the idea of race can be seen to still be inherent.⁴⁶ Concerning “racism”, other concepts have been suggested to better capture difference-ideologies in the post war era. In Sweden, *etnotism* and *islamofobi* are two contemporary examples – pointing to the way essentialist expositions of ethnicity and religion has been used to categorise certain immigrant others.⁴⁷ I think terms like these are relevant when analyzing how specific forms of violence are expressed in language; however, in this thesis I will prove to be more indiscriminate.

My use of the term racism is a unifying term pointing to a “combination of practices, discourses and representations in a network of affective stereotypes” based on ideas of a priori and originative (cultural, ethnic, racial or religious) difference, that furthermore is closely related to an unequal distribution of power, possibilities and accesses.⁴⁸ I realize that in contemporary Swedish society it is marginal to subscribe to the category race. This does however not change that race is still embedded in markers such as religion and culture, even if “only” pronounced in or as history. As Ahmed contends; “bodies remember such histories even when we forget them.”⁴⁹ Consequently, following Ahmed as well as Mikela Lundahl, race to me is real.⁵⁰ Not as a biological particularity, but as a very concrete social marker that we all relate to and that has material affects in this society and on the bodies that it operates on.

⁴⁶ C. h. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In my Father's house: Africa in the philosophy of Culture*, New York; Oxford: Oxford University press, 1992

⁴⁷ C. h. Aleksander Motturi, *Etnotism*, Göteborg: Glänta, 2007; Mattias Gardell, *Islamofobi*, Stockholm: Leopard, 2010

⁴⁸ Etienne Balibar, “Is there a ‘neo-racism’?” in Etienne Balibar & Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, nation, class: Ambiguous identities*, London; New York: Verso, 1991, p 18

⁴⁹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 2006: 125

⁵⁰ Mikela Lundahl, *Vad är en Neger?* Göteborg: Glänta, 2005

Previous research: Swedish whiteness

Having been a more or less established academic discipline in the United States and Great Britain since the early 1990's, whiteness studies and whiteness as a theme within anti-racist research have become popular in Sweden only recently. Although occasionally touched upon in different arenas, it was not until intersectionality was introduced in the Swedish social sciences and humanities (and especially feminist- and gender studies) in the 2000's that whiteness became a somewhat – if marginal – established field of research. In the last couple of years however, (critical) whiteness studies has had an upswing.

In 2010 *Tidsskrift för Genusvetenskap* (TGV) launched a special issue on whiteness with a translated version of Sara Ahmed's article *A Phenomenology of Whiteness* in focus (further discussed in the next section).⁵¹ This can perhaps be seen as the first joint published work on whiteness, summarizing the themes in focus for Swedish (critical) whiteness studies and reaching a broader academic audience. Among the Swedish scholars that contributed were Catrin Lundström, Katarina Mattson, Ulrika Dahl, Irene Molina, Mikela Lundahl and Anna Adeniji – all of which have been engaged in whiteness research to different degrees and length of time.⁵²

Katarina Mattson contributes with a discussion on the growing interest of critical whiteness studies within the “intersectional turn” of Swedish gender- and feminist research. She argues that whiteness has not enough been included within those fields and stresses the importance of a critical analysis of how hegemonic discourses shape the understandings of feminism and equality, to a degree where they become represented as a unique Swedish project.⁵³

Irene Molina stresses the importance of separating whiteness as experience and whiteness as norm and claims that while whiteness scholars set out to be critical, they often analyse the norm without deconstructing the experience of their own whiteness. An effect of this, according to Molina, is that white privilege manifests itself within whiteness research (drawing from the argument of Ahmed, presented above), as sympathy for the (black) “sisters in need”. This white compassion should be understood as the paternalistic and “kind

⁵¹ *Tidsskrift för Genusvetenskap* (TGV), Tema Vithet, 2010: 1-2

⁵² Also Signe Bremer, Mariana Alves and Alma Persson

⁵³ Katarina Mattson “Genus och vithet i den intersektionella vändningen” in *TGV*, 2010: 1-2

side” of colonialism, Molina states.⁵⁴ Mikela Lundahl discusses along the same lines how the colonial pattern that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivaks coins “white men saving brown women from brown men” can be seen to structure Swedish popular discourses on female African literature and authorship. Lundahl argues that some aspects of female African life is more engaging to the Swedish audience and that this engagement can be understood as inherent to the project of whiteness and a specific discourse on benevolence within the solidarity movement that has colonial roots.⁵⁵

Catrin Lundström’s contribution in the *TGV* issue will not be referenced in this thesis, however together with Tobias Hübinette, Lundström has presented a position paper concerning the discourses surrounding the Swedish election 2010 that lie close to my case. In this paper, Lundström and Hübinette argue that both the anti-racist explosion in the aftermath of the Swedish election 2010, as well as the broad support of the project of *Sverigedemokraterna* can be viewed as performances of whiteness.⁵⁶

Sverigedemokraterna mourns, the authors observe, the loss of “old Sweden” as a homogenous, white cultural space, while the proclaimed anti-racists struggle to reclaim the vision of “good Sweden”: a country high-ranked internationally in terms of gender equality and anti-racism. These seemingly contradictory ideologies play on and serve to reproduce ideas of normative whiteness, however differently. In the discourse of “good Sweden”, “Swedes” are portrayed as being gender equal and anti-racist, marking out certain immigrant groups as the opposite of especially the former.⁵⁷ Furthermore, anti-racism becomes invested in whiteness itself – pointing to the way Swedish self image has been restored as innocent and separate from European colonial history, as was mentioned earlier.

A framework of thought: White space

As for the *TGV* issue presented above, this thesis makes whiteness theory specific to the work of Sara Ahmed central. Ahmed is a rather “late” contributor to the academic field of

⁵⁴ Irene Molina, “Om föreställd vithet, systerligt medlidande och nya husbyggen”, *TGV*, 2010: 1-2

⁵⁵ Mikela Lundahl, “Kvinnor, vithet och de andras litteratur”, *TGV*, 2010: 1-2

⁵⁶ Tobias Hübinette & Catrin Lundström, “Sweden after the Recent Election: The Double-Binding Power of Swedish Whiteness through the Mourning of the Loss of ‘Old Sweden’ and the Passing of ‘Good Sweden’”, *NORA – Nordig Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*. London: Routledge. 2011, 19:1

⁵⁷ Also discussed by Katarina Matsson, “Genus och vithet i den intersektionella vändningen”, and by Keskinen et. al, 2009

whiteness, and the most prominent names today are still those related to the development of the field. Especially Ruth Frankenberg broke new ground with her book *White women, race matters* in 1993, which is still extensively cited.⁵⁸ Frankenberg will be used on especially one occasion in this thesis but my general understanding of whiteness benefits from Ahmed's work and especially from her ideas on the relation between bodies and space.

It should be said however, that earlier whiteness theory have cleared ground for later scholars such as Ahmed, and that her understanding of whiteness builds on and develops these earlier understandings. Ruth Frankenberg along with for example Peggy McIntosh have made key contributions in seeing whiteness as race privilege and pointing to the way social structures and imaginings work through these privileges and through racism that is invested in whiteness as such.⁵⁹

Below follows a presentation of some of Ahmed's central argument on whiteness. These arguments should be understood as the theoretical background against which I have "read" my case. When Ahmed is referenced in the analysis that follows, it is in specific arguments and she is far from the only one referenced and not the only theoretical tool I have used to understand my data. However, as far as other perspectives have been applied, and it will be obvious who they are, they have been used to support and specify my argument that should be understood as taking place *within* Ahmed's discussion on white space, an argument that is made explicit mainly in the concluding discussion.

Whiteness as dwelling place

According to Ahmed "[w]hiteness can be described as an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space."⁶⁰ Her definition of racism is identical, pointing to the way whiteness and racism are intertwined, to a degree where they produce each other, as well as "bodies" and "space".⁶¹ As was discussed above, Ahmed opposes to the common argument in whiteness research of whiteness being invisible. Instead, Ahmed discusses how it becomes "wordly":

⁵⁸ Ruth Frankenberg, *White woman, race matters: the social construction of whiteness*, Minneapolis: the University of Minnesota Press, 1993

⁵⁹ Peggy McIntosh, "White privilege and male privilege: a personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies", *Wellesley college center for research on women working paper series* 189, 1988

⁶⁰ Sara Ahmed, "A phenomenology of whiteness", 2007, p 150

⁶¹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 2006, p 111

I want to consider whiteness as a category of experience that disappears as a category through experience, and how this disappearance makes whiteness 'worldly'.

Whiteness is not interesting as in what it *is*, Ahmed conveys, but in what it *does* to the bodies which come to embody the negation of this white "wordly" experience. Whiteness has an effect of "allow[ing] white bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape, spaces in which black bodies stand out, stand apart, unless they pass, which means passing through space by passing as white," Ahmed describes.⁶² Having said this, whiteness should not be understood mainly as a property of the body, although its relation to the body is central. Whiteness, as race, is a social construction and its boundaries are flexible and dependent on other similar constructions, as intersectional analyses have taught us. Not all light-skinned people are white in the "wordly" way that Ahmed discusses, and accordingly, non-white bodies can be.

Given that relationships of power 'intersect', how we inhabit a given category depends on how we inhabit other [...]. There are 'points' in such intersections, as the 'points' where lines meet. A body is such a meeting point. To follow one line (say whiteness) will not necessarily get you too many points, if you do not or cannot follow others.⁶³

Whiteness as understood by both Ahmed and the scholars she departs from – positively and negatively – is closely related to normativity. Given this; sexuality, gender and class will effect how one can, or fails to, inhabit the white wordly space. Drawing on Husserl and Fanon, Ahmed analyses whiteness in terms of orientation as the familiar and the habitual. To be oriented means to take a point of departure as given, and from that point a certain world appears, putting certain "objects" and "others" within reach and others out of reach.

The starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the 'here' of the body, and the 'where' of its dwelling. Given this, orientations are about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places.⁶⁴

Thus, whiteness is both space as "dwelling place" and the "bodies" that dwell together in this space. Space and bodies come to inhabit and produce each other, Ahmed claims. Stating that "colonialism makes the world white", Ahmed observes how certain bodies are familiar and habitual within the post-colonial world, so that these bodies seem to "extend into spaces

⁶² Ahmed, *The cultural politics of emotion*, 2004, 1

⁶³ Ahmed, "A phenomenology of whiteness", 2007, p 159

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p 151

that have already taken their shape”, as was referred above. Hence, certain bodies “trail behind” so that they can move and act easily, because their “wordliness” fit the “wordliness” of the white space in which they are familiar. Thus, they do in a way go “unnoticed”, because the space acquire the skin of the bodies that can inhabit it, with an emphasis on *habit*. “When bodies ‘lag behind’, then they extend their reach,” Ahmed states.⁶⁵ Black bodies (or bodies that in other ways fail to inhabit the normative whiteness or follow its line of orientation and desire) on the other hand can not “trail behind” and extend their reach into the white space, but a black body gets stopped by being “seen”.

For bodies that are not extended by the skin of the social, bodily movement is not so easy. Such bodies are stopped, where the stopping is an action that creates its own impressions. Who are you? Why are you here? What are you doing? Each question, when asked, is a kind of *stopping device*: you are stopped by being asked the question, just as asking the question requires that you be stopped.⁶⁶

In line with the ideas on benevolence as a discourse inherent to the project of whiteness and colonialism that was presented above, stopping does not only come in the form of ill-will. Othering performs in inclusive discourses as well as excluding ones, Ahmed states. If one is included as “different” for example, or “strange” to use a word of Ahmed’s, this too involves a kind of stopping. One is *seen* as different – ones body is stopped by this being seen; does not go “unnoticed” as for the bodies that “trail behind” and “extends their reach”. I will explore the discourse of *Vi gillar olika* in the light of this, to see how the different bodies that it focuses on, implicitly and explicitly, “pass” or, respectively, are “stopped” in a space that could be understood as white.

Method

Discourse, language and silence

This study is a discourse analysis focusing on popular- and social media texts. It seeks to deconstruct popular understandings of a certain event and bring to the surface explicit and implicit assumptions.

