

Race in Sweden

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

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Chapter 3

The Swedish N-issue, Swedish N's and white transracial identifications

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3 The Swedish N-issue, Swedish N's and white transracial identifications

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Introduction

In the spring of 1945, at a time when the war in Europe ended, the statistician Richard Sterner published an article in the weekly magazine *Vi*, where he claimed that the “woman issue” (*kvinnofrågan*) was Sweden’s “Negro issue” (*negerfråga* – literally “Negro question”) (Sterner 1945). The former phrase was a generally established term of its time and referred to issues of women’s rights and women’s social status in Swedish society, and the latter to the situation of African Americans and similar issues raised primarily by the black civil rights movement in the US. Sterner’s article made a huge impact in post-war Sweden and popularised the analogising of Swedish gender relations to American race relations and later also to South Africa’s apartheid system, often through the use of some variant of this specific discursive figure – the rhetorical framing of some issue as a Swedish N-issue, or of some social group as Sweden’s N’s.

This chapter consists of an in-depth case study of this discursive figure, which found its shape and subject in a conceptualisation of “the Swedish Negro” or “Swedish Negroes” and sometimes even in “Swedish Niggers”. We argue that this figure represents not only an *ad hoc* analogy between American and international and Swedish civil struggles but also a form of a white Swedish identification with African American and black struggles, presaging the birth and development of modern Swedish antiracism as it would take shape during the second half of the 20th century.

We trace the trajectory of this discursive figure in the Swedish post-war press from Sterner’s 1945 *Vi* article until 1972 when a black South African political refugee writing under the pen name Msabalazo Hulumeni more or less abruptly ended the mainstream use of this expression by a powerful critical intervention (Hulumeni 1972). In that year, the pseudonym Hulumeni published an article in one of the major Swedish newspapers arguing that the Swedish N-figure was demeaning for Africans and black people in general. He also more broadly criticised the then normalised usage of the Swedish N-word (although he was not the first black person in Sweden to do so; see, for example, Quick McEaddy 1953; Sithole 1969).

The immanent reason for Hulumeni to write his article was an upcoming book titled *The Women – Sweden's White Negroes* (*Kvinnorna – Sveriges vita negerer*), which apparently never came out due to Hulumeni's article (Hulumeni 1972). Although Sterner's 1945 article also had its predecessors and even if some white Swedes continued to make use of the insensitive discursive figure of "Swedish Negroes" also after Hulumeni's article, it is clear that the Swedish N-figure had its principal heyday between 1945 and 1972.

Here, we address the following questions: Firstly, how did the discursive figure of the Swedish N-issue emerge and evolve? And secondly, how can this post-war white Swedish identification with African Americans and with blackness in general be understood in relation to the development of modern Swedish antiracism? The chapter can in other words be seen as a study of two interrelated, and perhaps apparently paradoxical phenomena, namely of an early post-war Swedish antiracism expressed as a white Swedish identification with African Americans and blackness and of Swedish uses and understandings of the Swedish N-word, the carelessness of which black people in Sweden have regularly criticised from the 1950s and onwards. It is clear that during the post-war period and up until the 1980s, the Swedish N-word was not seen as problematic to make use of among Swedish speakers in general, and the Swedish newspapers could also use the word in headlines and on placards well into the 1980s.

We should note that in a Swedish context, the most prevalently used and therefore criticised N-word was and still is *Negro* (*neger*) rather than *Nigger*, although the latter word also occurred now and then in post-war Swedish language. In general, Swedish speakers apparently did not differentiate systematically between the American English words *Negro* and *Nigger*. One indication of this, among many, is that when the white American journalist John Howard Griffin's classical antiracist book *Black Like Me* from 1961 was published in Swedish in 1968 it was given the title *Svart som en neger* – that is, *Black Like a Nigger*. Furthermore, Julius Lester's classical children's book *To Be a Slave* from 1968 was given the title *Vems neger är du?* in Swedish in 1971 – *Whose Nigger Are You?* – while Robert Liston's historical account *Slavery in America: The History of Slavery* from 1970 was given the Swedish title *Tio dollar för en neger* – *Ten Dollars for a Nigger*. In what follows, we have chosen to make use of the term *the Swedish N-issue* and the expression *Swedish N's*, etc., opting not to spell out the entire word except in direct quotations, in reference to publication titles or when clarity demands it. Except where otherwise noted, "N" stands for the Swedish *neger*.

