

Race in Sweden

Racism and Antiracism in the World's First 'Colourblind' Nation

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Chapter 2

The emergence and development of the world's first colourblind nation

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2 The emergence and development of the world's first colourblind nation

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on the transition from the white purity period to the white solidarity period and principally on the white solidarity period in its prime blooming and golden age of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, which constitutes the basis for the construction of “good Sweden”. Specifically, the chapter examines how and why Sweden has become the country in the world that has gone the furthest in terms of developing a colourblind approach to race.

The starting point is that Sweden during the first half of the 20th century was one of the countries in the democratic part of Europe which invested the most in racial thinking, race science and race hygiene and that from the end of the 20th century, Sweden has since become the first, the most and arguably also the only colourblind antiracist state on Earth. The purpose of the chapter is to try to trace today's Swedish colourblind antiracism back in time to its origin during the post-war period and follow its development and gradual radicalisation mainly between 1960 and 2015, and the chapter tries to answer the following questions: How has the Swedish critique of race emerged during the post-war period, and how has the demand to eliminate the word *race* been expressed over time? How has the critique of the term race been articulated and which arguments have been used and mobilised to criticise the word race? And why have Sweden and the Swedes become the world's most colourblind country and people in relation to issues of race, racism and antiracism?

The examined material consists partly of media texts published in newspapers and magazines in the form of, among other things, debate articles and op-eds, editorials, cultural essays and news articles, and partly of parliamentary and government material in the form of inquiries, reports, motions coming from Members of Parliament (MPs), debate minutes and government bills. The temporal limitation is explained by the fact that the first modern and explicit critique of the concept of race in Sweden can be dated back to a number of newspaper articles which were published from around 1960. The year 2015 is in its turn explained by the fact that it was during this year when the latest of in total three state inquiries was published, which all have been tasked with investigating the possibility of eliminating the concept of race from all Swedish legal and official texts and also with finding a replacement word for the term.

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Colourblindness here means the attitude and approach to race that says that we should not see race, think in terms of race, talk about race, operationalise the concept of race or even make use of the word race itself. David Theo Goldberg has termed this extreme attitude to race *antiracism* as he distinguishes between a racially conscious antiracism that makes active use of the concept of race to be able to identify, analyse and fight racism and an antiracism that aims to counteract the use of the term race with the aim of eventually eliminating the very word race (Goldberg 2009, p. 10). Colourblindness has been theorised and studied by several researchers in the English-speaking world ever since one of the founders of critical race theory, Neil Gotanda (1991), initiated the study of colourblindness as a specific approach and attitude to race. Some of these researchers include Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003), who talks about *colourblind racism*; Sumi Cho (2009), who uses the term *post-racial thinking* or *post-racialism*; Jennifer C. Mueller (2020), who uses the terms *white ignorance* or *racial ignorance*; and Alana Lentin (2018), who uses the term *non-racism*.

All these theorists and researchers, however, study various expressions of colourblindness in the English-speaking world, which means that research on colourblindness in the US, such as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's analysis of American colourblindness as a manifestation of American neoliberalism rather than a progressive antiracism, as is the case in Sweden, is not really comparable to or even applicable to the understanding of Swedish colourblindness. In other words, it is difficult and in many cases perhaps not even possible to transfer analyses and theoretical understandings of colourblindness in different English-speaking countries to Swedish conditions, as Swedish colourblindness is so specific in its progressive radicalism. Contemporary Europe in general, except for the UK and a number of other countries, can admittedly also be characterised by an at least more or less colourblind attitude to race, but each individual European country also has its own history that explains the origin and maintenance of its colourblindness. France, for example, is a colourblind country, as well as Germany, but French colourblindness does not stem directly from any radical progressive antiracism as in Sweden but from the French ideology of republican universalism, while German colourblindness has its direct origin in the country's perpetrator role before and during WW2 (Beaman and Petts 2020; Salem and Thompson 2016). There are however some similarities to the neighbouring countries of Norway and Finland, which also have abolished the term race and thus followed the Swedish example but Norwegianness and Finnishness are at the same time not as intimately associated with antiracism as Swedishness is (Bang and Stine 2014).

Colourblind Sweden refers to the country that in the course of barely a century went from being the European democratic country that probably invested the most in racial thinking to then becoming in practice the world's first and so far possibly also only colourblind state on a political, legal, official and also popular and attitudinal level, as well as within the academia, the media and the cultural sphere. Swedish colourblindness also not only

permeates Swedish society as a whole, but it is also in practice the same as what is considered to be antiracism in a Swedish context. This means that in Sweden, colourblindness is the same as antiracism in its antiracial version for the vast majority of all Swedes regardless of political background. Sweden, for example, is one of a few states on Earth where there is an official government action plan against structural racism which at the very same time also distances itself from the concept of race, as well as from equality data (Regeringskansliet 2016). In addition, Sweden works actively, as part of its antiracist foreign policy, to get both other sovereign states and supranational organisations to abolish the concept of race, as in relation to the European Union (EU) or the Council of Europe (1999 års diskrimineringsutredning 2001, p. 249).

From 2001 and onwards, after the Green Party parliamentary motion from 1996, the word race has routinely been avoided in ordinances and legal texts such as in that year's new law on equal treatment of students in higher education, and it has been systematically eliminated, as in the revised constitution that came into force from 2011. When the current Swedish discrimination law was promulgated in 2008, race was not included at all as a ground for discrimination after another inquiry into the question of eliminating the concept of race. Instead, race was replaced with the euphemistic expression "other similar circumstance" (*annat liknande förhållande*) despite the law being based on the EU's race directive, which has its very basis in the concept of race (Utredningen om aktiva åtgärder mot diskriminering 2014, p. 83).

The Swedish elimination of the concept of race also applies not only to legal texts but to all printed Swedish-language texts in general. For example, the leading Swedish textbook publisher when it comes to higher education, Studentlitteratur, published a translation of the American researchers Lynn S. Chancer's and Beverly Xaviera Watkins' book *Gender, Race, and Class* in 2009 which was called *Social Positions – An Overview* (*Sociala positioner – en översikt*) in Swedish to be able to avoid the word race in the title. The book was even provided with a preface written by a Swedish social scientist with the aim of explaining the use of the word race in the English-language original title for the Swedish readers who were in advance expected to be upset by the presence of the word race. "For many Swedish readers, this can be a word that is loaded with negative meanings", the preface said with the knowledge that this is most certainly also the case in colourblind Sweden (Krekula 2009, p. 7).

Yet another example of how the word race has been exorcised from the Swedish language is Johan Forsell's textbook in sociology, where he writes that the few times when the word race is nowadays used in Swedish-language printed text, the word is almost always put "in quotation marks to show that it is a clumsy and outdated expression" and that "whoever wants to be correct" should instead use the word "ethnicity" (Forsell 2017, p. 170). The practice of replacing the word race with ethnicity was institutionalised in official Swedish-language texts already from the beginning of the 2000s according to a parliament and government recommendation and is today also the norm in academic contexts (Osanami Törngren 2015).

Previous research and empirical material

It is this peculiar Swedish *Sonderweg* in modern history in terms of the drastically changing Swedish view of race that forms the starting point for this chapter; namely, this sharp throw from having indulged fully in racial thinking to then going the furthest in an antiracial thinking and in investing in colourblindness as the dominant approach to race and as the only accepted form of antiracism. The theoretical framework concerning the development of Swedish whiteness and Swedish race relations over time that was presented in the previous chapter also constitutes the analytical understanding for this chapter (HübINETTE and LUNDSTRÖM 2015; LUNDSTRÖM and HübINETTE 2020). Within this framework, the need and desire for colourblindness from the 1960s and onwards is seen in the light of the racial thinking that permeated Sweden during the white purity period between 1905 and 1968.