According to Michel Foucault, all manifest discourses build on an “already-said” that is at the same time a “never-said”. There is always a silence which pursues and precedes the

⁶⁵ Ibid, p 156

⁶⁶ Ibid, p 161

discourse; “a voice as silent as a breath, a writing that is merely the hollow of its own mark.”⁶⁷ Everything that is articulated within a discourse and as a discourse relates back to something in a feeling of having already been said, so that it seems self-justified and the assumptions automatic. The unity of discourse, or a relation of discourses, Foucault continues, is invoked through the emergence of objects that are named in the relation and through a coherent style. As referred by Stuart Hall, Foucault argues that “since we can only have knowledge of things if they have a meaning, it is discourse – not the things-in-themselves – which produces knowledge.”⁶⁸ A discourse is thus not only “words” or language as such, but words and language can only be known within a discourse, that as such hold vast amounts of silences. “The category of language [...] embraces the categories of world and consciousness even as it is determined by them,” as Gayatri Spivak observes.⁶⁹

In much the same manner, Hall states that signs, performing as words and metaphors, are “already coded”:

These codes are the means by which power and ideology are made to signify in particular discourses. They refer signs to the ‘maps of meaning’ into which any culture is classified; and those ‘maps of social reality’ have the whole range of social meanings, practices, and usages, power and interest ‘written in’ to them.⁷⁰

My analysis targets the specific campaign *Vi gillar olika* and some of its particular utterances. This campaign, and these utterances, refer the receiver to other discourses and expressions, and thus to “already-said’s” that are also “never-said’s” in terms of preconceptions that are rarely articulated but overflow with meaning. *Vi gillar olika* is an expression of a broader discourse and “map of meaning” – a certain kind of anti-racism and multiculturalism – that it draws meaning from and that holds silences. Thus, while looking at *Vi gillar olika* I am at the same time looking at this.

Vi gillar olika can be understood as a gathered narrative of the reactions that the election success of *Sverigedemokraterna* gave rise to within the majority, “anti-racist”, Swedish collective. Hall conveys, on the subject of media studies, that “the event must become a

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of knowledge*, London: Routledge, 1989, p 25

⁶⁸ Stuart Hall, “The work of representation”, *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*, London: Sage, 1997, p 73

⁶⁹ Gayatri C. Spivak, *In other worlds: Essays in cultural politics*, New York, London; Routledge, 1998, p 103

⁷⁰ Stuart Hall, “Encoding, Decoding” in Michael Ryan (ed), *Cultural Studies: an anthology*, Oxford; Carlton, MA: Blackwell Publishing ltd, 2008, p 912

'story' before it can become a *communicative event*."⁷¹ I view *Vi gillar olika* as such a story, trying to communicate and make meaningful the event of the election. In this story, "figures of speech" are central, which Ahmed argue are "crucial to the emotionality of texts".⁷² Within discourses figures draw on emotions and get stuck together, so that they seem to correspond to each other and certain emotions. Sticking is "dependent on past histories of association that often work through concealment," Ahmed states, thus they operate within the "already-said" that is "never said".⁷³

Discourse theory

In the methodology book *Diskursanalys som teori och metod* (Discourse analysis as theory and method) the authors map three different forms of methodologies.⁷⁴ Out of these three, the performance of this study will best correspond to what is referred to as "discourse theory"; drawing from the theories of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, combining the (post)structuralist focus on meaning with the Marxist focus on thought. Discourse theory aims at an "understanding of the social as discursive construction, where all social phenomena in principle can be analysed with tools of discourse analysis."⁷⁵ The name itself imparts the difficulty, impossibility even, of separating theory from methodology in a project like this. My method is thus to theoretically analyse a discourse, and I treat discourse here as a social phenomenon expressed through text. I will not be faithful to particularly Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory or discourse theory as understood in the book mentioned. However, I find some of its concepts useful.

A discourse, it is said, is articulated through *moments* and *nodal points* – the codes, signs, objects and figures of Hill, Foucault and Ahmed above – where *moments* refer to signs as the differential positions in a discourse and *nodal points* to the privileged signs around which other signs (moments) are structured and gather meaning from. To discourse theory silences are central. Thus, a discourse has a *constitutive outside of elements*: that is, meanings and signs that are ignored within the discourse to create unity of articulation. In the analysis

⁷¹ Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding", 2008, p 908

⁷² Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2004, p 12

⁷³ *Ibid*, p 13

⁷⁴ Marianne Winther Jørgensen & Louise Phillips, *Diskursanalys som teori och metod*, Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2000

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p 31, "förståelse av det sociala som diskursiv konstruktion, där alla sociala fenomen i princip kan analyseras med diskursanalytiska redskap."

that follows, I will identify certain moments and nodal points and through them, bring forth and discuss the silent elements.

Social constructions

As stated above I depart from post-colonial, post-Marxist, post-structuralist and Queer thought, meaning that my thinking as well as the direction of this thesis are structured by these ontologies – and has especially benefited from the deconstructive qualities – of these different perspectives. I am grounded in what John W. Creswell would call “the social constructivist worldview” which means that I hold the meaning ascribed to situations by a social collective as central to my research.⁷⁶ It also means, that I treat reality not as a given but as a continuous and discursively practiced social construct that is always and only subjectively perceived. Knowledge to me is always as contextual and situated as I am and what I or anyone can know is particular to that context. These assumptions guide the formulation of problems and questions and are intimately interrelated with the implementation of theory and method.

Material

My corpus consists of published popular- and social media text within the discourse of *Vi gillar olika*, focusing on the campaign’s web page at *Aftonbladet* and its Facebook site. I treat the discourse as a dialectic product between its official author (*Aftonbladet*) and its supporters. Thus, *Vi gillar olika* in a Derridian sense, continue to produce meaning and effects in the absence of its signature *Aftonbladet*.⁷⁷ Accordingly, I am using data articulated by both *Aftonbladet* and campaign supporters. Time wise, the data is roughly limited to text published between the day of the election – September 19th 2010 – and two months following, due to the mere fact that this was the time period when the campaign was most active. I have selected pieces of texts and sentences that I find especially interesting and, in my view, representative for the over-all discourse.

As will be obvious, I have made use of some signatures more than others. The main one is Jan Helin, *Aftonbladet* editor in chief. This is due to the fact that it is he who has

⁷⁶ John W. Creswell, *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*, third edition, Los Angeles, London; New Dehli; Singapore: SAGE, 2009, p 8

⁷⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context”, *Margins of Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, 1982.

articulated the proclamations for *Vi gillar olika*; and that it is he, representing *Aftonbladet*, that set the campaign going and has stayed a central figure in it. I have also used one article signed Peter Kadhammar in more length than other excerpts, due to its interesting representation of a certain binary logic that is important in the discourse. A part from these names, I have used shorter quotes and sections especially by “famous Swedes” and political leaders, contributing with interesting views on the themes I aim to analyse.

Translation

The original data is in Swedish and I have translated it myself, keeping the original quotes in footnotes. I have especially struggled with the word *främlingsfientlighet*, for which the only available English translation is “xenophobia” which gives a lack in the transfer of the meaning of *främlingsfientlighet*. *Främlingsfientlighet* consists of the words *främling* – “stranger” – and *fientlighet* – “hostility”, and has a more popular tone than “xenophobia” which exist in a Swedish equivalent, but is thus *not* used in the discourse of *Vi gillar olika*. Having said this, I have after all chosen to use the English “xenophobia” as a translation for the Swedish *främlingsfientlighet*.

Making a discourse

Foucault discusses how a discourse always really is many discourses: many narratives that through time and work turn into one.⁷⁸ Concerning my case, it becomes one discourse here, in this thesis. *Vi gillar olika* consists of multiple and contradictory narratives and I will obviously not do them justice. I am thus not only analysing a discourse, but while doing so I am also making one. I do however believe that I am not solely making it up in as much as I refer to texts that refer to each other and common objects that are named in a somewhat “coherent style”. I have heard the campaign *Vi gillar olika* be described as “silly”, as in un-critical or superficial, and it is invested in a certain popular cultural tone. I believe that this tone is what, to some extent, accounts for the success of the campaign and that it should not be underestimated in terms of the meanings it produces for and in our social sphere. This is why I have chosen to not include the more critical voices (that do exist), problematizing the popular message of the campaign.

⁷⁸ Michel Foucault (ed), *I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister and my brother: A Case of a Parricide in the 19th century*, Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1975

A BACKDROP TO THE CASE – multiculturalism debated

Multiculturalism as alive was as much a fantasy as it is a fantasy as dead

Sara Ahmed

During the 2000's, multiculturalism has been a hot topic for public conversations, debates and politics in Europe and Sweden. Given this, I must situate this thesis within a conversation that already exists. Below follows a presentation of I understand to be the general, and roughly two-sided, conflict that fuels the contemporary debate on multiculturalism as policy and discourse. *Vi gillar olika* does not directly position itself within this debate, but it operates on the discourse on multiculturalism and so it is related to the debate. More importantly however, this thesis – an analysis of the discourse *Vi gillar olika* – is.

The failure of multiculturalism

The current most prominent trend in Europe seems to be the proclamation of multiculturalism as a failed societal condition and political project. Angela Merkel was perhaps the first to openly declare this opinion in her speech to the Christian Democratic Union party in October 2010 where she conveyed that “the approach [to build] a multicultural [society] and to live side-by-side and to enjoy each other... has failed, utterly failed”, fuelling an already heated debate on immigration in Germany.⁷⁹ Earlier in the week of Merkel's speech, Horst Seehofer, the leader of CDU's Bavarian sister party Christian Social Union stated that “multikulti' is dead”.⁸⁰

David Cameron voiced the same stance in his first speech as prime minister, criticising state multiculturalism for having cleared way for religious radicalisation and terrorism instead of uniting the British people around proper liberal values. “Frankly, we need a lot less of the passive tolerance of recent years and much more active, muscular liberalism,”

⁷⁹ Quoted in “Merkel says German multicultural society has failed”, *BBC news*, 2010-10-17, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11559451>

⁸⁰ Ibid

Cameron said.⁸¹

A mere month later, Nicolas Sarkozy followed, stating that “[w]e have been too concerned about the identity of the person who was arriving and not enough about the identity of the country that was receiving him”.⁸² The popularity of rightwing politics with a special interest in limiting non-European immigration and cultural practices has been growing all across the European continent in recent years; Germany, Great Britain and France being only a short excerpt of this story that should also include examples from the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Austria and Finland, among others.

The critique on multiculturalism articulated within this liberal- to right-wing discourse is thus a critique on an overly tolerant society, consequently leading not only to segregation but also to radicalization and violence. In Sweden, this kind of critique on multiculturalism has not been articulated by political leaders (in this way at least) – and tolerance and integration are still held to be important political mottos. In this arena, *Sverigedemokraterna* have come to represent the European rightwing trend that has popularly been understood as destructive.

A conflict between critiques

There is however proclamations on multiculturalism as failure closer to home that are not expressed by *Sverigedemokraterna*.⁸³ A common conflict concerns what is often referred to as relativism (*kultur-/ värderrelativism*) and its relation to multiculturalism and liberalism. The Swedish liberal magazine *Axess* has been especially active in running this debate. In its special issue “Den enfaldiga multikulturalismen” (“The simple-minded multiculturalism”) *Axess’* authors indulge in revealing the damage that the presumed relativistic approach to culture has done to the Swedish society.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Quoted in “State multiculturalism has failed , says David Cameron”, *BBC news*, 2011-02-05, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12371994>

⁸² Quoted in “Nicolas Sarkozy declares multiculturalism had failed”, *The Telegraph*, 2011-02-11 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/8317497/Nicolas-Sarkozy-declares-multiculturalism-had-failed.html>

⁸³ In Sweden the term *multikulturalism* has for long had a bad reputation – however the shorter *multikulti* is used in slang – and has been replaced by the term *mångkultur* which would translate into something like *pluriculture*. I will however use the English multiculturalism as a translation for *mångkultur*, since it is within this discourse the concept operates.

⁸⁴ *Axess magasin*, “identitetskris”, “Tema: den enfaldiga multikulturalismen”, 2011:5

“Cultural relativism is as guilty of honour-killings as is the honour-culture,” Sara Mohammad states, and:

Cultural relativism and multiculturalism based on identity politics lead to consideration of those parts of different cultures that are in conflict with human rights.⁸⁵

In another article of the same issue, Svante Nordin, professor in History of Ideas, states that “[l]iberal culture is founded on tolerance. But the liberal society must not be so tolerant that it invalidates itself.”⁸⁶ In yet a third article, Angela Merkel- and David Cameron’s statements against multiculturalism are justified as statements against the relativism of multiculturalism as policy and the segregation and violence that it is assumed to produce. Thus, *Axess* positions itself with those politicians, but - importantly- opposes to the populist politics of *Sverigedemokraterna*.