In what follows, we examine chronologically how the interrelated expressions the "Swedish N question", the "Swedish N-problem", the "Swedish N" and "Swedish N's" were used mainly between 1945 and 1972. Specifically, we examine how they came to be associated with white Swedish women and the woman issue and soon also with white Swedish workers and the labour issue, as well as with numerous other groups of white Swedes such as youth subcultures, pensioners, disabled people, people living in the countryside and so on. Notably, this ridiculously creative and seemingly limitless discourse

production of the Swedish N-issue and of Swedish N's corresponds with the transitional period of 1950–1968 between the white purity period and the white solidarity period. This discursive figure can thus be linked to and should also be understood in the context of a successively growing Swedish interest in and engagement with supporting the civil rights movement of African Americans and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, and consequently of the birth and development of modern Swedish antiracism during the post-war period.

To continue, we situate our analysis of this rhetorical phenomenon in relation to the concept of transraciality (Hübnette 2011). By this, we refer to how the analogy between African American struggle and (a variety of) white Swedish social struggles rhetorically constructed a transracial identification between white Swedes and non-white others. Interpreted rhetorically, this suggests that white Swedes of the time found the idea of the Swedish N-issue to be useful for talking about various social struggles and identified so strongly with the morally righteous plight of the African Americans that they perceived, or desired to perceive, themselves to be like them on a transracial level. This transracial reconceptualisation of the struggling white subject as a Swedish N probably also offered a desired radical escape from Swedish pre-war racial thinking and from the tainted whiteness pursuant to the recent events of World War 2 (WW2) and the Holocaust, as well as in relation to the then ongoing decolonisation process and the black civil rights struggle, which the Swedes of the time followed with great interest.

The chapter is divided into four parts following this introduction with the first part accounting for the 1940s and 1950s, the second part the 1960s and the third part the 1970s, while the fourth and final part summarises and discusses the findings. This chronological structure is also largely a thematic structure, as the use and scope of the discursive figure develop and expand throughout these decades. The examined material has been found through the National Library of Sweden's digital database *Svenska dagstidningar*, containing press texts from practically all newspapers that were published in the period 1945–1972, by searching for articles where the expressions the “Swedish Negro question” (*den svenska negerfrågan*), the “Swedish Negro problem” (*det svenska negerproblemet*), the “Swedish Negro” (*den svenska negern*) and “Swedish Negroes” (*svenska negrer*) appear and also the terms “white Negro” and “white Negroes” (*vit neger* and *vita negrer*).

Only articles in which the target phrases refer to white Swedes have been included and examined in the study. This means that texts which for example refer to the Swedish Roma minority or the Swedish Sámis as Sweden's N-problem or as Swedish N's have been excluded. In the post-war period, it was relatively common to discuss the dire situation of the Swedish Roma minority in particular as Sweden's own N-issue, and representatives from several immigrant and minority groups have throughout the years also designated themselves as being Sweden's N's and Swedish N's without being black, such as Finns, Tornedalians and Italians, and these examples are also excluded (see, for example, Aftonbladet 1961; Heith 2012, 2020; Inte någon parasit

1982; Sjöqvist 1970; Takman 1952). In total, around 300 separate articles were identified referring to white Swedes as Swedish N's. These were published in Swedish-language newspapers between 1944 and 1992, most of which were within the target period of 1945–1972.

While there exist some previous studies on the use of the N-word in a Swedish context, there are no previous studies examining the specific discursive figure of the Swedish N-issue and Swedish N's (see, for example, Idevall Hagren 2019; Hübinette 2012). However, in his work on how popular music shaped the emergence of the 1968 revolution, the sociologist Håkan Thörn has noted that the N-word was used side by side with the term *black* to designate famous African Americans in the Swedish media of the 1960s such as Jimi Hendrix, Stokely Carmichael and Martin Luther King (Thörn 2018). Thörn also writes that after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the N-word slowly but steadily at least started to be more contested, although it took many decades before it disappeared from the mainstream public sphere.

In addition, the art historian Jeff Werner has taken up that white Swedish factory workers could call themselves N's and use expressions like racial segregation (*rasåtskillnad*) to describe their situation in relation to the management and thus compare themselves to African Americans in Folke Isaksson's and Jean Hermanson's acclaimed book of investigative journalism about Swedish foundry workers from 1970, which was symptomatically titled *Dom svarta* – that is, *The Blacks* (Werner 2021, pp. 219–226). Finally, the historian Lars-Erik Hansen has examined the Swedish debate on immigrants and minorities in the 1960s and he has noted that the number of Swedish newspaper editorials taking up the subject of the African American civil rights movement increased from 21 in 1951 and 45 in 1962 to 151 in 1963, which in practice meant a formidable media explosion when it came to the Swedish interest in and engagement for black Americans (Hansen 2001, p. 77).