As for previous research, the number of existing studies that specifically examine the view of the concept of race in a Swedish post-war setting is almost non-existent. In other words, there is still no Swedish equivalent to the type of study that Poul Duedahl (2017) has been behind for the Danish context, which looks at how the view and use of the concept of race developed in Denmark during the period 1890–1965. Legal researcher Leila Brännström (2016) is the only one who so far has studied the concept of race in a Swedish context in a more complete way. Brännström has mapped and analysed the entry and exit of the concept of race in Swedish legal contemporary history from the beginning of the 1970s and until the concept began to be eliminated in the 2000s, and she concludes that Swedish antiracial thinking and the elimination of the term race ultimately affects non-white Swedes in a negative way, who are thereby deprived of the opportunity to protest, report, debate and even verbalise discrimination based on race (Brännström 2016). In addition, Brännström (2018) has also studied how Swedish courts treat and perceive discrimination cases that are based on the discrimination ground of ethnic origin.

Otherwise, there are no other previous studies that directly examine the Swedish view of the concept of race in relation to Swedish colourblindness and Swedish antiracism, but there are however a number of related studies that operationalise the term colourblindness or examine different attitudes to race in contemporary Sweden. In her report on different ways of relating to the concept of race, Marja Ågren (2016) has identified a number of Swedish approaches to the word and the following approach is the one that dominates in today's Sweden and also within the Swedish academia:

[T]o avoid the term – with disgust – because it symbolises something old and horrible. One probably uses culture or ethnicity instead, and expects that most others mean roughly what you yourself mean by these concepts.
(Ågren 2016, p. 52)

Among studies that operationalise colourblindness as an analytical concept are Sayaka Osanami Törngren's (2011, 2018) study of Swedish views of

interracial intimate relationships, Osanami Törngren's and Sofia Ulver's (2020) study of racial representation in Swedish television advertising and Osa Lundberg's (2015) and Carolin Schütze's (2019) PhD theses on the silence of racism in Swedish schools and among officials who work with migrants. Regarding research on Swedish antiracism, Jenny Malmsten (2007) touches on the fact that her informants are all negative towards the concept of race in her dissertation on Swedish antiracists, while Jan Jämte (2013, p. 34) talks about a "scientific antiracism" that opposes the concept of race in his history of the Swedish antiracist movement.

Regarding research on the use of the concept of race in Sweden, the historian Martin Ericsson (2021) has argued that Swedish race science must be understood as a continuity before and after the war rather than as a discontinuity as, for example, the progressive researcher Gunnar Dahlberg, who was the director of the State Institute for Race Biology 1935–1956, continued to use the concept of race also during the post-war period. Kjell Jonsson (2004) has also looked at Gunnar Dahlberg's approach to the concept of race, while Lina Spjut (2018) has studied the occurrence of the concept of race in Swedish school textbooks. Ericsson (2022) has also examined how the idea of race and racial taxonomies were present in Swedish encyclopaedias into the early 1990s. In other words, it is fair to say that in addition to Brännström's study of the concept of race and its entry and exit from the Swedish constitution and from Swedish ordinance and legal texts, there has so far been a lack of research on Swedish negotiations on, understandings of, views of and attitudes to the concept of race and not the least studies on the origin and development of Sweden's colourblind antiracism.

As for the chapter's empirical data, the text material has been found by systematically searching for all texts that contain the word race in the newspaper article databases *Svenska dagstidningar* (see <https://tidningar.kb.se>), which the National Library of Sweden is responsible for, and *Mediearkivet* (see <https://www.retrievergroup.com/sv>), which the company Retriever is responsible for, as well as on the Swedish parliament's and government's websites (see <https://www.riksdagen.se> and <https://www.regeringen.se>). The collected material consists of close to 500 separate media texts and around 100 parliamentary and government texts, out of which several inquiries can amount to hundreds of pages.

Around two-thirds of both text types originate from 1990 and onwards, that is from the transitional period of 1991–2001 between the white solidarity period and the white melancholy period. Furthermore, it is only in the 2010s that the concept of race becomes the subject of a more open discussion and not just of pure criticism that is expressed as routine demands to abolish the term. It should also be said here that in a large number of the texts collected, the word race occurs only on a single occasion and not infrequently once in passing in the form of a quote or to exemplify something. The general tendency from the 1990s has simply been to by all means avoid the word race itself in media texts as well as in printed texts in general.

The collected text material has been categorised in accordance with the main themes corresponding to the three empirical parts of this chapter. The first theme deals with the arguments expressed when criticising the concept of race and when demanding the elimination of the word. This applies to arguments based on science and more specifically on natural science, and medical and genetic research as the Swedish understanding of the word race is so intimately embedded within the history of Swedish race biology. The second theme is centred on Swedish values and Swedishness and specifically on attitudes and perceptions on Swedish antiracism as well as on Swedish racism. The third theme concerns how supranational organisations like the UN become criticised by Sweden and Swedes as they make use of the concept of race and also how American so-called race fixation is considered to be morally wrong and inherently racist.

The Swedish race biological understanding of race

This first theme looks at the arguments against the concept of race on the basis of science saying that the concept is unscientific and that it should therefore be eliminated. The first traces of a Swedish post-war critique of the concept of race in the text material appear already from around 1960 when then well-known Swedish researchers and public intellectuals such as Gunnar Boalt, Herbert Tingsten, Sven Nilsson and Åke Gustafsson argued that the concept was “vague” and “unclear” (Dagens Nyheter 1959; Nilsson 1962; SVALE 1962; Teora 1963; Tingsten 1955).

It is striking that the first and early critique of the concept of race in Sweden was about emphasising that there were no pure races and that all racial groups are in fact mixed and not about demanding an elimination of the word itself. This critique of the notion that there are pure races can be interpreted as a specific distancing from the type of racial thinking that had prevailed in Sweden during the first half of the 20th century and which lived on also during the immediate post-war period. For the Swedish researchers and intellectuals, it was in other words about a need to distance themselves from the specific idea that the white Swedes had been considered to be the purest of all white nations in the world and that they, therefore, had been considered to be the foremost subgroup of the white race in their capacity as having been seen as the prime representative of the so-called Nordic race, which was in its turn the most noble and valuable branch of the white race (Hagerman 2006; Kjellman 2013; Schough 2008).

Later in the 1960s however, voices started to be raised against the concept as such. In 1965, for example, the evening newspaper *Aftonbladet* was able to dramatically report from a course held by a student association in Uppsala where sociologist Joachim Israel had lectured that “today associate professor Joachim Israel abolished the concept of race”, and in the article, it was explained that Israel had referred to the notion of races being pure (Kumm 1961).

During the next decade, the categorical distancing from pre-war Swedish racial thinking and specifically from the old race biological view of the

concept of race in the style of Israel's statement became both increasingly clear and more common. In 1970, a Swedish biologist objected to the use of the word race in a government bill concerning the possible introduction of a law against racial discrimination in connection with Sweden ratifying the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) (Gawell 1970). This is the first example in the examined material of a critique of the concept in relation to the context of antiracist measures and in this case in relation to the earliest introduction of antiracist legislation in Sweden.

In 1975, the argument was made that the "scientific significance of the concept of race was uncertain" when Amnesty International's Swedish section and the Swedish Writers' Union questioned that the word race had been introduced in the Swedish constitution in the wake of Sweden having ratified ICERD (Diskrimineringsutredningen 1983, p. 72). In this way, these two organisations became the first organisations to officially question the concept of race out of scientific arguments, and the Swedish Writers' Union even questioned the term skin colour while arguing that the term ethnicity, which was a relatively new concept in the 1970s, was enough to make use of in legislative texts (Diskrimineringsutredningen 1983, p. 72).