In a recent issue of the leftist journal *Arena*, the liberal-/right-wing critique on multiculturalism is met with a different, post-colonial and “anti-racist” critique.⁸⁷ In an interview, Aleksander Motturi, anti-racist philosopher and writer, draws from the ideas that were conceptualised in his essay *Etnotism*:⁸⁸

My critique concerns how, through concepts such as multiculturalism, a form of difference-thinking [*skillnadstänkande*] is reproduced in new names, where the multicultural society is acknowledged while the ethnified [*etnifierade*] power-structures of this society in many respects remain. The multicultural society that we know today is not identical to an openly racist society, as for example Germany under the Nuremberg Laws or the Apartheid of South Africa. But there are still obvious similarities that manifest themselves in many ways. In the contemporary multicultural society the Other becomes either an exotic object that can be embraced, or he is represented in demonizing terms.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ “Kulturrelativismen är lika skyldig till hedersmord som hederskulturen.”; “Kulturrelativismen och den identitetspolitiskt baserade multikulturalismen leder till hänsynstagande gentemot de delar av olika kulturer som befinner sig i konflikt med mänskliga rättigheter.” Sara Mohammad, “Dubbla budskap om integration”, *Axess*, 2011:5

⁸⁶ “Liberal kultur bygger på tolerans. Men det liberala samhället får inte bli så tolerant att det upphäver sig själv.” Svante Nordin, “En intellektuell revolution”, *Axess*, 2011:5

⁸⁷ *Arena*, 2011:5, “Krisen i Europa”, <http://www.tidskriftenarena.se/2011/10/25/antirasistisk-kritik-av-mangkulturalism/>

⁸⁸ Aleksander Motturi, *Etnotism - en essä om mångkultur, tystnad och begäret efter mening*, Göteborg: Glänta, 2007

⁸⁹ “Min kritik handlar om hur man genom begrepp som mångkultur reproducerar en typ av

The critique of *Etnotism* focused the political project *Mångkulturåret* 2006 (Year of Multiculture) of the then Social Democratic government, articulated as a project aiming towards a “long-term, lasting change and development of the Swedish cultural life [*kulturliv*] towards increased ethnic and cultural diversity.”⁹⁰ In the *Arena* interview Motturi argues that his critique is still valid today, when multiculturalism has gone from mostly celebrated to mostly condemned. “Critique on multiculturalism as a difference-ideology [*skillnadsideologi*] must not be confused with a nationalist anti-immigrant critique on the multicultural society,” he says.⁹¹ Whereas the intellectual left’s critique on multiculturalism (which is where Motturi positions himself) can be seen as a form of ideology critique, the right-wing- and liberal critique performs as a defence of the European normative community and given this, the leftist critique is still highly relevant, Motturi states.

In the same *Arena* issue Paulina de los Reyes, professor in Economic History, articulates her critique along the same lines as Motturi, stating that multiculturalism is “a concept that depoliticises social antagonism and obscures inequality.”⁹² de los Reyes argues that the multiculturalist discourse draws from an essentialist understanding of culture that make certain people appear as different which in turn make them especially exposed to discrimination in the Swedish and European societies. Furthermore, multiculturalism with its complete focus on cultural difference in terms of political conflict makes social and economic inequality invisible, de los Reyes conveys.

When asked “[w]hat is your answer to the statement ‘multiculturalism has failed’,” she answers:⁹³ “Whose agenda are we discussing when multiculturalism is in focus? Or rather,

skillnadstänkande under nya namn, där man erkänner det mångkulturella samhället samtidigt som detta samhälles etnifierade maktstrukturer i mångt och mycket består. Det mångkulturella samhället som vi känner idag är ju inte identiskt med ett öppet rasistiskt samhälle, som t ex Tyskland under Nürnberglagarna eller Sydafrikas apartheid. Men det finns fortfarande ganska tydliga beröringspunkter som yttrar sig på många sätt. I dagens mångkulturella samhälle blir den andre antingen ett exotiskt objekt som man kan omhulda, eller så representeras han i demoniserande termer.” Aleksander Motturi, quoted in Devrim Mavi “Antirasistisk kritik av månkulturalism”, *Arena*, 2011: 5

⁹⁰ “för en långsiktig och varaktig förändring och utveckling av det svenska kulturlivet i riktning mot en ökad etnisk och kulturell mångfald.” SOU 2005: 91, p 10

⁹¹ “Kritik av mångkulturalism sedd som en skillnadsideologi får inte förväxlas med en nationalistisk invandrarfientlig kritik av det mångkulturella samhället.” Motturi in Mavi, *Axess* 2011: 5

⁹² “ett begrepp som avpolitiserar sociala antagonismer och döljer ojämlikhet.” Paulina de los Reyes, quoted in Devrim Mavi & Daniel Strand, “Vid sidan av mångkultur”, *Arena* 2011:5, <http://www.tidskriftenarena.se/2011/10/17/vid-sidan-av-mangkultur/>

⁹³ “[v]ad är ditt svar på påståendet ‘mångkulturalismen har misslyckats’”, *Ibid*, Mavi & Strand

whose fantasies? That Sweden is a multicultural society is a myth.”⁹⁴ The only thing Sweden has in terms of multicultural policy is a vision of integration but nobody really knows what that means, de los Reyes continues. To say that it has failed is thus impossible, because something that abstract can not fail. That racism has not been seen as a political issue however, should according to de los Reyes be seen as a failure.

Positioning the thesis

This thesis is situated within the Swedish critique on multiculturalism as ideology, here articulated by de los Reyes and Motturi. Through applying a perspective on whiteness, I hope to further develop it.

⁹⁴ ”Vems agenda diskuterar vi när mångkulturalism är i fokus? Eller rättare sagt, vems fantasier? Att Sverige skulle vara ett mångkulturellt samhälle är en myt.”, Ibid, de los Reyes

ANALYSIS

No, I'll never be you. But I don't need to. As long as you love me like you.

K's Choice



Merging with Sweden

Vi gillar olika arrives to me as an image. Its symbol and message appears bold, non-compromising in what it conveys: "We like different." Period. It is a sign that insists. In a very direct way it is a stopping device and a bodily such: a symbol of a human hand. In my imagining, the hand reads we are not racists, marking the boundary between in- and outside, creating a position behind the hand and a position in front of it. It seems as if those who stand behind it hold the hand up like a shield to protect those that can not "like" different but who "are" different. I hear *Vi gillar olika* as a call from those who state that they like different and are not racists, to those who presumably do not like different and hence are racists: "STOP".

Do you recognize the hand? We borrowed it from the 1980's. It said "Rör inte min kompis" [*Don't touch my friend*] then. It was a call to the silent majority to take a stand against racism. We need the hand again. For diversity. Now we have a party in Swedish parliament that says that everybody has to be alike to merge with the Swedish nation. We do not like xenophobia. We like different.⁹⁵

Am I this "silent majority"? The "you" addressed in the paragraph? I think I am. Then, do I "need the hand again", "for diversity"? To know this I must know what diversity means, and what it means to "merge with the Swedish nation".

⁹⁵"Känner du igen handen? Vi har lånat den från 1980-talet. Då stod det 'Rör inte min kompis' i den. Det var en uppmaning till den tysta majoriteten att ta ställning mot rasism. Vi behöver handen igen. För mångfalden. Nu har vi ett parti i Sveriges riksdag som säger att alla måste vara lika för att uppgå i den svenska nationen. Vi gillar inte främlingsfientlighet. Vi gillar olika.", *Aftonbladet* – "Vi gillar olika", accessed 2011-03-14, <http://www.aftonbladet.se/vigillarolika/>

Who do we want to be?

If Sweden is something that can be merged with, it appears as a social body that holds integrity; something that can be appropriated even. *Vi gillar olika* prefers this body to be different-looking in contrast to the “alike” Sweden that is assumed to be the object of desire of *Sverigedemokraterna*. Thus, *Vi gillar olika* can be seen to take part in a negotiation of what Sweden as a society and a social body should be and look like, and it presents to us a suggestion. It comes in the form of an image that carries the name diversity. In this image, everybody should not have to “be alike”. Those who think that everybody “has to be alike” do not fit in the image. They destroy it, and so they threaten to destroy the Sweden that “we” believe in.

Who do we want to be? We travel to London, Paris, Berlin and New York because these cities hold the whole world. They have all different kinds of people and cultures. It makes them so fascinating and alive. The American people are proud that their country is a country of immigration. The success of Hongkong is due to it being a city wide open to the world.⁹⁶

The quotation above is taken from an article signed Peter Kadhammar that was published on the *Vi gillar olika* site in Aftonbladet in November 2010. It summarizes well the image of diversity that becomes desired in the discourse of *Vi gillar olika*. “These cities hold the whole world.” *Vi gillar olika* as a space wants to hold the whole world as well, and “have all different kinds of people and cultures”. *Vi gillar olika* wants for its society to be “fascinating and alive”, or rather – it wants to become this fascinating and alive difference. “Bodies inhabit space by how they reach for objects” Sara Ahmed proclaims.⁹⁷ Hence, “we” are formed as a group within the *Vi gillar olika* space through a shared orientation towards the object of diversity. “We” have become this specific “we” as a result of supporting the campaign and supporting the campaign means to support the idea of diversity as a desired object.

In the discourse of *Vi gillar olika* “difference” is general, and refers both to a difference

⁹⁶ “Vilka vill vi vara? Vi far till London, Paris, Berlin och New York därför att de städerna rymmer hela världen. Där finns alla sorters människor och kulturer. Det gör dem så fascinerande och levande. Amerikanerna är stolta över att deras är ett invandringsland. Hongkongs framgång bygger på att det är en stad vidöppen för världen.” Peter Kadhammar, “Vill vi leva i Åmål 1970?”, *Aftonbladet* – “Vi gillar olika”, 2010-09-25

⁹⁷ Ahmed, *Queer phenomenology*, 2006, p 110

that we all to some degree share, and to a difference that is attributed to certain people. Thus, the campaign proclamation holds an ambiguity. The immediate message is that we (the campaign supporters) like different (people). With this proclamation comes the more descriptive statement that we (people in general; humanity) like different (things). Supporting the campaign *Vi gillar olika* thus means to agree on liking people that are different and/or to agree to say that we, as people, like different things and hence are (and have a right to be) different. "People are different. We like that," Jan Helin states.⁹⁸

However, even in the sense that difference is attributed to the whole of humanity it seems to be unequally distributed so that some within the general category "people" are more different than others. It seems to be "immigrants" that contribute with the difference that make up the diverse society in the Swedish context, more so than those who are understood to be "Swedes" originally (as in "typical" Swedes)

The figure different

It is the immigrant category that *Sverigedemokraterna* scorns and it is for this category that *Vi gillar olika* "stand up" when taking a stand "for diversity" and against "xenophobia". The campaign proclamation reads, "We like different. Because we don't like xenophobia". The two sentences seem to be assumed to mean the same thing. Thus, if we "like different" we are by definition "not xenophobic".

Rather simplified, the proclamation can be translated as "We like immigrants. Because we don't like xenophobia." Or the other way around: "We don't like xenophobia. Because we like immigrants."

Sverigedemokraterna blame those who are different for almost all bad things in society. We have a wave of rapes [*våldtäktsvåg*] in Sweden because we have Muslims in the country. The retired people in Sweden suffer because immigrants cost so much in allowances.⁹⁹

In the excerpt above it is communicated that "Muslims" are different, and "immigrants" are different – Muslims being the particular of the latter one can assume, as in immigrant

⁹⁸ "Människor är olika. Vi gillar det", Jan Helin, "Därför gillar vi olika", *Aftonbladet blogg*, 2010-09-19, <http://blogg.aftonbladet.se/janhelin/2010/09/darfor-gillar-vi-olika>,

⁹⁹ "Under 2000-talet har Sverigedemokraterna effektivt exploaterat [...] den rädsla inför olikheter som finns kvar. Sverigedemokraterna lägger skulden för nästan allt ont i samhället på de som är olika. Vi har en våldtäktsvåg i Sverige för att vi har muslimer i landet. Pensionärerna i Sverige har det dåligt eftersom invandrare kostar så mycket i bidrag.", *Ibid*

Muslims. *Vi gillar olika* opposes to the project of *Sverigedemokraterna*, not because of the designation of differences as such but because of the assessment of these differences. (Thus, *Vi gillar olika* does not agree to say that immigrants should be blamed for all bad things in the Swedish society.) Accordingly, both *Vi gillar olika* and *Sverigedemokraterna* subscribe to the very idea of “immigrant” as “different”. However, the immigrant is not merely the denoted: it is as abstract as “different” is. We can use Ahmed’s conceptualization of the figure here.