In the following three empirical sections, we outline some major themes in our material which variously reflect these previously observed habits of using the N-word in Sweden and this perhaps somewhat peculiar Swedish interest in the African American civil rights movement, as these are expressed in the discursive figure of the Swedish N-issue and Swedish N's. In hindsight, it is difficult if not impossible to say distinguish neatly between use of the figure intended purely as a rhetorical analogy and use expressing a transracial identification in the examined texts. The analysis is also complicated by the fact that several of the texts are also ambiguous about who was actually identifying as the Swedish N. Sometimes, for example, it was the writer claiming the position of being a Swedish N, sometimes the writer argued that others were Swedish N's. The presentation of the material is mainly chronological, reflecting a development over time of the discursive figure, as it broadened in concept from denoting the Swedish woman's issue and the Swedish labour issue to also encompassing analogies and identifications in relation to a huge variety of social struggles.

The woman's issue as the Swedish N-issue in the 1940s and 1950s

The first mention of a specific Swedish N-issue which gained an impact appeared as mentioned in the introduction in the then widely read weekly *Vi*, which was published by the then powerful Swedish Co-operative Union and which today is a monthly magazine (Sterner 1945). The article was written by the statistician Richard Sterner, a social science researcher and an influential voice in post-war Sweden in relation to issues and debates concerning adoption and adopted children, and disability and disabled children (HübINETTE 2021). It is clear that Sterner built his argument from his direct experiences in the US, given his credentials regarding racial matters deriving from having worked closely together with Gunnar Myrdal. Sterner did so between 1938 and 1942 when Myrdal was writing his world-famous, monumental work *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, which came out in two volumes in 1944. A year before that, Sterner himself had also published his PhD thesis on African Americans titled *The Negro's Share: A Study of Income, Consumption, Housing and Public Assistance*.

Sterner's 1945 article, "Our Swedish Negro issue", was included in a special issue of *Vi* centring on the Swedish woman's issue which came out in connection with a big and important women's movement meeting in Stockholm during the spring of 1945, and it evidently became the immediate catalyst for a distributed imaginary of "Swedish Negro issues" and "Swedish Negroes" in the public and political debate. Today, Sterner's article is largely forgotten, except for a brief mention by the historian and gender studies scholar Yvonne Hirdman in one of her autobiographical books (Hirdman 2017). Hirdman mentions the existence of Sterner's article in passing and the commotion that it provoked in 1945 in a positive way, while at the same time reminding her readers that several newspapers such as *Dagens Nyheter's* editorial page were sceptical and hesitant to the analogy and felt that it was a bit exaggerated (Hirdman 2017, p. 88).

In the article, Sterner explicitly referred to the situation of African Americans by writing that "just as many Americans are blind when it comes to the Negro issue, so we men are often blind when it comes to women and how they feel in the world" (Sterner 1945, p. 9). Sterner also wrote the following concerning the similarities between African Americans and white Swedish women from the perspectives of white Americans and white Swedish men, respectively:

Whites in the United States have a superiority complex compared to Negroes. In the same way, we men have a superiority complex in relation to women – not individually but as a group. And because we believe women are inferior, we keep them down. In this way, we turn them into worse people than they would otherwise have been, just as the Negroes get worse by being treated badly.

(Sterner 1945, p. 10)

Here it must be mentioned that Sterner was actually not the one who coined the expression the Swedish N-issue and the Swedish N's in the first place, as for example a writer of the evening paper *Aftonbladet* using the alias Phocas used the expression "our Negro problem" already the prior year. Phocas did so in relation to the growing antagonism and hostility between people living in the capital city of Stockholm and in the Swedish countryside, calling the latter group "Swedish Negroes" (Phocas 1944). The signature Phocas is one of numerous signatures turning up in the examined text material as the name of a writer, as it was common in the 1940s, '50s and '60s to make use of signatures in Swedish newspapers.