To continue, the Discrimination Inquiry, which was active from 1978 to 1984 and which was the first Swedish government inquiry focusing solely on the problem of racial discrimination within the country, made a clear demarcation between an anthropological concept of race, which can be said to correspond to the cultural studies and social science view of race as a social construction, and the biological view of natural scientists and especially of medicine and genetics (Diskrimineringsutredningen 1983, p. 75). This differentiation also in practice meant a strong emphasis on the natural scientific understanding of race, which in its turn was a legacy of Swedish race biology, which had always been the domain of natural science, medicine and genetics.

The cultural and social scientific view of race as a socially constructed category would from then on always fall in the shadow of the natural scientists' medical, biological and genetic view of race as the last understanding of the word has always been the dominant one in Sweden. An illuminating example of natural scientists having owned and monopolised the issue of race from the beginning is that the Swedish Medical Board was responsible for issues concerning migration and minorities until the authority merged with the National Board of Health and Welfare in 1968. That is, for example, the reason why the Swedish Medical Board was commissioned to comment if Sweden would start adopting non-white children from other countries or not in the early 1960s (Hübinette 2021a). As the so-called racial issues in Sweden fell under the domain of natural science and medicine, and since the issue of immigrants and minorities was seen as a so-called racial issue, it was logical that issues concerning migration, including the question of adoption of non-white children, also fell under the responsibility of the Medical Board. The consequence of this also became the beginning of the Swedish 1960s adoption debate as will be evident in Chapter 4.

The 1990s was characterised by strong reactions to the word race also in the media. In 1995, for example, the historian Mattias Tydén warned in *Svenska Dagbladet* that the word race was still being used now and then in Swedish media texts by referring to the fact that some newspapers had started to report on “race quarrels” between immigrant youth and right-wing extremists and thus had used the word race in the form of this word composition (Tydén 1995). Some years later, the historian Rolf Karlbom warned that a Swedish university had begun to give a course on the history of ideas of racial thinking and he, therefore, urged the minister of education to act resolutely against the university and the course in question so that it would stop being given “while there is time”:

[R]acism is not a science but an anti-intellectual forgery. The concept of race is metaphysical nonsense, used by totalitarian rulers to legitimise anti-Semitism, apartheid and other reprehensible ideas. One only needs to study dactyloscopy (the theory of fingerprints) or DNA to realise each individual’s unique status. The Minister of Education and the National Agency for Higher Education should review this type of pseudo-education. It is best if epidemics and plagues are stopped while there is time.

(Karlbom 1999)

Karlbom apparently automatically assumed that the course taught the type of racial thinking that applied in Sweden during large parts of the 20th century when it was in fact a course in the history of racial thinking and countered the imagined biologicistic racism with an argument for actual biologicistic individualism.

The fight against the word race

When the Green Party submitted its motion to the parliament in 1996 demanding that the concept of race should be eliminated from all Swedish laws and regulations, the MPs stated that “medical and biological research does not really provide any support for the definition” (Abascal Reyes et al. 1996). After, when the parliament had approved the motion, it also made an official announcement which all parties in the parliament supported and which said that “the parliament has stated that there is no scientific basis for dividing people into different races and consequently from a biological point of view no basis for using the word race about people”, again referring to the natural scientific understanding of race (1999 års diskrimineringsutredning 2001, p. 249). The parliament and the government also contacted the natural scientific Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences to get advice on the issue, which in practice means that it seemed completely natural for them to turn to the Swedish natural scientists’ most respected institution and later to the medical university Karolinska Institutet as well, which has also been engaged by the government in the work of eliminating the concept of race (Regeringen

2001a). The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences also issued its own expert opinion, which was summarised as follows:

[T]here is no scientific basis for dividing people into different races and consequently from a biological point of view no basis for using the word race about people.

(Konstitutionsutskottet 1998, p. 5)

As the expert statements of medical and natural scientists and genetics counted the most and always weighed most heavily it was therefore also to these researchers that the politicians continued to refer to when arguing for the abolishment of the word race. “There is no scientific basis for this word”, wrote for example two liberal MPs in a joint motion in 1998 and referred to the natural science concept of race (Persson and Ström 1998). Two Green Party MPs did the same in 2001 by writing that “there is no scientific basis for dividing people into different races” (Stalin and Ruwaida 2001). “The scientific position nowadays is that there is no scientific basis for talking about different human races”, the then social democratic government under Prime Minister Göran Persson summed up the state-of-the-art research situation in a government bill from 2001 (Regeringen 2001a, p. 29). In the same year, a discrimination inquiry added that “the scientific position strongly suggests that the concept of race should be eliminated in Swedish legislation”; that is, the Swedish natural scientists’ expert opinions were more than enough to initiate the tedious work of eliminating the word race (1999 års diskrimineringsutredning 2001, p. 249). In 2006, yet another MP requested that all occurrences of the word race be removed from Swedish legislation with a reference to the current state of research, which again meant only natural science (Diskrimineringskommittén 2006, p. 542).

As for the government’s approach to Swedish research and the concept of race, in 2012, a government bill addressed this issue and concluded that the term *ethnicity* is interchangeable with and synonymous with the concept of race and consequently that Swedish researchers should not make use of the concept of race at all anymore, and the same bill also concluded that the concept was hardly present anyway within Swedish academia (Regeringen 2012, p. 38). Five years later, the then government under Prime Minister Stefan Löfven said in another bill that “there can never be a need to make compilations based on race because there is no scientific basis for dividing people into different races” (Regeringen 2017, p. 37). Thus, argued the government, there is simply no reason at all to research race in Sweden and to make use of the concept within research as the natural scientific understanding of the concept of race which is so intimately connected with the old, Swedish racial thinking dominates fully as the framework of understanding the word race and to the degree that the government considered it completely irrelevant to research race in contemporary Sweden. The Swedish race biological legacy is in other words still almost completely dominant in the sense that most Swedish speakers associate the word race with race biology and

consequently with natural science, medicine and genetics, and therefore it has to be eliminated and disappear forever.

The Constitution Committee further stated explicitly that the concept of race was the domain of natural scientists in Sweden, unlike in the English-speaking countries where the social sciences and the humanities were also counted in the picture (Konstitutionsutskottet 2002, p. 14). The same was also pointed out by the association of Sweden's united LGBTQ students which wrote that "the English word race is a broader concept with an understanding that includes cultural experiences and socioeconomic background" (Utredningen om transpersoners straffrättsliga skydd m.m. 2015, p. 144). Yet, both the committee and the association were for the total abolishment of the concept of race in a Swedish setting.

In the 2000s, it also became increasingly common to criticise any kind of research which operationalises the concept of race. This criticism was directed not least at foreign and mainly English-language research, in which the term itself is commonplace. The leading Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, for example, wrote that it was remarkable that medical research in English-speaking countries makes use of the term race and that the scientific text database Medline catalogued studies that use the concept of race (Snarud 2002). Medline, which today is part of the scientific text database PubMed, was a database that contained millions of scientific references to mainly medical publications, and it could hardly be claimed that the English-speaking researchers behind all these studies are racists just because they operationalise the concept of race in their studies. A few years later, the newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* interviewed a number of Swedish researchers, who jointly and unanimously criticised the use of the term race in medical and pharmacological research in the English-speaking world (Ramel 2005). The fact that Swedish natural scientific and medical researchers categorically refuse to operationalise the concept of race also means that they regularly end up in more or less conflict with Anglophone colleagues and in the long run also risk isolating themselves.

The idea of Swedish values and Swedishness as equating antiracism

The second theme examines how Swedish values and Swedishness are equated with antiracism, as well as with colourblindness as a goal and as an ideal. The idea that Sweden is a more tolerant and less racist country than other Western nations started to be voiced in earnest already after the war as newspapers reported incidents of racial discrimination when visiting non-white and African American artists had problems finding lodgings at Swedish hotels and sometimes also tables at Swedish restaurants, and at this point, the word race was still used on a mundane level in Swedish language (Aftonbladet 1946; Norrskensflamman 1946).