A figure is “a shape that appears to have linguistic and bodily integrity,” she describes.¹⁰⁰ “[L]eak[ing] beyond itself” it is over-determined as signifier: it holds and transfers too much meaning, making it impossible to define but is at the same time too narrow for the bodies that it clings to.¹⁰¹ The immigrant as “stranger” is the origin of difference in the discourse of multiculturalism, Ahmed argues. Multiculturalism holds a fetishizing “love of strangers” that should be questioned, because “it is the very gesture of getting closer to ‘strangers’ that allows the figure to take its shape.”¹⁰²

Stranger fetishism is a fetishism of figures: it invests the figure of the stranger with a life of its own insofar as it cuts ‘the stranger’ off from the histories of its determination.¹⁰³

The “immigrant” is an idea of a person, a general category that has become very real in our social imaginings. When “immigrant” is evoked in public discourses it can mean many conflicting things yet it still holds credibility – we know this symbol, it is meaningful in a sentence, argument and discourse. We somehow recognize the “immigrant” when we meet her or him in the streets and we often believe we know something about her or him apart from what we see. We relate this figure as material body to ideas we have about this body, according to the metaphysics of racism. Thus, if *Vi gillar olika* can be seen as a story, the figure immigrant is central to it.

Becoming diverse

Ahmed, drawing from the work of bell hooks, states that contemporary Western, capitalist societies feeds a desire to consume the other.¹⁰⁴ Through consuming objects that are

¹⁰⁰ Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality*, New York; London: Routledge, 2000, p 22

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p 154

¹⁰² Ibid, p 4

¹⁰³ Ibid, p 5

associated with foreign cultures and places, as the cosmopolitan citizen of today is assumed to desire, the consumer can in a way *take in* the other.¹⁰⁵ When eating food that are labelled “ethnic”, or using cosmetic products “originating” (physically or as imagined) from far-away places, the white Western subject can almost become the “stranger”. “In other words, the stranger becomes a fetish through the product, and is consumed as something the object simply has.”¹⁰⁶ Difference in consumer culture becomes desired and is “limited to the private and the expressive domain of ‘style’”.¹⁰⁷ The difference of the product, which is *their* difference, can thus be incorporated as the white Western subjects’ own difference – but only in so far as it is a difference that can be assimilated and is not too strange. Ahmed observes how multiculturalism in general performs in the same way:

[D]ifferences that can not through consumption be assimilated in the nation or the body holds no value.¹⁰⁸

The multicultural society seeks to incorporate a certain difference as its own difference, thus becoming diverse, Ahmed states. This seems to relate to the idea of “merging with Sweden”, where difference – the “not alike” – is invited to do so.

The idea of becoming has two implications. Firstly, it discriminates among differences so that some are desired and some are worthless or harmful, and secondly it operates on the idea that some people rather than others can act to become: It is the (white) consumer that presumably has “enough agency” to become different rather than simply being it. The stranger is what we can be extended to, Ahmed conveys, the “we” then are presumably not “strange” to begin with but can appropriate a certain degree of strangeness.¹⁰⁹

In a talk that was given in Stockholm in May 2011, Ahmed suggested that whiteness could be understood as a “general will” and multiculturalism as an explicit will for whiteness to “be” and “do” diversity.¹¹⁰ Multiculturalism is a fantasy of diverse parts coming

¹⁰⁴ bell hooks, “Eating the Other” in *Black looks, race and representation*, Boston: South End Press, 1992

¹⁰⁵ Ahmed, “Going strange, going native” in *Strange Encounters*, 2000

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p 114

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p 115

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p 115 italics removed

¹⁰⁹ Ahmed, “A phenomenology of whiteness”, 2007

¹¹⁰ The talk was given at *Södra Teatern*, May 27th 2011 under the headline “Rasism, vithet och mångkultur som fantasi” and ended a series of seminars on radical political theory presented by *Tankeverket* in collaboration with *Södra Teatern*. The series also presented intellectuals such as Judith Butler and Wendy Brown. http://www.tankeverket.com/wordpress/?page_id=483. Ahmed’s talk was

together as one, she stated, and it can only ever remain happy if the parts are willing to the whole. Happiness, she said, is key to the project of multiculturalism. Through “happy diversity”, the nation offers love to its others, provided that they are willing to integrate, thus willing to the whole of the national body. To *Vi gillar olika*, the Swedish identity is central. Everybody should not have to be alike to merge with Sweden we are told, and thus everybody should not have to be alike to *be Swedish*. There seem to be no doubt that merging with Sweden and the Swedish is what those that are “not alike” should want.

Integration, becoming one

Multiculturalism performs as singular, Ahmed contends.¹¹¹ This is apparent in the political vision of integration, here related by Jan Helin:

Sverigedemokraterna is the only party that completely lacks a policy for integration. This is not a mistake. They want to fight the unification of different parts into a greater whole, thus integration.¹¹²

This conceptualization of integration is in line with the official Swedish definition. According to the *County Administrative Boards* (Länsstyrelserna) integration means:

[T]o unite separate parts into a greater whole. He/she who settles in a new country, must have the possibility to be part of a new community without violating his/her cultural and ethnic identity.¹¹³

As one of the articulations of diversity or multiculturalism, integration is thus an idea of unity; of the society as one. In the same text as was cited above, Jan Helin blames the success of *Sverigedemokraterna* on failed integration policy. In combination with discrimination – an argument that is not further developed – this has led to a “constrained [*konstlad*] view on people from other countries,” Helin states.¹¹⁴ “Getting a job quick and a rapid learning of the

based on her paper “Feminist Killjoys (and other Willful Subjects)”, *The scholar and feminist online*, Issue 8:3 2010

¹¹¹ Ahmed, *Strange encounters*, 2000, p 97ff

¹¹² “Sverigedemokraterna är det enda parti som helt saknar en politik för integration. Det är ingen miss. De vill bekämpa föreningen av olika delar till en större helhet, alltså integration.” Jan Helin, “Därför gillar vi olika”, *Aftonbladet blogg*, 2010-09-19

¹¹³ “att förena skilda delar till en större helhet. Den som bosätter sig i ett nytt land måste få möjlighet att ingå i en ny gemenskap utan at göra våld på sin kulturella och etniska identitet.” *Länsstyrelserna*, “Integration/Vanliga frågor”, accessed 2011-10-10, http://www.lst.se/lst/sv/amnen/Integration/vanliga_fragor.htm

¹¹⁴ “konstlad syn på människor från andra länder.” Jan Helin, “Därför gillar vi olika”, *Aftonbladet blogg*

Swedish language is the best integration,” he proclaims.¹¹⁵ This latter argument as well as the argument that failed integration policies have cleared ground for *Sverigedemokraterna* have been extensively articulated in Sweden in recent years. The idea of “merging with Sweden” seems to correspond to the vision of integration. Furthermore it seems to be the failure of this merging that produces xenophobia.

Ahmed states that in the popular discourse of diversity, difference is seen to belong to and should return to the nation.¹¹⁶ From this perspective, the extended “we” of the nation should not be “culturally assimilated but must assimilate at the level of being.”¹¹⁷ Thus, according to integration as articulated above, immigrants “must have the possibility to be part of a new community without violating his/her cultural and ethnic identity”; and “your Swedish identity is okay, as it appears to you,” as stated by Jan Helin. This assumes that even though one can be Swedish in many different ways, “at the level of being”, one must at least be devoted to “the Swedish identity”, and “community”, as such. In the event of a failure to commit to this identity and community, this failure produces xenophobia.

The difference that is ours

Sweden’s best single success story of today, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, can for example never become Swedish, although he was born in Malmö. His ‘attitude’, ‘language’ and ‘body language’ makes him un-Swedish [osvensk], according to Sverigedemokraterna’s communication officer Mattias Karlsson.¹¹⁸

The quote above imparts some clues as to what difference means more specifically to *Vi gillar olika*, here expressed by Jan Helin. Difference, as depicted above, can be expressed in “‘attitude, ‘language’ and ‘body-language’” and hence seem to correspond to a certain appearance and style that stand out as irregular. In opposition to the negative connotations it has to *Sverigedemokraterna*, in the discourse of *Vi gillar olika* this irregularity becomes something positive. It is often paired with success and excitement; the fun of a new or unique experience. It is said that to evolve, as a society, person (or business) – one must dare to try

¹¹⁵ “Snabbt i arbete och snabb inläring av svenska språket är bästa integration.”, Ibid

¹¹⁶ Ahmed, *Strange encounters*, 2000, p 105

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p 106

¹¹⁸ “Sveriges enskilt bästa framgångshistoria idag, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, kan till exempel aldrig bli svensk, trots att han föddes i Malmö. Hans ‘attityd’, ‘språk’ och kroppsspråk gör honom osvensk enligt Sverigedemokraternas presschef Mattias Karlsson.” Jan Helin, “Därför gillar vi olika”, *Aftonbladet blogg*

the new or else the society as well as the person (and business) stagnates. "To find the new Lady Gaga one must like different" it is said.¹¹⁹

It is societies that are able to use the strength of differences and new influences that are successful. And in reality, Sweden has long since passed the point where it is even possible to think that Swedish identity means the same for all. Your Swedish identity is okay, as it appears to you.¹²⁰

Here, "differences" and "new influences" are directly related to success. It is stated that "in reality" Sweden and Swedish identity is and, importantly; should be, based on difference as in the heterogeneity of its readings. Thus, "your Swedish identity is okay, as it appears to you". Sweden is brought forth as a social, integrated but "different-looking" body. The looking different is central, hence difference as depicted by *Vi gillar olika* has a clear flamboyant touch. It is often ascribed a certain aesthetic appeal: "Diversity is beautiful" as a headline of an article on the *Vi gillar olika* site reads.¹²¹ Actress Marie Richardsson declares:

I want to stand up against xenophobia for my kids sake. I want the society that they grow up in to be colourful, different, generous and empathic.¹²²

The signifiers "colourful, different, generous and empathic" seem to make up a coherent picture of a good, diverse society, and it captures well both the society as idealised by *Vi gillar olika* and the campaign project itself. Although silently present, the immigrant is not named here, but disappears in the colourful diversity in which it is invested. This diversity is a difference that can be(come) "ours". It adds (colour) to the Swedish identity, and thus to the "look" of society. This seems to correspond to what Ahmed predicts as a difference "limited to the private and the expressive domain of 'style'".¹²³

Strangeness as Sameness

¹¹⁹ Andreas Carlsson "För att hitta nya Lady Gaga måste man gilla olika", *Aftonbladet* – "Vi gillar olika", 2010-10-01, <http://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/article12550664.ab>

¹²⁰ "Det är samhällen som förmår utnyttja kraften i olikheter och nya influenser som är framgångsrika. Och i verkligheten är vi redan långt förbi den punkt där det ens är möjligt att tänka att svenskhet betyder samma sak för alla. Din svenskhet är okej så som den ser ut för dig." Jan Helin "Därför gillar vi olika", *Aftonbladet blogg*

¹²¹ Elsa Larsson, "Mångfald är vackert", *Aftonbladet* – "Vi gillar olika", 2010-09-23, <http://www.aftonbladet.se/vigillarolika/article12526898.ab>

¹²² "Jag vill stå upp mot främlingsfientlighet för mina barns skull. Jag vill att det samhälle de växer upp i ska vara färgstarkt, olik, generöst och empatiskt." Marie Richardsson, *Aftonbladet* – "Vi gillar olika", 2010-09-19, <http://www.aftonbladet.se/vigillarolika/article12524452.ab>

¹²³ Ahmed, *Strange encounters*, 2000, 106

There seem to be a slippage in difference as invoked by *Vi gillar olika*. Difference is on the one hand appreciated as particularity or irregularity, and on the other hand it seems to lean towards a certain idea of sameness. Stefan Holm, the famous Swedish sportsman, gives voice to this:

I think xenophobia is horrible. All people are equal, regardless of origin, religion and sex. My former teacher always said that there is only one race and that is the human race.¹²⁴

That “all people are equal” seems to in a sense translate into that all people are also ultimately the same, in terms of belonging to the same and “human race”. A Facebook commentator among many others on the same subject proclaims that, “[j]ust because we are different on the outside we are alike underneath... what is the problem??”¹²⁵ Another one states that “[a]s a human-being regarding appearance we are alike/ or different, but with the same human dignity – our intention is the same.”¹²⁶