In response to such incidents reported in the press, a writer in *Expressen* wrote that "let us Swedes show that democracy and racial hatred do not belong together" (Rödhårig 1946). The then minister of the interior Ejje

Mossberg stated that “a discriminatory treatment of individuals due to racial affiliation is completely contrary to the perception prevailing among the vast majority of Swedish citizens”, and it was the racial segregation of and racial discrimination against black people in the US which was routinely highlighted as a supposed opposite of Swedish values (Expressen 1947). Even though incidents of racial discrimination continued and even grew in frequency in the 1950s, the attitude was still that the Swedes were not racist, and at most, they were sometimes xenophobic due to the country’s racial homogeneity and isolated geographical location. In 1956, after yet another series of racial discrimination events, Communist *Norrskensflamman* (1956) devoted its whole editorial page to the question of “racial prejudice in Sweden” and concluded “racial prejudice is something completely foreign” to “the Swedish people’s large majority” meaning that it existed in other countries but not in Sweden (Norrskensflamman 1956).

In the 1940s and 1950s, a self-image was in other words cultivated which said that Sweden and the Swedes were largely free from racial prejudices, and when incidents of racial discrimination occurred, they were seen as being rare exceptions. In particular, the large mass of the Swedish people was perceived as being free from racial prejudices, and racial hatred was linked to the US and other Western countries and to something reactionary, conservative, old-fashioned and outdated, as well as to something undemocratic and foreign, while its opposite was said to be democratic values and not the least Swedish values.

In 1961, *Dagens Nyheter* reported that the historical university city of Lund would be visited by about 70 people from about 40 different countries including Liberia, Uganda, Cameroon, South Africa, Nigeria, Mexico, India, China and Japan (NoN, Lund 1961). The incoming foreign guests would participate in a summer course on racism, which the student union organised and which was financed with state funds. The fact that Sweden considered itself capable of teaching what racism was to 73 non-white visitors already in the early 1960s was probably due to the fact that several Swedes had participated in the UN agency UNESCO’s post-war work to reformulate the concept of race and that Sweden thus had come to see itself as the world’s expert country on racial issues. Similar visits would then continue throughout the 1960s. For example, in 1966, 55 black children from Chicago were officially invited to Sweden to be able to get “a glimpse of a generous and prejudice free country” and, among other things, got an audience at Stockholm Castle where they met King Gustaf VI Adolf after Martin Luther King had been allowed to do the same earlier in the same year (Ahlenius 1966). The African American children toured the country, and when they came back to the US they told the American public about Sweden as being practically the only white Western country without any racial prejudices.

At the beginning of the 1960s, an incipient colourblindness also started to make itself heard in the press, such as when the author Tord Wallström exclaimed passionately and indignantly in capital letters “THERE ARE NO RACES, THERE ARE ONLY HUMAN PEOPLE” in *Expressen* (Wallström

1962). In the same year, the artist Kerstin Ostwald criticised the use of the concept of race in relation to the question of the dire situation of the Swedish Roma, which was otherwise common in the 1960s when comparisons were made between the Roma minority in Sweden, said to be a Swedish race issue, and African Americans (Mohtadi 2012; Ohlsson Al Fakir 2015; Ostwald 1962). Ostwald instead argued that the Roma minority's situation was about "prejudices" and not a Swedish "racial problem", and she ended her article by writing that the best thing would be if "we realised that we all belong to one race, namely the human one" (Ostwald 1962).

As for the term colourblindness itself, it appeared for the first time in a Swedish-language text in 1962 in connection with the African American artist Josephine Baker visiting Sweden to appear on Swedish television together with several of her adopted children from different countries and continents, who according to Baker represented all racial groups of mankind (Pratt Guterl 2009). *Aftonbladet* took the opportunity to interview Baker in connection with her visit and wrote that "56-year-old Josephine Baker proves that the world can become colourblind" in relation to her 11 adopted children whom Baker named as her rainbow family, which is an expression that Baker also coined in the first place (Jansson 1962).

In the same year, 1962, the Swedish parliament debated for the first time the problem of cases of racial discrimination in Sweden, which had been directed at, among others, visiting black Americans, Roma people and also Sámis in Swedish hotels and restaurants (Hübinette 2021b; Utredningen angående förbud mot rasdiskriminering 1968, p. 13). In the 1962 parliamentary debate, as well as in later discussions in the parliament when the issue was raised during the 1960s, it appeared that the government's position, and the official Swedish line in general, was that no specific legislation against racial discrimination was needed at all in Sweden, as most Swedes were said to be antiracist:

A greater need for legal rules, including a ban on racial or ethnic discrimination as such...have not so far prevailed in our country. For the vast majority of citizens, it should be obvious that everyone, regardless of race, should be treated equally.

(Utredningen angående förbud mot rasdiskriminering 1968, p. 14)

In 1964, the evening paper *Expressen's* editorial also agreed with the position that Sweden did not need any racial discrimination law after a Roma family had been refused entry to a restaurant by referring to the Swedes' strong "reaction to abuses" (*Expressen* 1964). *Expressen* argued that if a restaurant or a hotel were to discriminate against African Americans, Roma people or other minority residents, the absolute majority of the Swedish people would both condemn and stigmatise the institution in question so that it would be "hit hard by a strong moral judgement of rejection" and eventually forced to close and go bankrupt.

The 1960s was also the decade when more and more Swedes had started to adopt non-white children from other countries, and during the decade, an

animated debate took place regarding whether Sweden and the Swedes should institutionalise the adoptions of children of colour or not (Hübinette 2021a). It was in connection with the 1960s adoption debate that colour-blindness came to be established as an expression in the Swedish language with the meaning that is today attached to the term – that is, the approach to race that says that race should not play any role in politics, society and culture and that the word itself should also be avoided as much as possible and even eliminated from language itself. The proponents for transnational adoption argued that Sweden had no colonial past like the other Western countries had and that the Swedes were less racist than the other Western nations were (Moberg 1964; Sterner 1963). Thus, despite Sweden's recent history of racial thinking and race biology, the country saw itself as being better suited than any other Western country to take in and adopt non-white children.

In 1971, *Aftonbladet's* Erik Eriksson (1971a, 1971b, 1971c) published a series of articles on “the new hatred of foreigners”, and he began by stating that racism was something that applied in South Africa and the US and earlier also in Germany but that in Sweden, it was more a question of “xenophobia”. In 1975, Sweden's ambassador to Seoul Bengt Odevall assured South Korea that “3,400 Korean orphans adopted by Swedish families from 1967 to 1974 have been well integrated into their adoptive families” and that “there is no racial problem in our country such as discrimination” (Korea Newsreview 1975). Also in 1975, the Freedom and Rights Inquiry stated the following in relation to the fact that there was still a lack of legislation against racial discrimination in Sweden and that, according to the inquiry, no such legislation would be needed in the foreseeable future:

It seems completely incompatible with Swedish legal consciousness that society's organs could treat someone worse than others because he belongs to a certain race or a minority of people of a certain ethnic origin.

[...]

The Swedish population and social conditions, on the other hand, are such that the problem here becomes relatively insignificant.

(1973 års fri- och rättighetsutredning 1975, pp. 114–115)

The inquiry thus stated that due to the Swedish progressive social conditions and the Swedes' tolerant and positive attitudes towards immigrants and minorities, there was no need for racial discrimination legislation in Sweden even though Sweden had ratified ICERD and was thus required to legislate against racial discrimination.

Taking the lead in combating racial prejudices in the world

In 1963, the psychologist Anna-Lisa Kälvesten proposed, in relation to the adoption debate, that Sweden should even take the lead among the white

nations in the world in breaking with “racial prejudices” once and for all and thus become the leading antiracist pioneer in the Western world in the same way that Sweden had already become in terms of having solved what had previously been called the labour issue and which caused foreign delegations to visit Sweden:

Would it not be something to strive for to in the future receive similar study delegations with the purpose to see how we managed the problem of receiving some coloured children without becoming inflamed by racial prejudices. As small as the world begins to become, it is necessary for one of the white nations to take the lead.

(Kälvesten 1963, p. 36)

During the 1960s, an increasingly strong attitude was cultivated which said that even though there were some people having racial prejudices also in Sweden, they were both declining dramatically and far less common than in other Western countries, and this idea and self-image were especially formulated in connection with the adoption debate. More and more utopian elements could also be heard which said that Sweden had a unique role to play in the world as the great role model in terms of racial harmony and racial tolerance. In 1967, for example, the world-famous social democrat and feminist Alva Myrdal spoke at a conference in Malmö and touched on the issue of racial prejudices, and she then said that the Swedes had understood that it was “uneducated to have racial prejudices” to a much greater extent than the other Western countries (Arbetet 1967). In other words, Myrdal meant that the Swedes had far fewer racial prejudices than other white nations harboured at the time.

In the 1970s, the idea that Sweden and the Swedes were the least racist in the West continued to develop in connection with Sweden ratifying ICERD, as well as in relation to the first state inquiry into issues of discrimination taking place in Sweden (Diskrimineringsutredningen 1983). This position that Sweden was by no means as racially discriminatory as the other Western countries in the world and that the Swedes harboured far fewer racial prejudices than other Western peoples on Earth was voiced when the parliament discussed the ratification of ICERD in 1970. Several members of parliament claimed that Swedish gender discrimination was far more widespread than Swedish racial discrimination, and the liberal MP Eric Nelander was convinced that “for us Swedes, it seems quite natural that – as the UN’s general declaration puts it – all people are born free and with equal value and rights” (Riksdagen 1970, p. 176).

The world-famous social democratic leader Olof Palme, who was then the opposition leader after the historic social democratic election defeat in 1976, also believed that the Swedes were already exceptionally progressive as compared to all the other white Westerners when it came to both fighting and eradicating racial prejudices:

We must all learn to accept other people's distinctiveness. It's a long way before we get there. But here in Sweden, we are still enormously far ahead of other people in this respect.

(Arbetet 1977)

During the 1970s, the foundation of colourblind Sweden was laid out, as Sweden was seen as the avant-garde of Western antiracism, being "ahead of other people". The next step would then be to erase the word race altogether, possibly even rendering the term racism obsolete.

In 1977, the then director general of the Swedish Migration Agency Kjell Öberg said that he did not think that there was any ground in Sweden for a politically organised "race hate" of the type that had emerged in Britain in the form of the infamous conservative MP Enoch Powell and the far-right party the National Front (Valfridsson 1977). However only two years later, in 1979 a far-right organisation was formed calling itself Keep Sweden Swedish (*Bevara Sverige svenskt*), which later on developed into the Sweden Democrats.

In the 1980s and during the first half of the 1990s, it became increasingly common for not only individual Swedes to express criticism of the concept of race but also of the term racism, which many seem to have found to have no bearing at all on Sweden and on the Swedes other than in relation to the Swedish Nazi movement. The then equality ombudsman against ethnic discrimination Peter Nobel said in 1986 that "Sweden is not racist" and that racism was hardly a problem at all in Sweden due to Swedish humanism and Sweden's solidarity with and development aid in the so-called Third World (Frankendal 1986).

In 1987, Gunnar Johnson demanded in *Dagens Nyheter* that the then prime minister Ingvar Carlsson and all the other Swedish politicians should use the term xenophobia instead of the word racism "because the term is linked to Nazi racism" (Johnson 1987). In the same year, the then leading migration and minority researcher Charles Westin said that it was more about problems with xenophobia in Sweden and that "in the real sense there is no racism in Sweden" in an interview (Kennedy 1987). In the following year, Sweden's then social democratic minister of immigration Georg Andersson further stated that "racism has not increased" in Sweden, and Andersson referred to Swedish legal consciousness and to Swedish humanism in the form of the Swedes' solidarity with the postcolonial so-called Third World as the explanation for this (Andersson 1988).

Despite all these statements coming from the establishment, in the 1990s, the Nazi skinhead youth subculture was growing in Sweden, and in 1991, a right-wing populist party entered the parliament while at the same time, the colourblind reaction to this development became even more radical. In 1994, seven social democratic MPs demanded measures against the violent Nazi groups that were active in the 1990s. In the motion text, the social democratic MPs expressed that they wanted to be careful about using the term racism in relation to the Nazis and the far right, and they, therefore, proposed the following:

The crime should suitably be described as organised ethnic persecution. It is important that the concept of racism is not unnecessarily given a too broad meaning.

(Franck et al. 1994)

This view of the Swedish Nazi movement of the 1990s probably reflected the then widespread attitude that they were mostly just angry young men and not any “real” racists. The argument that there was no racism to speak of in Sweden but that there was primarily a minor problem with prejudices and some lingering xenophobia or that the term racism was overused would then continue to be heard around the turn of the last millennium. Furthermore, some also said that the term racist risked stigmatising people who were critical of immigration and that the term racism and even more the term racial discrimination were problematic as they risked reproducing a racial thinking (Andreasson 2000). In 2000, the American cultural geographer Allan Pred concluded in an interview in *Svenska Dagbladet* that racism was far more difficult to discuss in Sweden than in other Western countries due to the proud recent history of the self-conscious Swedish anti-apartheid movement (Westerståhl Stenport 2000).

The Green Party parliamentary motion from 1996, which became the starting point for the systematic elimination of the concept of race from Swedish legal and official texts, also argued that there was consensus in Sweden that the concept of race was reprehensible and in practice that the Swedish values considered the same (Abascal Reyes et al. 1996). The government’s bill that formed the basis for the decision to remove race as a ground for discrimination in the 2008 discrimination act further stated that it was “important that the new discrimination law reflects current values” (Regeringen 2008, p. 120). The increasingly charged term racism also disappeared more and more in public text production from the turn of the millennium and onwards, and instead, it became more common to refer to “prejudices” and “xenophobia” in various motions, inquiries and parliamentary debates. The social democratic MP Barbro Hietala Nordlund said, for example, in a parliamentary debate that “by using the word race we risk inciting prejudice”, and she ended her speech by saying that “we must avoid all concepts that can support xenophobic forces”, including terms like racism (Riksdagen 2002, p. 35).

Finally, Swedish values were also what the then minister for integration Erik Ullenhag referred explicitly to when he argued in a debate article in *Nerikes Allehanda* that the last instances where the word race still appear in Swedish laws and regulations should be removed once and for all:

Swedish laws must reflect contemporary values and views and this does not include the notion that there are different human races.

(Ullenhag 2014)

Evidently, these Swedish values were coextensive with colourblindness. Ullenhag’s statement can in other words be said to have summed up the end

result of the construction of Swedishness as being equated with antiracism, which in the mid-2010s had finally become completely naturalised.

Sweden's international antiracist crusade against the word race

This third and last theme takes up how Sweden criticises international organisations and especially the UN and the EU, as they are both making use of the concept of race. The theme also includes how Sweden relates to and criticises other countries which are using the concept of race and principally the US and the Anglophone world. The first part accounts mainly for the parliamentary and governmental texts while the second part accounts for the media texts.