“There is only one race”; “we are alike underneath”; “our intention is the same”. Underneath our skin – we are same and simply “human-beings”, thus difference is only difference on the surface. We are all *worth* the same “regardless of origin, religion and sex” becomes, with the loss of just one little word, we *are* all same “regardless of origin, religion and sex”. This is nothing new in Swedish anti-racist thought where difference as sameness is an established idea: “Alla Olika Alla Lika!” (“All Different All Same!”), reads the motto of *Ungdom mot rasism* (Youth against racism); Sweden’s biggest anti-racist youth association.¹²⁷ Difference thus *does not make a difference*. One can still be “Swedish”. Because we are really “the same underneath” we should care better for each other: The immigrant that is attacked in the rhetoric of *Sverigedemokraterna* could be my brother or my sister – we are all a one family; “one race”. Listen to the words of Sartre:

¹²⁴ “Jag tycker att främlingsfientlighet är fruktansvärt. Alla människor är lika värda, oavsett, ursprung, religion och kön. Min gamle SO-lärare sa alltid att det bara finns en ras och det är människan.” Stefan Holm, *Aftonbladet* – “Vi gillar olika”, 2010-09-19, <http://www.aftonbladet.se/vigillarolika/article12524452.ab>

¹²⁵ “Bara för att vi är olika utanpå är vi lika inuti...vad är problemet??” , comment by the signature Elisabeth Svedborg, on log post (“Här kan du läsa mer om kampanjen”), *Vi gillar olika, Facebook, “log”*, 2010-09-18, <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/vigillarolika>

¹²⁶ “Vem är du och vem är jag? Som människa gällande utseende är vi lika/ eller olika, men med samma människovärde- vår intention är densamma”, *Vi gillar olika, Facebook, “log”*, 2010-11-26

¹²⁷ *Ungdom mot rasism*, accessed 2011-08-16, <http://www.umr.nu/>

The Jew has one friend, however, the democrat. But he is a feeble protector. No doubt he proclaims that all men have equal rights; no doubt he has founded the League for the Rights of Man; but his own declarations show the weakness of his position. In the eighteenth century, once and for all, he made his choice: the analytic spirit. He has no eyes for the concrete syntheses with which history confronts him. He recognizes neither Jew, nor Arab, nor Negro, nor bourgeois, nor worker, but only man – man always the same in all times and all places.¹²⁸

At first sight, *Vi gillar olika* appears to be the opposite of Sartre's democrat – the democrat refusing to recognize the differences that *Vi gillar olika* feeds on. I would however suggest that the connection not so easily be dismissed. The seemingly contradictory anthropologies could be read as two versions of the same story, different in execution but not necessarily in essence.

Vi gillar olika could be understood as an updated version of Sartre's democrat. Difference to *Vi gillar olika* is not important, "we are alike underneath", although at the same time very important: "People are different. We like that", the device reads.¹²⁹ This discursive conflict is very much situated within the discourse and idea of equality of man (close to the heart of both Sartre's democrat and *Vi gillar olika*), because to be worth the same, human beings need to in a sense also be (analytically) the same. Difference becomes unimportant when we belong together; believe in the same things and when "our intention is the same".

The democrat of Sartre "saves the [Jew] as man and annihilates him as Jew."¹³⁰ *Vi gillar olika* clings to the particularity of difference as culture and style, but this difference is secondary to the whole of the citizen; everybody can "merge with" Sweden and "be Swedish": and human; we are "alike underneath", one "human race".

Who is human, who is Swede?

As many have argued, what "citizen" as well as "human" refers to is not obvious. Lundahl discusses how the human became a central figure in the epoch of The Enlightenment:

Two decades of struggles by workers, non-whites and women have however since then shown that the content of this 'human' is not uncontentious, and it is still only in exceptional cases that all humans are referred to when one speaks of the human.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, New York: Schocken Books, 1995 (1948), p 55

¹²⁹ Jan Helin, "Därför gillar vi olika", *Aftonbladet blogg*, 2010-09-19

¹³⁰ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 1995 (1948), p 56

¹³¹ "Två seklers kamp från arbetare, ickevita och kvinnor har dock sedan dess visat att innehållet i

The concept of the human, or Man (to make it further problematic), is invested with power. Foucault observes that power is a contextual relation that circulates and passes through people. Thus, as its first effect, power produces individuals.¹³² “There is no more powerful situation than that of being ‘just’ human,” Richard Dyer conveys.¹³³ Etienne Balibar argues along the same lines that “[t]he category of the ‘masses’ (or the ‘popular’) is not itself neutral, but communicates directly with the logic of a naturalization and racialization of the social.”¹³⁴

Sara Ahmed distinguishes between “strangers” and “stranger strangers”. The first category designates the people that impart the kind of strangeness that fit into the normative model of cultural diversity – the diversity that “is ours”, that “we” can incorporate. Stranger strangers on the other hand are those that are strange in a way that “we” can not hold or tolerate: thus they are the “unassimilables”.¹³⁵ When *Vi gillar olika* claim to like different, not all kinds of difference should be included as “good” ones, but must correspond to what “we” want Sweden to be. Thus, “good” difference needs to be such that it is assimilated at the “level of being” but particular at the level of expressive culture or style, as Ahmed’s analysis has it. The familiar stranger is what we can extend to, the “‘real’ but not ‘typical’” national subjects.¹³⁶ Thus “your Swedish identity is okay, as it appears to you”. The “you” here is general and conceals the “some-body already recognized” as typical (Swede).¹³⁷ Those that are not assimilable, does not at all appear; can not be seen, within the discourse of diversity (in the popular, positive form).

On the same theme, and pointing to the critique on the concept of “human”, Victoria Fareld, in an interpretation of Hegel, argues that within social space – as for example the social space of Sweden or *Vi gillar olika* – some people are recognized while others are not. She calls this condition “being made dialectically redundant – a situation where some

denna ‘människa’ inte är oomtvistat, och det är fortfarande blott i undantagsfall som *alla* människor avses när man talar om människan.” Mikela Lundahl, *Vad är en Neger?*, 2005, p 128

¹³² Michel Foucault, *Samhället måste försvaras: Collège de France 1975-1976*, Hägersten: Tankekraft, 2008, p 42f

¹³³ Richard Dyer, *White*, London; New York: Routledge, 1997, p 2

¹³⁴ Etienne Balibar, “Is there a ‘neo-racism’?” in Balibar & Wallerstein, *Race, Nation and Class*, 1991, p 20

¹³⁵ Ahmed, *Strange encounters*, 2000, p 106

¹³⁶ Ibid, p 95f

¹³⁷ Ibid, p 97

people appear as non-recognizable, by being dialectically abandoned.”¹³⁸ She states that there is a void to the idea of “human” in between the abstract, universal human, and the concrete, particular individual – the main categories that the discourse on Human Rights addresses – and that within this void, those who are too particular, disappears from view. “[O]ne’s particularity as an individual [must be] *recognizable* in the name of the common,” she states.¹³⁹

Hence, the same seems to be true also for “integration” as a coming together in the discourse of *Vi gillar olika* (as well as in political and public vocabulary). One must be recognized, and recognize oneself, in the name of “Swede”.

Conversion

Ruth Frankenberg discusses the prevalent “colour-blind” discourse on race in the United States (in the 1990’s) as a discourse of essential “sameness”, in which racial difference is emptied of meaning and all people are ultimately “the same underneath [their] skin”.¹⁴⁰ Terming this discourse “a double move toward color evasiveness and power evasiveness,” Frankenberg points to the consequences of whites “not seeing” race has on whites not seeing power structures and dominance operating on race.

The American colour-blind discourse makes sense in relation to the discourse on “essentialist racism” that preceded it.¹⁴¹ To not see race seems as the better option if seeing it means to openly discriminate against those of colour. The same analysis can be applied to *Vi gillar olika*, only here difference is seen and targeted, positively. It could be argued that the positive focus in *Vi gillar olika* has a similar effect on obscuring the power structures that difference as a social marker is itself invested in, as we are told the American colour-blind discourse does. It seems even more adequate after having understood that difference in *Vi gillar olika* to some extent becomes unseen *through being seen as same*.

Frankenberg states that an important feature of “color- and power- evasiveness” is that it produces a white self innocent of racism.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Viktoria Fareld “Hegel and Exposure”, (in press) in *Translating Hegel: The Phenomenology of Spirit and Modern Philosophy*, Södertörn Academic Press, 2011, p 2

¹³⁹ Ibid, p 9

¹⁴⁰ Ruth Frankenberg, *White woman, race matters*, 1993, p 14

¹⁴¹ Ibid

¹⁴² Ibid, p 188

With this view, white women can see anti-racist work as an act of compassion for an “other”, an optional, extra project, but not one intimately and organically linked to our own lives.¹⁴³

Vi gillar olika seems to also be an “extra project”, and a “compassion for an ‘other’”, it becomes an act of benevolence, an option to do good. *Vi gillar olika* is to some extent trying to undo racism, or to “right the wrongs” of it to use the words of Spivak.¹⁴⁴ Spivak argues that inherent to the idea of righting wrongs that is central to the discourse of Human Rights and in relation to the colonial legacy, is a certain degree of paternalism and one should be wary when setting out in such a project as to connect the “righting” to responsibility.

Vi gillar olika does not take responsibility for racism, as racism is assumed to be practiced by others and not in any real sense a problem for the diverse society as such. Those others who are assumed to be racists however, operate *within* the society that *Vi gillar olika* represents. It is also implied that racism has been a problem in the past in Swedish society, making *Vi gillar olika* somehow complicit, however not to a degree where it demands concrete responsibility to be taken.¹⁴⁵ Thus, *Vi gillar olika* can be understood as an expression of what Molina terms “the kind side of colonialism”; “well-meaning” in a similar way as the Swedish audiences’ engagement in African literature, as Lundahl argues is a well-meaning with colonial roots.¹⁴⁶

Vi gillar olika becomes a conversion point, a kind of subliming. By drawing on the idea of a “Swedish identity” we can inscribe ourselves in, and a “Swedish nation” we can all merge with equally, *Vi gillar olika* offers the place where diversity can be happy, where racism is not a problem anymore. Love becomes the healer to the project of diversity that seems to say if we can only get close enough, we will become one.¹⁴⁷ In the discourse of *Vi gillar olika* the negative feelings that surround difference – unhappy racism – turn into positive feelings as “happy diversity”.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Ibid, p 6

¹⁴⁴ Gayatri C. Spivak, “Righting wrongs”, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 103, No. 2/3, 2004

¹⁴⁵ Kadhammar among others articulates the idea of racism as a feature of the past in the article “Vill vi leva i Åmål?” that was referred to earlier. Back then, in the 1970’s, racism was apparently prominent in Åmål, as to suggest that it is not now, in a different city of a later year.

¹⁴⁶ Irene Molina “Om föreställd vithet, systerligt medlidande och nya husbyggen”; Mikela Lundahl, “Kvinnor, vithet och de andras litteratur”, *TGV*, 2010: 1-2

¹⁴⁷ Sara Ahmed, *Vithetens hegemoni* (sv översättning), Hägersten: Tankekraft, 2011, p 195

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p 196

We do not like xenophobia

The first condition of the *Vi gillar olika* campaign is, as we have seen earlier, a simultaneous liking of difference and disliking of xenophobia: "We do not like xenophobia. We like different."¹⁴⁹ To not like xenophobia is assumed to be equal to liking different, hence: "'We like different'. A clear statement against xenophobia".¹⁵⁰ To say that one likes different, as done by *Vi gillar olika*, is – following this logic – to say that one is not xenophobic, and to imply that one does not like different means to agree to xenophobia.

Xenophobia comes to a halt when it meets the symbol of the hand that says that we like different, or so one is assumed to understand it – it becomes the "in front of" the hand: the campaigns' outside. Xenophobia is thus something that is not in the picture to begin with – not in the "in" picture of the campaign at least. "We like different" conveys "we are not xenophobic" and hence, xenophobia – as depicted by *Vi gillar olika* – do not reside behind the hand that designates the border.

I described in the beginning of this analysis how *Vi gillar olika* comes to me as an image. I said that I hear *Vi gillar olika* as a call from those behind the hand addressing those in front of it with a "STOP". In what follows I will try to understand what this call consists of.