After the 1996 Green Party motion which demanded the abolishment of the word race from Swedish legislation, the Constitutional Committee asked the then coordinator for translation into Swedish at the European Commission, Kenneth Larsson, about the suitability of eliminating the term in relation to the EU. Larsson then made a long statement and advised against initiating a Swedish elimination of the word:

Kenneth Larsson points out in his response that the word race (and its equivalent in different languages) is used referring to people in a number of international documents, e.g. in the Council of Europe conventions, the Geneva Convention, the UN Conventions and the Olympic Charter. The word race also occurs in all types of EU legislation.

[...]

Kenneth Larsson considers it impossible to avoid the use of the word in the Swedish EU texts as long as other languages use the term. A consequence of this should be that the word race would continue to be used in Swedish EU regulations. Kenneth Larsson cannot comment on whether the Commission and the court would accept that the word is not used in Swedish statutes that implement EU directives where the word race occurs.

(Konstitutionsutskottet 1998, p. 5)

Although Larsson never said outright that Sweden would be criticised if the path of elimination was initiated in his statement, which clearly advised against this, that was exactly what came later together with other intricate obstacles. The principal problem was that Sweden had committed itself to numerous international agreements that contain the word race. Time and time again it was also stated in the various reports and inquiries that it was a fundamental obstacle that Sweden had bound itself towards international organisations through membership in, for example, the UN and the EU and by having signed a number of different treaties, all of which had in common that they contain the word race and different derivations, compositions and inflections of the word such as in the form of racial discrimination. The Discrimination Committee's report from 2006, for example, listed an

extensive number of “conventions and other instruments” that Sweden had signed over the decades and which derived from several supranational actors such as the International Labour Organization, all of which make use of the word race (Diskrimineringskommittén 2006, p. 293).

In connection with the parliament’s approval of the 1996 Green Party motion, the parliament also issued a statement saying that the Swedish government “in international contexts should work to ensure that the word race, used about people, is avoided as far as possible in official texts” (1999 års diskrimineringsutredning 2001, p. 249). Thus, the demand for the elimination of the concept of race from then on became part of Sweden’s foreign policy, and that is why the then EU committee’s social democratic member Mona Sahlin and Christian democratic member Holger Gustafsson together raised the question in 2000 that Sweden would require the EU to eradicate the word race:

Last but not least: Since the word “race” is used in guideline 8, we want it to be very clear in the recit to the guidelines that the European Union rejects all theories that there are particular human races. This is a point of view we have made several times.

(EU-nämnden 2000b, p. 21, 26, 28)

At the EU committee’s 2000 meetings where the EU’s race directive was discussed, there was full consensus across party lines that Sweden would work for that. “We must try to continue to push the issue of getting rid of the word race”, Mona Sahlin stated when she summarised the main issues that Sweden would pursue towards and within the EU as a relatively new member state (EU-nämnden 2000a, p. 22). In the end, a compromise was reached between Sweden and the EU as the EU partially accepted Sweden’s demand and introduced a special clause in the EU directive on equal treatment regardless of race or ethnic origin, which states that “the European Union rejects the theories that try to establish that there are different human races” (Konstitutionsutskottet 2001, p. 10; Regeringen 2001b, p. 10).

Also within the context of the Council of Europe, Sweden has come to work actively for the Council of Europe to remove the concept of race and especially in relation to its special commission the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), which was installed in 1994 to combat racism and racial discrimination and which operationalises the word race in practically all its documents (Konstitutionsutskottet 2001, p. 5). Individual MPs, such as from the Liberal Party and the Left Party, have also emphasised in connection with the various inquiries into the concept of race that Sweden must continue to make international organisations understand that the word race should be eliminated and that “the government should make efforts to work for the word to be eliminated” outside of Sweden also in relation to other sovereign states (Diskrimineringskommittén 2006, pp. 542, 567).

In 2007, the European Parliament adopted a recommendation to the member states, including Sweden, that they should start collecting statistics on the various grounds of discrimination and on the minorities that each ground corresponds to by the way of equality data based on the survey method's principles of anonymity, voluntariness, informed consent and self-categorisation (Al-Zubaidi 2012, 2021; Hübinette 2015). The Swedish EU parliamentarians at the time, however, do not seem to have understood at all what equality data means and warned in *Aftonbladet* that the EU was forcing Sweden to start registering race and introduce a state race register:

The EU wants to reduce discrimination – by registering which race you belong to.

[...]

It is in the proposal for the EU's new discrimination directive that this very controversial proposal is found. The document states, inter alia, that “the European Parliament recommends that the member states consider collecting statistics on the representation of different races and ethnic groups”.

[...]

But it is madness, albeit with good ambitions, says Christofer Fjellner (Conservative Party).

[...]

Despite this, the report was voted through – by a large majority. It now goes to the European Commission, which will then most likely produce a bill.

– If it is also voted through, Statistics Sweden must start collecting such information and send it to Brussels, says EU parliamentarian Carl Schlyter (Green Party). The Swedish members of the parliament are concerned about the development.

(Bynert 2007)

This completely misinformed view of what equality data means still applies today in the Swedish political debate, as will be obvious in the last chapter of this book. Despite the fact that the three inquiries into the matter of abolishing the word race ensured that Sweden continued to respect its commitments towards the international structures even after the word had been removed from for example the discrimination act, the criticism soon came from the very same organisations. The previously mentioned Kenneth Larsson had also warned of all the linguistic, legal and political problems that would arise if Sweden still chose to start the journey towards a systematic elimination of the word race and not least in relation to the EU. The various supranational organisations all began to regularly draw attention to and strongly criticise the Swedish abolishment of the word race in the 2000s, and the criticism of Sweden was strong and harsh, even though it was usually wrapped in bureaucratic language, such as from the sides of UN's ICERD and the Council of Europe's ECRI:

The committee also noted that Sweden had removed the word race from the discrimination act and the constitution. The Committee considered that this could lead to difficulties in qualifying and handling reports of racial discrimination and thus affect access to justice.

(Utredningen om transpersoners straffrättsliga skydd m.m. 2015, p. 150)

The UN, the EU and the Council of Europe were all primarily concerned that the Swedish elimination of the concept of race would affect immigrants and minorities in the country, despite the fact that the Swedish intention to eradicate the word had been antiracist. However, according to Sweden's own way of looking at the issue, the elimination had taken place in the name of antiracism and for the sake of the immigrant and minority groups as a way to eradicate racial thinking and thus in the end to annihilate racism itself according to the Swedish colourblind logic.

To continue this accounting of Swedish criticism of supranational actors and of other countries with the media texts, criticism of international organisations using the word race began to be heard in the media at about the same time as the Green Party motion was presented to the parliament in 1996. Two years later, for example, Ove Lundström requested the UN to “delete the word race in the UN Declaration of Human Rights” as “a clear signal to all the world's racists” (Lundström 1998). One year later, Lisa Berg Ortman and Karolina Ramqvist, among others, all demanded the same from the UN in connection with the preparations for the UN's conference on racism in Durban in South Africa, which took place in 2001 (Berg Ortman 2001; Bergman 2001; Ramqvist 2001). Karolina Ramqvist was not only against the very word race, but she was also against the terms *racism* and *racial discrimination*, which Ramqvist found to be reprehensible. Ramqvist argued that since racism derives from the word race, it has no meaning since race does not exist:

Xenophobia is one thing, according to the dictionary a morbid fear of strangers. Intolerance and prejudice create and are created by xenophobia and isolation. But what is racism and racial discrimination?

[...]

Everywhere in the statements from Durban there is the word race, but what is it – if not just a construction? The first thing the UN should do to “stop racism” is to abolish the whole concept, investigate its origins and declare that it does not recognise such a division of people. Or, if one really believes that racism is valid, one should account for exactly what evidence there is for the existence of different races.

(Ramqvist 2001)

The fact that Swedish criticism of not least the UN using the term race culminated around the year 2000, considering also the 1996 Green Party motion, suggests that the transition period between the white solidarity period and

the white melancholy period which concerned the years 1991–2001 also constituted the culmination of Swedish colourblindness (Lundström and Hübinette 2020).

From the 2000s, the newspapers also reported that Sweden began to receive a great deal of strong criticism from international and supranational actors for having eliminated the word race. In 2013, for example, *Dagens Nyheter's* Ewa Stenberg wrote about the usual and during this year unusually harsh UN criticism that the then right-wing government's representative Jasenko Selimović had received in connection with the UN's racial discrimination committee ICERD questioning Sweden in Geneva, where ICERD has its office. Selimović chose to vigorously defend Sweden's abolishment of the word by simply telling the UN that "race does not exist":

He also received criticism that the concept of race is being removed from Swedish legislation. The UN Committee fears that it will complicate the work against racial discrimination. He defended Sweden by arguing:

– Race does not exist, it is a social construction that does not exist in reality.

Jasenko Selimović defends the government's line.

(Stenberg 2013)

In 2013, the Swedish linguistic elimination can be said to have reached the end of the road in the sense that Sweden had diverged so sharply from the rest of the world in terms of its antiracial and colourblind view of race that the Swedish attitude was probably perceived as almost incomprehensible within the UN and the EU contexts. The stubborn defence of the Swedish elimination before ICERD in Geneva was defended by the Swedish government representative with the same affective rhetoric that had been used since the 1960s when the first Swedish demands for the elimination of the word began to be heard, albeit in earnest. Since the 2000s, a kind of positional war has prevailed in the sense that the UN, the EU, the Council of Europe and several other international organisations have continued to criticise Sweden harshly for having abolished the concept of race, while Sweden, for its part, has continued to stand up for itself and not least persisted in arguing that the decision was right and above all made in the name of antiracism.

The US as the worst example of racism

To conclude with the Swedish critique of American so-called race fixation, in the 1990s, the US became the negative reference point as the most deterrent and frightening example of a country where the word race is used in everyday life, politics, research, statistics and popular culture and in society at large. This was probably due to the fact that Swedish colourblindness had become fully hegemonic at this time, and thus the US appeared as Sweden's absolute opposite in the Western world in terms of a diametrically different approach and attitude to race, including to the word itself. Martin Newstream, for

example, criticised the African American hip-hop music group Public Enemy for standing for “an unmasked racism” in a long cultural essay in *Expressen* only because the group used the word race (Newstream 1992).

Some years later, Mattias Barsk claimed that the Oscars ceremony had been “destroyed” by “clumsy word choices” in connection with the African American actors Halle Berry and Denzel Washington, having been awarded the prize for best female and male lead, respectively, and as Berry referred to other black female actors and used the word race from the podium (Barsk 2002). As the public television broadcaster Sveriges Television (SVT; Sweden’s Television Stock Company) had shown Berry’s speech with Swedish subtitles, Barsk wrote the following in *Norrbottnens-Kuriren*:

[I]n the small white line of text that translates the speech into Swedish, the word “race” is given which is a word that separates us humans. Given that race biology is now doomed and after having proved that there are no human races, it feels uncomfortable that we still use the word in SVT’s morning program.

(Barsk 2002)

In a similar way and in the form of an equally indignant harangue, Martin Erlandsson criticised the main Swedish film distribution company Swedish Film (SF) for using the word race in relation to marketing the American feature film *Cloud Atlas* in 2013:

Ahead of the Swedish premiere of “Cloud Atlas” on Friday, the science fiction epic was presented in SF’s advertising magazine *Film på bio* with the sentence: “Some, like Halle Berry and Tom Hanks, change both race and gender”.

[...]

... all humans belong to the species *Homo Sapiens* and that there are not clear enough genetic differences between different population groups to be able to divide us into well-defined subspecies/races.

(Erlandsson 2013)

Both Newstream’s, Barsk’s and Erlandsson’s forceful colourblind outbursts against the everyday American use of the word race can be said to express a megalomaniacal Swedish self-image which says that white Swedes are the planet’s and humanity’s experts on racism, and therefore they know what racism is and thus are able to recognise and clamp down on racism wherever it occurs.

Furthermore, in 2008, Erik Rynell criticised *Sydsvenskan*’s Per T. Ohlsson for having used the word race in an article which dealt with race relations in the US by pointing out that “the number of people with different ethnic backgrounds belonging to different ‘races’ is the very foundation in all racism” (Rynell 2008). A few years later, the conservative politician Gunnar Strömmer said that according to him, the US had abandoned Martin Luther King’s ideals in favour of “racial quotas” (Strömmer 2011). In his article in

Svenska Dagbladet, Strömmer also emphasised that the Swedish approach to race was the exact opposite of the American one.

“For a Swede, it is a little surprising how a term that is so charged among us is widely used in the United States as a statistical term”, Richard Appelbom wrote in *Vestmanlands Läns Tidning* in 2012 (Appelbom 2012). “We Swedes are often surprised that there is so much talk in the US about race”, stated Helena Gustavsson (2013) in the leftist magazine *ETC* in connection with her review of the journalist Karin Henriksson’s book about American race relations and at the same time she added that “in Sweden we avoid the concept of race” (Gustavsson 2013). And Jacob Broman also pointed out the same thing when he mentioned Henriksson’s book in an editorial: “The word race in the USA has a completely different meaning and magnitude than in Sweden where the word feels weird” (Broman 2013).

At the same time as the US was constructed as Sweden’s total opposite in terms of the way it relates to race, the question of Swedish antiracism and what it would consist of and where it was heading became increasingly discussed in the 2010s. Above all, many debate participants defended Swedish colourblindness as being the only acceptable antiracism in Sweden against American “racial fixation”, which was said to have been “imported” to Sweden by some “postcolonial” researchers. *Göteborgs-Posten* warned, for example, that “antiracists have begun to use the concept of race” in an editorial and stated that “true antiracism is about counteracting all kinds of discrimination and prejudice”, which for the newspaper meant continuing to uphold the Swedish colourblind taboo against the word race (*Göteborgs-Posten* 2012). In an editorial in *Svenska Dagbladet* in the following year, Ivar Arpi opposed American “racial fixation” and instead advocated vehemently for Swedish colourblindness (Arpi 2013).

Nerikes Allehanda further warned in an editorial against “the reuse of the concept of race” for “it will never be a legitimate antiracist strategy” (Nerikes Allehanda 2013). The few Swedish researchers who at this time advocated that the concept of race had a place in Sweden as well, including in Swedish research were accused of wanting to “import” an American “race fixation” and both from those standing to the right and to the left (Bred 2013; Strand 2014).

The argument that certain Swedish researchers wanted to racialise Sweden according to an American model and had something in common with Nazis by advocating for the use of the concept of race is based on the Swedish colourblind logic which says that everyone who even utters the word race itself in Swedish is simply a racist. This sharp and loud colourblind criticism of the use of the word race that characterised the 2010s was ultimately found in all political camps and was in the end about defending and maintaining the colourblind antiracist hegemony in Sweden at all costs.

The battle for the souls of the Swedes and Sweden’s place in the world

So to conclude, how can the Swedish critique of the concept of race, the Swedish demand to eliminate the word race and the emergence and

development of Swedish colourblindness be understood? What are the criticism and demand really about, and what is the purpose and goal of colourblindness as a national, ideological project? And finally, why have Sweden and the Swedes become the world's first and most colourblind country and people in relation to issues of race, racism and antiracism? To begin with a short summary of this chapter, it was found that from around 1960 a more conscious critique of the concept of race began to be heard in the public in connection with the emergence of the Swedish anti-apartheid movement as well as the general Swedish solidarity movement with the so-called Third World and with the African American civil rights movement as well as with non-white people in general in connection with the decolonisation process.