"The values we already have"

Equality as a human quality is an important feature in the discourse of *Vi gillar olika* as we have seen. "People are equal, regardless of origin, religion and sex", sportsman Stefan Holm claim above. In another proclamation for *Vi gillar olika*, Göran Hägglund – party leader of the Swedish Christian Democrats – says that: "Every idea that builds on a grading of human dignity is abominable. Human equality is an obvious base in a good society."¹⁵¹ Jan Björklund of the Liberal Party, says along the same lines: "All people are equal. I want us to be an open and tolerant country; we must build Sweden together and not create agitation

¹⁴⁹ "Vi gillar inte främlingsfientlighet. Vi gillar olika." Jan Helin "Därför gillar vi olika", *Aftonbladet blogg*, 2010-09-19

¹⁵⁰ "'Vi gillar olika'. Ett tydligt ställningstagande mot främlingsfientlighet." Jan Helin "Aftonbladets kampanj större än SD", *Aftonbladet* – "Vi gillar olika", 2010-09-22, <http://www.aftonbladet.se/vigillarolika/article12521335.ab>

¹⁵¹ "Varje idé som bygger på en gradering av människovärdet är avskyvärd. Alla människors lika värde är en självklar utgångspunkt i ett gott samhälle." Göran Hägglund, "Vi stödjer Aftonbladets kampanj", *Aftonbladet* – "Vi gillar olika", 2010-09-19, <http://www.aftonbladet.se/vigillarolika/article12524452.ab>

towards different groups.¹⁵² Lastly, Carola Häggkvist, celebrated artist, proclaims her support for *Vi gillar olika*:

In a country that represent peace and human equality it is obvious that we should do all we can as citizens to keep the important values we already have.¹⁵³

These statements are only an excerpt out of a vast number of similar ones, and what they convey is clear: People are equal, not should or could be but are. Equality is hence understood as an inherent attribute to the human collective and not as particular political commitments or achievements. In Sweden (and the world) people have equal worth, one is told; it is a “fact”. Equality is one of “the values we already have”, as Häggkvist puts it. “Human equality is an obvious base in a good society”. Hence, Sweden becomes this “good society” – the “we” of “the values we already have”. The plural of values include also democracy, openness, generosity and tolerance, among other related discursive concepts that the Swedish society – that is also by definition diverse – presumably coheres around.¹⁵⁴ Sweden is depicted as *being* all of this. This assumes at least two things. Firstly, that some other countries are not this and do not share “the values we already have”, and secondly, that xenophobia and racism is exterior to these concepts and values.

Hübinette & Lundström argue that in the “progressive” anti-racist camp that became defined in the aftermaths of the Swedish election 2010, and in which *Vi gillar olika* is a prominent actor, gender equality and anti-racism is appropriated as specifically Swedish values and political achievements.¹⁵⁵ Kerstin Mattson argues along the same lines that feminist politics in Sweden (popular and academic) has suffered from a lack of not problematising the hegemonic discourses on “Western” feminism that structures the field and that is marked out against specific immigrant cultures that are represented as being non-

¹⁵² Jan Björklund, “Vi stödjer Aftonbladets kampanj”, *Aftonbladet* – “Vi gillar olika”, 2010-09-19

¹⁵³ “I ett land som står för fred och alla människors lika värde så är det en självklarhet att göra allt vi kan som medborgare för att behålla den viktiga värdegrund vi redan har.” Carola Häggkvist, “Valkändisar”, *Aftonbladet* – “Vi gillar olika”, 2010-09-19, <http://www.aftonbladet.se/vigillarolika/article12524452.ab>

¹⁵⁴ C.h. Lars Ohly, “Vi stödjer Aftonbladets kampanj”, *Aftonbladet* – “Vi gillar olika”, 2010-09-19, “Det finns sju demokratiska partier i riksdagen i dag. Några av dem för en riktigt usel politik, men de står i alla fall för människors lika värde. Det gör inte rasisterna”; Richard Hobert “Valkändisar” *Aftonbladet* – “Vi gillar olika”, 2010-09-19: “Öppenhet och generositet mellan alla människor är själva kännetecknet för ett civiliserat land.”

¹⁵⁵ Hübinette & Lundström, “Sweden after the recent election”, *Nora*, 2011

gender equal, non-democratic etcetera.¹⁵⁶

Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein conclude in a joint project that racism is growing, instead of – as is often thought – declining.¹⁵⁷ Balibar labels racism a “true ‘total social phenomenon’” which through a combination of practices, discourses and representations serve to produce a community of racist subjects as well as racialized objects.¹⁵⁸ Wallerstein insists that racism and sexism should not be seen as flaws of a universalistic and liberal system of humanism, but as integrated parts of it. The two are imagined as opposites, he asserts, but they should really be understood as symbiotic ideologies. It is not a question of simply hypocrisy or human weakness, but a persistent paradox that we all, more or less, subscribe to.¹⁵⁹

Vi gillar olika subscribes to the ideology of liberal, universal humanism, hence one feature to the call that *Vi gillar olika* addresses to *Sverigedemokraterna* seems to be that “we are not racist, because we are open, tolerant, democratic and diverse.” If we are to take Balibar and Wallerstein seriously, the assumed self-justification of this call must be questioned.

“Xenophobia is a sticky disease”

Given the context of the campaign, it is *Sverigedemokraterna* that come to embody xenophobia – it is xenophobia in the shape of this particular political party and its particular ideology that stand before the hand that reads “*Vi gillar olika*” and is somehow stopped by it. Thus, *Sverigedemokraterna* as an actor within the Swedish society that *Vi gillar olika* stands (up) for can be seen as an anomaly to that society. An anomaly is per se something that exists within an order, but that is symbolically projected out of it to affirm a certain orderly stability.

“When something is firmly classed as anomalous, the outline of the set in which it is not a member is clarified,” Mary Douglas states.¹⁶⁰ Even if it is sometimes admitted that *Sverigedemokraterna* is a product of its society the party ideology is nonetheless depicted as something that does not “fit” in the Swedish context. Hence, “stop sverige demokraterna

¹⁵⁶ Katarina Mattson, “Genus och vithet i den intersektionella vändningen”, *TGV*, 2010: 1-2

¹⁵⁷ Etienne Balibar & Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, nation, class: ambiguous identities*, 1997

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p 17-18

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p 29ff.

¹⁶⁰ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An analysis of concept of pollution and taboo*, London: Routledge, 2003 (1966), p 47

today, they don't belong in a democracy" as one Facebook commentator has it.¹⁶¹ "I endorse the campaign. Anyone who likes Sweden does not vote for Sverigedemokraterna," Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt states.¹⁶² Lastly, Henning Mankell – well known writer – and his wife, the director Eva Bergman:

We think that racism and xenophobia is the stickiest societal disease there is and it must be fought so that it does not root and grow.¹⁶³

Racism and xenophobia is something that must be "fought" before it "roots and grows". Accordingly, it has not yet rooted – there is still time to fight it. By projecting xenophobia to *Sverigedemokraterna*, the contours of the *Vi gillar olika* "we" and the Sweden this "we" "stand up" for stabilizes with the assurance that xenophobia however there does not really *belong* within the diverse society as represented by *Vi gillar olika*. It stands before the hand that reads that we like different, not behind it.

Douglas suggests different ways as to manage the presence of an anomaly. We can, she states, "ignore, just not perceive them, or perceiving them we can condemn."¹⁶⁴ *Sverigedemokraterna* has been both ignored and condemned, ignored more often before the election – they were for example not represented nearly to the same extent as the rest of the competing parties in public debates – and condemned to a larger degree after the election (*Vi gillar olika* is one out of many examples of this).

An anomaly is something "betwixt and between" – something that is at the same time on the inside and on the outside. It is, by definition, a borderland creature and something that does not "fit". *Sverigedemokraterna*, and accordingly *racism*, in the discourse of *Vi gillar olika* becomes that which do not fit but that nonetheless dwells within the borders (of Sweden). "Xenophobia is a sticky disease" we are told, hence *Sverigedemokraterna* themselves are "sticky". Drawing from Jean-Paul Sartre, Douglas discusses stickiness. "[T]o touch stickiness is to risk diluting myself into viscosity. Stickiness is clinging, like a too-possessive

¹⁶¹ "stoppa sverige demokraterna idag, de hör inte hemma i en demokrati." Comment by the signature Maria Koski on log post ("På URL kan du märka din profilbild med Vi gillar olika-handen och visa ditt stöd!"), *Vi gillar olika*, Facebook, 2010-09-19

¹⁶² "Jag ställer mig bakom kampanjen. Den som gillar Sverige röstar inte på Sverigedemokraterna." Fredrik Reinfeldt, "Vi stödjer Aftonbladets kampanj", *Aftonbladet* – "Vi gillar olika", 2010-09-19

¹⁶³ "Vi tycker att rasism och främlingsfientlighet är den kladdigaste och kletigaste samhällssjuka som finns och den måste bekämpas så att den inte får rötter och grov." Henning Mankell & Eva Bergman, "Valkändisar", *Aftonbladet* – "Vi gillar olika", 2010-09-19

¹⁶⁴ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 2003 (1966), p 48

dog or mistress.”¹⁶⁵ Stickiness is a kind of half-way state in between solidity and liquidity. It is unstable and makes the relation between the subject self and the outside world such as well. Thus, “xenophobia must be fought so that it does not root and grow” or so that we do not all get sticky like it is sticky.

The common enemy

In “The rhetoric of Hitler’s ‘Battle’” Kenneth Burke goes to depth with the trope of the common enemy as it presents itself in the rhetoric of Hitler’s. The Jew of Hitler’s materializes as “the international devil” Burke asserts – the symbol of evil to which society’s all ills can be ascribed.¹⁶⁶ The Jew in this form is seen to operate on hate in its pure will to destroy the German society, thus “[t]he ‘Aryan’, as the vessel of love, must hate the Jewish hate.”¹⁶⁷ According to Burke, the enemy trope serves a number of practical purposes especially for the middle class in the then German society. By taking on features such as greed, the Jew comes about as the bad side of capitalism, making it possible for businessmen in a time of great depression to “continue conduct business as usual”.¹⁶⁸

Hence, there is ‘medicine’ for the ‘Aryan’ members of the middle class in the projection device of the scapegoat, whereby the ‘bad’ features can be allocated to the ‘devil’ and one can ‘respect himself’ by a distinction between ‘good’ capitalism and ‘bad’ capitalism.¹⁶⁹

This is the “curative” aspect of the scapegoat which allows for “purification by dissociation.”¹⁷⁰ Burke warns against dismissing the Nazi rhetoric as something too particular and to associate fascism with a certain kind of society, different in values from the societies we label democratic. Obviously pointing to a rather different problem than the problem in this analysis, there are however important points of contact.

Sverigedemokraterna seems to be the “devil materialized” to *Vi gillar olika*. It is *Sverigedemokraterna* as the embodiment of xenophobia that is depicted as the main problem to Swedish contemporary society and the project of “diversity”. Accordingly, *Vi gillar olika*

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p 47

¹⁶⁶ Kenneth Burke, “The Rhetorics of Hitler’s ‘Battle’” in Michael Ryan (ed), *Cultural Studies. An Anthology*, 2008 (1939), p 433

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p 437

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p 433

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p 436

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p 437

can be seen as the “vessel of love” which must “hate” the hate of *Sverigedemokraterna* – although spelled out in a more diplomatic style. Thus, “we” of *Vi gillar olika* “don’t like” the hostility (xenophobia) of *Sverigedemokraterna*.

Furthermore, *Vi gillar olika* “likes” the “different” (and the “difference”) that *Sverigedemokraterna* dissociate from. Hence, to “not like” difference is presumably the bad way to experience difference (“bad’ capitalism”) while to “like” difference is the good way to experience it (“good’ capitalism”). As we have seen earlier in this analysis, there is seemingly nothing problematic with the proclamation of difference as such, what matters is how one relates to it, as “it”. However, difference, like money, is a sore point and our feelings and practices in its prevalence need to be managed.