It is clear in retrospect that there was a successive escalation of the criticism of the word race from the end of the 1960s and onwards, which is consistent with the gradual shift between the white purity period and the white solidarity period that took place at that time. What certainly makes the subsequent development of Swedish colourblindness unique in an international comparison is the sharp Swedish criticism of the UN and later also of the Council of Europe, the EU and other supranational entities which all make use of the concept of race.

The critique of the concept of race in the 1970s was also about opposing that the word made its entry into the Swedish constitution and into Swedish laws and regulations, which was due to the fact that Sweden had signed the UN International Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. As early as 1975, two organisations, Swedish Amnesty and the Swedish Writers' Union, officially requested the government that the term race should not be introduced in the constitutional text, and the latter organisation even opposed the term skin colour and instead advocated for the term ethnicity. In the 1980s and 1990s, when the Swedish Nazi movement and the far right became increasingly violent and visible, criticism also began to be directed at the term racism, whose use was said to have been inflated, both in terms of the frequency of its occurrence and its significance. To be categorically against the word race also became the same as being against Nazism and right-wing extremism during this time period.

In 1996, the critique of the term race and its various word combinations and linguistic derivations escalated with the Green Party motion of that year which finally set the stone in motion for the Swedish state apparatus' work to systematically eliminate the concept of race from all legal and official text production. Full consensus prevailed that this was considered to be the only way forward into the future to combat and finally end racism. All parliamentary parties agreed on the vital importance of the elimination of a word which at that time was perceived only as being a natural scientific, medical and genetic concept that belonged to a dark past.

After Sweden joined the EU as a member state in 1994, a similar situation arose as in the 1970s when the EU directive on equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, that is EU's race directive, became a legal text to which Sweden had committed itself to follow. The

announcement against the term race that was adopted by the parliament in connection with the 1996 motion also included a statement that Sweden would work actively to eliminate the concept of race also in international contexts as an integrated part of its antiracist foreign policy. All parliamentary parties agreed on this colourblind line, and Sweden finally also managed to get the EU to introduce a special clause in the race directive that says that the EU does not believe that there are any races in the classical meaning when it comes to human beings. Also vis-à-vis the Council of Europe, Sweden has repeatedly tried to get its special commission against racism ECRI to understand that the word race should no longer be used at all. At the same time, the Council of Europe, the EU and the UN in their turn regularly criticise Sweden for having abolished the concept of race and not least for removing race as a ground for discrimination in the 2008 still valid Swedish discrimination law and for replacing the concept of race with the euphemistic expression “other similar circumstance”.

From the 1990s and into the 2000s, the volume was further increased in the colourblind antiracist tone and the criticism of the word race, which was directed at virtually everyone who uttered the word orally or in writing, became increasingly condemning through, among other things, the abundant use of negative and value-laden adjectives and dramatic and drastic verbs. Swedish Television as well as American actors, musicians and artists were condemned for making use of and even uttering the word race. Swedish politicians who used the term racism and Swedish universities that gave courses in the history of racial thinking were also harshly criticised, as were not the least the EU, which was even said to reproduce Nazi racial ideology by wanting to force Sweden to start registering race and establish a full-fledged state race register.

In the 2010s, a public debate erupted for the first time concerning the word race when a handful of Swedish researchers began to raise the question of the need to operationalise the concept of race in relation to research on today's hyper-segregated Sweden as well as in relation to the equality data issue. This prompted the formulation of an even more affective colourblind rhetoric that spoke of the almost deadly danger of importing American “race fixation” to Sweden. In 2017, the government stated that research that operationalises the concept of race and the category of race has no place at all within Swedish academia, as the term race is said to be totally unscientific.

Even after the hitherto third government inquiry that has been tasked with eliminating the concept of race was published in 2015, a small number of laws and ordinances however still remain where the word is included. Often, it remains in the form of the adjective racial, as in the expression racial discrimination. All of these legal texts are however international agreements that Sweden as a sovereign state has entered into and committed itself to respect. In 2018, therefore, yet another motion was submitted to the parliament, which is the latest in a series of around a dozen similar motions which since 1996 have demanded that the concept of race must be finally eliminated and that Sweden must find a replacement term for the word race. Most of

these motions have originated from the Green Party, the Liberal Party and the Left Party, and this latest Left Party motion demanded that Sweden must once and for all complete the abolishment process that began in 2001 and take it to the final goal and at the same time finally find a suitable replacement word for the term race.

To return to the only previous study that has tried to understand the Swedish approach to the concept of race over time – namely, Leila Brännström's (2016) previously mentioned study of the concept of race in Swedish modern legal history – Brännström argues that the elimination of the word race and the equally negative view of similar terms such as skin colour and racism among Swedes should be understood against the background of an underlying reluctance in Sweden to discuss racism that is not just about Nazism, about racism in history or about racism in other countries.

In addition to Brännström's analysis of why the concept of race came and went in Swedish constitutional texts from its entry in the 1970s, which as we have seen was not seen lightly from the beginning by several media voices and organisations, and until its elimination in the 2000s, we argue that from the beginning it has also been about purifying the souls of the Swedes from all racial thinking including the very word race itself. This struggle emanated in the 1960s from an almost desperate desire to leave pre-war Swedish racial thinking behind as soon as possible and at all costs sweep away all traces of it. In other words, the Swedish colourblind antiracist project has not only been about cleansing the Swedish language of a word as an end in itself. Instead, this cleansing has served the purpose of allowing contemporary Swedes to distance themselves and also absolve themselves of complicity when it comes to the legacy of racial thinking.

The tireless and at times truly fanatical Swedish fight to eradicate all instances of the word race, including its various derivations, word compositions and inflectional forms, can therefore only be understood in the light of the white solidarity period's need to completely break with the white purity period and erase all traces of it. The final break between the white purity period and the white solidarity period took place in the 1960s and 1970s because Swedes had begun to identify so strongly with the non-Western and non-white world and with minorities of all kinds within the Western world to the extent that the various minorities' struggles were also almost perceived as Sweden's and the Swedes' own struggle, as will be shown in the following third chapter.

The Swedish settlement with the racial thinking of the white purity period and the Swedish identification with the non-Western world and with non-white people in general simply required a radical critique of the concept of race, a resolute demand for its abolition and finally also a systematic elimination of the word itself from the Swedish language. Because Sweden had invested so heavily in racial thinking during the first half of the 20th century, the need to distance itself from racial thinking probably became more strongly in Sweden than in other Western countries and especially when Sweden chose to take the side of the postcolonial so-called Third World

during the post-war period and during decolonisation in a way that no other Western country did to the same extent at that time. Thus, it was also about Sweden's place in the world in relation to both the West and the non-West at a time when Sweden's identification with non-white people was almost complete.

Furthermore, it was also about Sweden during these decades being the world's proportionally largest receiver of adopted children of colour from the former colonies, having the Western world's most generous asylum policy and standing for the world's most extensive development aid activities per head. The end goal, which already began to crystallise and be formulated from the 1960s, albeit only on paper and in the world of utopian visions of the future, has been about finally creating the first and only colourblind nation in history and on Earth and both on a state level in official and legal texts and on a popular level in the attitudes and minds of the people.

Finally, it is therefore not surprising at all in light of the fact that colourblindness is now and since the 1990s hegemonic in Sweden that the few researchers who in the 2010s began to argue that race as a concept should be used to better understand contemporary racially hyper-segregated Sweden encountered a massive colourblind critique and were accused of being racists bordering on Nazism. Nor is it surprising that the US was described as Sweden's absolute opposite in terms of the country's view on race from the 1990s and onwards. The loud and hysterical condemnation of American "race fixation" arose simply at the same time as colourblindness had become fully hegemonic and above all seen as the only form of antiracism that is legitimate and valid in Sweden.

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