Diversity and racism as “good” and “bad” capitalism

In the article *Vill vi leva i Åmål 1970?* (Do we want to live in Åmål 1970?), published on the *Aftonbladet* site of *Vi gillar olika* in November 2010, Peter Kadhammar takes us back to his childhood streets in the 1970’s when the inhabitants of Åmål saw and turned towards their first dark-skinned immigrants.¹⁷¹ This anecdote is further related to Kadhammar’s experiences of war time Yugoslavia and what he then learnt about “evil” and the “human nature”. He writes – as Jan Helin, puts it – “about the necessity of not always saying what you think in a civilization.”¹⁷²

With imagined or real violations for excuse she [*the human being*] can turn on her enemy with pleasure. There is no limit for evil. Everyone that has found themselves in a larger social context knows this. It need not be a collapsing state; it is enough to remember the bully on the schoolyard or the exclusion of a colleague.¹⁷³

As an antithesis and a response to this state of evil and anarchy, Kadhammar puts up the idea of civilization:

Civilization is a set of rules for our common room. You do not say just anything; you do not do just anything. The one who is polite and holds the door for others is rightly

¹⁷¹ Peter Kadhammar “Vill vi leva i Åmål 1970?”, *Aftonbladet* – “Vi gillar olika”, 2010-11-25

¹⁷² “om nödvändigheten att inte alltid säga vad man tänker i en civilisation.” Jan Helin, *Aftonbladet* – “Vi gillar olika”, 2010-11-25, <http://www.aftonbladet.se/vigillarolika/article7846751.ab>

¹⁷³ “Hon kan med inbillade eller verkliga kränkningar som ursäkt i vällust ge sig på sin granne. Det finns ingen gräns för ondskan. Det vet alla som befunnit sig i ett större socialt sammanhang. Det behöver inte vara en kollapsande stat, det räcker med att minnas mobbaren på skolgården eller utfrysningen av en arbetskamrat.” Kadhammar, “Vill vi leva i Åmål 1970?”

considered more civilized than the one who pushes her/his way past. The rules of civilization – it may also be called coercion – forbids us to throw around expressions like *pack-i-stan*.¹⁷⁴ It pollutes the one who pronounces the words and destroys our shared environment. Civilization forces us to hold down the vomit and thereby make us into better people.

“We say what you think” reads one of Sverigedemokraternas slogans. It is an anti-civilization slogan, it turns towards the whole society, it wants to smash our common room.¹⁷⁵

“She can turn on her enemy with pleasure.” “There is no limit for evil.” Evil seems to lie close to a certain idea of lust, libido or sadistic pleasure – limitless to its nature, it needs to be controlled. Also, it is seemingly not a specific kind of violence, but an indifferent and opportunistic kind of evil that simply exists and works in the social, taking different expressions in different settings.

Moving on to the following lines, it is not the thinking evil that is questioned – evil is rather taken for granted as inherent to the nature of the human being – it is the doing evil that seems to be the problem. Hence civilization as the saviour: “a set of rules for our common room” that regulates action. Evil and civilization are opposites, but as such they lie close. Civilization comes into being through its proximity to evil – it is the very act of controlling the evil that every sociality holds a primitive desire to express, be it through forcing your way through, or killing someone.

With the coercive assistance of civilization we learn to behave. “Civilization forces us to hold down the vomit.” One can thus expect to find some dirt in the belly of civilization – but not in its mouth. *Sverigedemokraterna* thus become the inside, the vomit, which has spilled over and out. “We say what you think” – it seems to be the ultimate threat, the threat of turning inside out – of letting the anomaly “fit”, thus tearing down the walls of civilization as order, and the happy diverse society.

¹⁷⁴ Kadhammar refers to a saying in his home-town that targeted a group of immigrants. *Pack-i-stan* in Swedish refers to both *Pakistan* as in the country but it also translates into, *Pack-in-town*

¹⁷⁵ “Civilisation är en uppsättning regler för vårt gemensamma rum. Man säger inte vad som helst, man gör inte vad som helst. Den som är artig och håller upp dörren för andra anses med rätta mer civiliserad än den som tränger sig före. Civilisationens regler – tvång kan man också kalla det – förbjuder oss att slänga oss med uttryck som *pack-i-stan*. Det sjaskar ner den som uttalar orden och förstör vår gemensamma miljö. Civilisationen tvingar oss att hålla inne med spyorna och gör oss därmed till bättre personer. ‘Vi säger vad du tänker’ lyder en av Sverigedemokraternas paroller. Det är en anticivilisatorisk paroll, den vänder sig mot hela samhället, den vill slå sönder vårt gemensamma rum.”

Kadhammar's article brings forward an inherent conflict in the project of *Vi gillar olika*. "We" of *Vi gillar olika* work to upgrade difference but "we" are all at the same time invested in a certain fear of the strange and different. *Sverigedemokraterna* "pleads to our fear," Jan helin states.¹⁷⁶ "We" work to overcome this fear, but while one does this one must hold it inside and not "say what one think". An outward manifestation of a "love for the stranger", in the words of Ahmed – even when it clothes discriminating or fearful thoughts – translates into, to reconnect with Burke, "good capitalism". To verbalise what one or others think, as *Sverigedemokraterna* claim to do – becomes "bad capitalism". Through "allocating the 'bad' features" of the discourse of difference to *Sverigedemokraterna*, *Vi gillar olika* can be seen to get "purification by dissociation". It becomes a conversion point, as was discussed above, where unhappy racism becomes happy diversity.

¹⁷⁶ Jan Helin "Därför gillar vi olika", *Aftonbladet blogg*, 2010-09-19

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Politics is the continuation of war by other means

Michel Foucault

Skrattet ersätter gråten på samma sätt som ordet ersätter skriket

Sara Stridsberg

A dark Tuesday evening in the end of September, towards the end of the process of writing this thesis, I participated in a meeting in my neighbourhood. It was a dialogue meeting focusing the school situation in the district and it were to take place at Hjällboskolan, a ten minute walk from my house in a building that I pass at least once a day but that I had never before seen the interior of. When I arrived there were no signs and no people standing outside of the building, but the main entrance was open so I stepped in. Inside, I was shown up some stairs by a man I met, towards the open doors of a brightly lit auditorium. I could see people were sitting around tables in there, talking. As I approached the end of the staircase, a woman came up a couple of meters in front of me from another direction, obviously heading towards the auditorium as well. Her clothing was patterned and brightly coloured and covered all but her face and hands. I automatically categorized her as black and Somali – a familiar figure to Hjällbo and to me.

As this woman arrived at the open door of the auditorium, a white man in a grey suit emerged. Standing in the woman's way, he welcomed her to the meeting and suggested she join in at any of the tables and to help herself to coffee or tea. The meeting would start any minute, he informed her. His head slightly tilted to the right, with a kind and sincere look in his face, he spoke slowly and clearly. I can not remember if the woman replied, but in any case she entered the room and the man's attention shifted towards me. I slowed down as I got closer to him, he smiled to me in recognition somehow, I smiled back, and then – nothing. I passed into the lit room and the grey suited white man turned to greet the next person entering.

I had been recognized, not in the individuality of me, Lisa, but as a figure; as someone knowing where to go and what to do in this room. I passed as someone who fitted. The

woman before me was familiar too, however as the black immigrant woman, she was recognized as the one not knowing – her body such that it did not fit or pass. Hjällbo, with its high number of immigrants and low counterpart of what is often referred to as ethnic Swedes or simply Swedes, is often described as *invandrartätt* (roughly immigrant-dense) and non-white. I was thus not the common visitor to this meeting, yet I was familiar in the room.

Ahmed describes what happened at a conference she took part in when four black feminists arrived in the room at the same time. “*We notice* the black feminist,” she says, and that we do notice should tell us more about what was already in place “than about ‘the who’ that arrives”.¹⁷⁷ At first sight, I appear to be the black feminist to the auditorium of Hjällboskolan. I stood out in the crowd, was visible – but when I sat with the “wrong” crowd rather than when I first appeared in the room. The people that were seen to be whites or Swedes did not sit around the tables but occupied the space up front in the room – hence they were the ones “holding” the meeting. To inhabit a white body, Ahmed observes, is to inhabit a body that passes in certain rooms, that “trails behind” and thus does not get in the way of action.¹⁷⁸ To inhabit a black body on the other hand is to stand out and get in the way: A black body is a body that is stopped, and if it passes it “passes as white,” Ahmed argues.¹⁷⁹

In the bigger picture, Hjällbo is the black feminist. We know this by knowing its name, the mere fact that it has one: *invandrartätt*; it is defined other. Hjällbo is the arrival we notice, and noticing we should ponder on the already-in-place, as Ahmed reveals. “Who is the immigrant?” is an authorized question in contemporary Swedish society where the immigrant performs and appears as concrete body, extended in fantasies. We must however also ask: “Who is not immigrant?” What is already in place for the immigrant to appear?

Vi gillar olika as white space

In much the same way as the auditorium takes the white shape of the society that has produced it – a room in which certain bodies are stopped and others pass – I imagine *Vi gillar olika* takes this shape as well. *Vi gillar olika* becomes a white space in which *olika* is the arrival we notice. The figure that was recognized as the black woman at the meeting in Hjällbo was welcomed, but by being welcomed she was simultaneously stopped. Stopping thus takes the

¹⁷⁷ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 2006, p 133

¹⁷⁸ Ahmed “A phenomenology of whiteness”, *Feminist theory*, 2007

¹⁷⁹ Ibid

shape of well-meaning and benevolence, and is not just an act of ill-will. This goes for the project of *Vi gillar olika* as well. *Vi gillar olika* welcomes and likes its different, but while doing so, the figure itself continues to stand unquestioned, and invested with a life of its own, the histories of its determination are cut off.

The discourse of *Vi gillar olika* is oriented towards difference, and there is a direct link between diversity/difference and immigration/immigrant. Through referring to them as ends in themselves, “different” as immigrant is established and naturalised as a self-sufficient, integrated category and body.

When a category takes the shape of people, people take the shape of the category and so the bodies of immigrants can not be seen outside of the name that designates them. When I walked in at the school auditorium I “saw” that the audience was an immigrant audience and that the people in charge were Swedes or whites. Yet I did not really see this, how could I have? It was how the collected bodies appeared to me, but appearing is very real. In the discourse of *Vi gillar olika* the immigrant “different” performs as an original figure that is out there to talk about. Yet, the violent and unfinished history of the figure in society is absent in the narrative of *Vi gillar olika*. It appears unproblematic, with only positive connotations. We like it: difference appears as a social good, in both allusions of good.

Becoming diverse

The project of *Vi gillar olika* is ultimately a negotiation of what Sweden as imagined community should be and look like. *Vi gillar olika* performs as a representation of “Sweden” and works to incorporate difference into itself. Hence, “we like different” also reads “we are different”. Everybody should not have to be alike to merge with the Swedish nation, *Vi gillar olika* proclaims. With the help of Ahmed’s ideas on becoming, I have seen how the concept “merging with” needs to be revised as it assumes “Sweden” as the object to be acted upon when in fact it seems to be “Sweden” that acts to incorporate difference to become diverse. There appears to be two desired national subjects to *Vi gillar olika*, the “typical” Swedes (those that are “there” to begin with) and the “real” Swedes (immigrants, those who “come”). They should both have the same opportunity to “merge with the Swedish nation” according to *Vi gillar olika*.

When Jan Helin states that “your Swedish identity is okay, as it appears to you,” the different “you’s” that it addresses are positioned at different levels of proximity. Thus, some

are there from the beginning, have already “merged with” Sweden and can without hesitation claim the Swedish identity.

“Strangers are what we can extend to” Ahmed proclaims. Sweden can thus extend to (become) diverse, but there is a specific and familiar shape to it that positions differences as more or less proximate, but also more or less desirable. Not all differences are differences that “we can extend to”. There is a silence in the discourse of *Vi gillar olika* that needs to be attended to, concerning the boundary between what we can, and respectively cannot, extend to when becoming diverse.

Difference and the unassimilable

Difference is never really defined in the discourse, and when it is referred to it seems to correspond to a certain similarity so that difference becomes unimportant. Difference to *Vi gillar olika*, however highlighted, does not seem to make a difference, because “we are all the same underneath”. Those that do not subscribe to this, that do not feel to be the same underneath or share the orientation towards diversity as a happy object do not fit in the image of the diverse nation itself.

Ahmed distinguishes between “strangers” and “stranger strangers”, the former being what is desired by the multicultural project, and the latter that which it can not or does not want to be(come). Certain differences become “unassimilable” to diversity, and to the idea of the multicultural nation. Not all differences are good. Ahmed states that while strangers “appear” – are seen and embraced within the discourse of diversity – the unassimilable; or unrecognizable to use a concept from Fareld – can not be seen or heard, thus they constitute the silences in the discourse where difference is assumed to only have positive connotations. Strangers as immigrants, must be familiar, they must be devoted to being and becoming Swedish, assuming that being or “becoming Swedish” in itself is unproblematic, and that “Sweden” in its ‘pure self’ is free from violence.

At first sight, *Sverigedemokraterna* seem to be the “unassimilable” to the diverse society depicted and desired by *Vi gillar olika*. However, *Sverigedemokraterna* is a highly visible feature to the discourse: It is what *Vi gillar olika* is oriented away from, explicitly, and so they are not invested in a discursive silence. The silence in the discourse of *Vi gillar olika* seem to concern something else; something other in a way that can not be seen or heard. As Fareld points to, certain practices govern the social space and restrict who can appear as someone to

be recognized. This analysis prove important to the case of *Vi gillar olika* in that the campaign's orientation towards difference makes difference *appear* only insofar as it is a difference that is ultimately the "same underneath". Ahmed states that:

Appearing as different might make no difference to the difference that is ours: in such a fantasy, we might seek to glimpse almost white skin or an almost human heart beating under the strangers dress.¹⁸⁰

Who can appear as "human" depends on how "human" is understood. As was discussed earlier, all humans are rarely included when we talk about the human in a general way. The same seems to go for *Vi gillar olika* when "Swedes" are invoked. "Your Swedish identity is okay, as it appears to you," implies that "Swedish" itself is completely open. It seems however that difference to *Vi gillar olika* concerns the "strangers dress", in the words of Ahmed, more than her "heart", so that difference does not make a difference to the difference that is "ours". At the "level of being" the different should want to "be Swedish".

Racism to *Vi gillar olika* and in the Swedish society

Vi gillar olika subscribes to the liberal ideology of universalistic humanism where markers such as democracy and equality play central roles. As was discussed above, this ideology is popularly understood as the opposite of racism, and *Vi gillar olika* becomes invested as embodying this opposite. If difference is what *Vi gillar olika* is oriented towards, *Sverigedemokraterna* is what it is orientated away from. By letting *Sverigedemokraterna* embody racism and depicting the party as the evil of Swedish society, *Vi gillar olika* and thus also the majority of Swedes (in the sense that this is what *Vi gillar olika* seeks to represent) gets "purification through dissociation" in the words of Kenneth Burke. However, violence in the form of racism, as understood in this thesis, structures also the ideology of universalistic humanism, and – it can be argued – the democratic project as such.

What I find violent about *Vi gillar olika* and the stigma of *Sverigedemokraterna* in general, and why I will not agree to say that *Vi gillar olika* is a "harmless" campaign, is that by projecting racism to this (however prominent) minority, the majority can get away with a lot, still standing tall within antiracism, as long as its outward manifestation is to disagree with *Sverigedemokraterna* and the particular idea of racism that they have come to represent in the

¹⁸⁰ Ahmed, *Strange encounters*, 2000, p 96

moral binary of *Vi gillar olika*.

Swedish political reality is, also without *Sverigedemokraterna* in parliament, structured by a deep-seated racism that is largely denied by the white majority that is privileged by it. Those that are identified as immigrants and especially those that come from (physically or as imagined) what is popularly referred to as the Third World come to embody distance not mainly in positive terms, but are stopped by racial discrimination on many of the arenas of Swedish society. It is literally easier for me to get around in the Swedish society than it is for many of my immigrant neighbours. It should not be controversial to state that it is generally easier for me to get a job and an apartment in Göteborg than it, generally, is for someone carrying a Somali name – to take a figure that has been around before in this thesis. Knowing that I am, as well as any “immigrant” is, restricted by what I have “behind me” – in terms of especially class and gender in my case – I will not in any significant way be disadvantaged by the “race” intersection on my body.

Hjällboskolan is not the only place where I pass while Somali women are stopped – and stopping often come in more unpleasant forms than as a welcoming. This is not due, I would argue, mainly to the political agenda of *Sverigedemokraterna*. *Sverigedemokraterna* is a product of its society, and I do not mean this as in *Sverigedemokraterna* being its aggrieved working class – or in any simple way a mere continuation of a European trend, in itself rarely further analysed – as a popular analysis have often made it out to be.

I have often heard people expressing a fear concerning the parliamentary participation of *Sverigedemokraterna* and the effect it could have on the other political parties’ ideas and vocabulary concerning immigration policy. As if those other political parties, and Swedish politics in general, are invested in a discourse that is itself free from any antagonism concerning immigration. I would argue that the ideology of *Sverigedemokraterna* is not strange to Swedish mainstream politics and attitudes but that it borrows from it.

Carsten Jensen, Danish writer and intellectual, comments on the way the deeds of Anders Behring Breivik – the Norwegian right-wing extremist that killed 77 people in Oslo in July 2011 – has much to easily been portrayed as deeds of a lunatic. Behring only took the public rhetoric unusually serious, Jensen states:

We are told by our politicians that Muslims are the problem. He just wanted to give a hand. He just went to the root of the problem. They will say to him: “Yes but, we did

not mean it like that, you weren't supposed to shoot anyone, you were just meant to hate them, like us. You could have been a good politician. But you misunderstood."¹⁸¹

The same analysis can be applied to the treatment of *Sverigedemokraterna*, hence they say things explicitly that many others imply – they have a different, “populist”, rhetoric – and for this they are not “good politicians”. As I have stated before, racism is inherent to the Swedish society and also to Swedish politics – Sweden is not a country “wide open to the world” as Peter Kadhammar presumably wants it to be. It never has been either, and it probably never will.

Sverigedemokraterna and whiteness

If I have succeeded in pointing to how *Vi gillar olika* as social, imaginary and discursive space can be understood as white – something should be said about how this whiteness relates to *Sverigedemokraterna* other than as in the “bad side” of whiteness or Swedish-ness.

With its desire for the homogenous “old” Sweden, *Sverigedemokraterna* seem at first sight to be the whitest of all the categories that the discourse of *Vi gillar olika* is made up of. However, as Ahmed states, the “wordliness” of whiteness is such that it stops being wordly when it is experienced and becomes noticed. Thus whiteness, in this sense of the concept, can never be oriented *towards* itself but must be oriented *around* itself, never catching itself out. In addition to this, Ahmed claims that “the white body must also be a respectable and clean body”.¹⁸²

Sverigedemokraterna, it can be argued, feeds a desire for whiteness in the shape of “old Sweden” and a particular way to “be Swedish”. The discursive body of *Sverigedemokraterna* is not a “respectable and clean body” to *Vi gillar olika* and to the Swedish society in general as *Vi gillar olika* depicts it. Having said this, *Sverigedemokraterna* – the party, discourse and the bodies – are *too white* and can thus be understood as *non-white* in the normative, wordly way whiteness works.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ “Vi fortelles av politikerne våre at muslimer er trusselen. Han ville bare gi en hånd med. Han gikk bare til rota av problemet. De vil si til han: ‘Ja men, det var jo ikke sånn ment, du skulle ikke skyte noen, du skulle bare hate dem, slik som oss. Du kunne blitt en god politiker, men du missforsto.’” Quoted in Emilie Ekberg “Alarmkockene må ringe”, *Klassekampen*, Oslo, 2011-08-06, no 179, p 15

¹⁸² Ahmed, *Queer phenomenology*, 2006, p 136

¹⁸³ Ahmed, *Queer phenomenology*, 2006, p 146

“Doing” anti-racism

An aim for this thesis was to do nothing, “by means of a critical and patient analysis” in the words of Žižek. “Doing nothing” here was understood in opposition to the doing “something as anything” as I initially claimed I understood the activity of *Vi gillar olika*.

The concept of “doing” needs to be attended to. To “take a stand” for or against something, as done by *Vi gillar olika*, is typically understood as doing something, while not taking a stand becomes to not do. However, when “taking a stand” means “taking sides” and the sides to choose between represent a flawed binary, one must hesitate and ask what the “doing” really consists of.

The campaign discourse reproduces an idea of the immigrant as different, and creates an image of an anti-racist collective as well as racist ditto. This is what my analysis tells me that the campaign “does”, more than performing anti-racism. I wanted to see how *Vi gillar olika* depicts its society and what this depiction can tell us in terms of anti-racist politics in that society. I suspect that the image I depicted in the beginning of the analysis has become real in “our” social imaginary, and that “we” believe that if “we” can only keep *Sverigedemokraterna* on the outside of the hand that reads that we like different and marks the boundary between “us” as an anti-racist and diverse collective, and “them” as racists we are safe and racism is not a problem in the society that *Vi gillar olika* seeks to represent.

To *Vi gillar olika*, anti-racism to a large extent seems to coincide with the act of supporting the campaign and to express this support and opinion in some way. Thus, to say that one is not a racist, that one “likes different” and appreciate that people “are different”, becomes the antiracist act. Signing the campaign is thus in a very direct way a performative act – in the Derridean sense of the word – letting the individual anyone merge with the anti-racist “we”, in a way as to say “I do”.¹⁸⁴ Thus, what one does in day-to-day life is not what makes one an anti-racist, even if it is assumed that one “is” an anti-racist, meaning that one is not being the kind of racist who openly says that one does not like different and who vote for *Sverigedemokraterna*.

It is obviously taken for granted that the campaign supporters practice anti-racism somehow in their everyday life, but how this is done is rarely talked about if not in terms of demonstrating and a general appreciation of values such as equality and human rights,

¹⁸⁴ as referred by Judith Butler in *Gender trouble*, 1999, p xv

which can be seen to mean little in terms of political achievement.

Vi gillar olika thus becomes an end in itself – it becomes “anti-racism”. To anyone who believes that to the extent anti-racism is at all possible it needs to be more, this is problematic. To borrow yet another concept from Ahmed; *Vi gillar olika* can be understood as non-performative.¹⁸⁵ It becomes its own solution, an end in itself. Anti-racism as understood in the discourse targets racism as understood in the discourse. To say that one is anti-racist, that one “likes different”, becomes the anti-racist act – an act that as such can be seen as demanding nothing and thus as performing nothing in terms of what it sets out to do. It is not only that “clicking” to sign the campaign or like the Facebook site is too “easy”, as the critique on “slacktivism” has it. It is also that the campaign proclamation itself is too “easy”. It demands nothing more than “liking difference” as in *saying* that one likes different, and the difference referred to is so abstract that it is impossible to disagree with and thus, binds the “anti-racist” to nothing in terms of personal and political engagement.

Sartre states that: “It is not up to the Jews first of all to form a militant league against anti-Semitism; it is up to us.”¹⁸⁶ This league, Sartre continues, should seek to spread out across the (French) society and intervene wherever it sees injustice; infiltrate media and education, get state recognition and form an ally with similar leagues internationally.

Vi gillar olika seem to share some of the features of Sartre’s league. It works through the media, it has spread out across society and it has gotten state recognition in the sense that party leaders and state officials have openly declared their support for the project. The only thing really lacking to *Vi gillar olika* in comparison to Sartre’s militant league is the militancy: *Vi gillar olika does not intervene wherever it sees injustice. Vi gillar olika* is not focusing on injustice in any other way than as pronounced in the rhetoric of *Sverigedemokraterna* and so it does not see it.

As an act of compassion, *Vi gillar olika* sets out to save its other from the violence of *Sverigedemokraterna*. It seems then as if Spivak’s notion of “white men saving brown women

¹⁸⁵ Sara Ahmed, “Declarations of whiteness: the non-performativity of anti-racism” in *Borderlands e-journal*, vol 3. no 2, 2004; “‘Liber multiculturalism is the hegemony – It’s an empirical fact’ A response to Slavoj Žižek” in *Darkmatter: in the ruins of imperial cultural*, general issue, 2008-02-19. In this latter article a conflict between Ahmed and Žižek is presented; Ahmed’s article being a response to Žižek’s argument that “liberal multiculturalism is the hegemony”. Ahmed states that it is this argument itself; that “liberal multiculturalism is hegemonic” that is hegemonic. I have made use of Žižek’s thoughts on violence but I think his argument in this matter is flawed.

¹⁸⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-semitism and Jew*, 1995 (1948), p 152

from brown men" can be extended to "good white people saving brown people from evil white people".¹⁸⁷

A final note

I think Žižek's call for "resisting the temptation to engage immediately" is crucial if we are to take the possibility for anti-racism seriously. To take a step back and critically analyse what appears to be a "good" or "anti-racist" act seems necessary, in order to reach a deeper understanding of how violence sometimes structures also well-meaning deeds, and how we, as "good" citizens, ourselves are both constitutive of and constituted by, the violent structure that is "our society". If this is to do nothing, than nothing is the best I can do for now.

¹⁸⁷ Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?" in Cary Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg (ed's), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*, University of Illionois Press, 1988

Epilogue

The meeting starts. A white teacher urges her non-white students up on stage. 13 years old, jerky and giggly; obviously excited while trying to seem casual, unwilling even, the colourful choir lines up before their teacher and the audience. Piano tunes fill the room and the teacher's waving arms direct the students who have become still before their task: Hold – hold – and – sing:

...

We are the world

We are the children

We are the ones who make a brighter day

So let's start giving

There's a choice we're making

We're saving our own lives

It's true we'll make a better day

Just you and me

...

Hjällbo, September 27th, 2011

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