Additionally, the Swedish feminist pioneer Elin Wägner had made the analogy between white Swedish women and African Americans already in 1923, and Swedish proletarian writers like Dan Andersson had made use of the idea of white workers becoming like black people, not the least in a literal sense due to the dirtiness of the manual work involved, already in the 1910s, which the literary scholar Therese Svensson has analysed in her decolonial reading of Swedish modernist literature (Bohlin 2010; Svensson 2014, 2020; Wägner 1923). This identification with blackness was also present among the so-called primitivist poets and authors of the 1930s and perhaps best represented by the author Artur Lundkvist who continued to harbour an interest in blackness and black diasporic literature also after the war (Alvstad and Lundahl 2010; McEachrane 2001). Furthermore, although it is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth mentioning at least that within various white youth subcultures in Sweden, there is a tradition of identifying with blackness through African American music which goes back to the mid-war years and the breakthrough of jazz music and which has continued up until today in the form of for example white Swedes consuming hip-hop music and the so-called wigger syndrome (Fornäs 1992, 2004; Sernhede 1994).

What is important here is instead that it was without doubt Sterner's 1945 *Vi* article which led to the linguistic, popular and political breakthrough of the discourse on Swedish N's, as it was immediately followed by many more instances of the same kind of use, which in the beginning meant the Swedish woman's issue and white Swedish women. When it comes to the reception of Sterner's article, he was as Yvonne Hirdman has mentioned initially met with scepticism by, for example, the biggest Swedish morning newspaper liberal *Dagens Nyheter*, which wrote "it was a lot all at once", meaning that it was a bit too much to make this analogy, and the newspaper also presented Sterner as "a specialist on Negroes" to its readers (*Dagens Nyheter* 1945). The second biggest Swedish morning paper, conservative *Svenska Dagbladet*, also wrote sarcastically that "the Swedish Negro has been discovered" and added "now it has happened" (*Attis* 1945).

The Communist newspaper *Arbetartidningen* however enthusiastically embraced Sterner's idea and wrote on its editorial page that "the woman issue is certainly still our Negro issue, women are considered lower beings, predestined for the worst work and the worst pay", thus fully supporting Sterner's comparison and analogy in *Vi* (*Arbetartidningen* 1945). From then

on, the general tendency in post-war Sweden was that Communists, Social Democrats and the left in general, including feminists and liberals, more or less fully supported Sterner's expression, while conservatives were more sceptical or outright negative, probably as the talk about Swedish N's offered a strong and dramatic underdog rhetoric for the Swedish left regardless if this was about a genuine solidarity and identification with African Americans or about a more shallow rhetorical appropriation.

Even if it is clear that Sterner was the one who popularised the discursive figure of the Swedish N-issue and Swedish N's and made it mainstream with his 1945 *Vi* article, interestingly enough, it was soon forgotten that it was Sterner who had been behind the public establishment of this expression. Instead, throughout the years, many other famous names would become attached to the expression and said to be the inventors of it, possibly since Sterner was not known publicly as a women's rights advocate, nor the best-known Swede engaged with racial matters. Already one year later, an article in the leading tabloid newspaper *Expressen* claimed wrongly for example that the expression "Sweden's Negro problem" in reference to the status of Swedish women had in fact been coined by Gunnar Myrdal, who was far more well-known among the Swedes of the time as well as in the outside world than Sterner (Hon själv 1946). Some years later, Gunnar Myrdal's spouse the equally world-famous Alva Myrdal was instead symptomatically said to be the founder of the expression and the idea that "the woman is the Swedish Negro problem" as she was one of the most influential feminists in post-war Sweden and possibly in the world at that time (Britta 1951).

Soon enough though, not only women in general but also specific segments of the Swedish female demographic were identified as being the main sufferers of the Swedish N-issue, as all white Swedish women were seen as Swedish N's but some were apparently perceived to be more Swedish N's than others. For instance, in 1946, the lawyer Henning von Melsted proposed that it was specifically the unmarried women who were Sweden's N's, saying that "the class difference between married and unmarried women is our Negro issue" (Hudiksvalls-Tidningen 1946). Similarly, a column in *Aftonbladet* alluded to "lonely women" as a group exposed to something like racial discrimination against black people in the US (Flins 1947).

Also following shortly after Sterner's article, the previously mentioned alias Phocas, who was a well-known columnist for *Aftonbladet*, was then the one who apparently initiated the expanded use and conceptualisation of the discursive figure. Phocas noted the phenomenon of certain restaurants not admitting male customers who were "collarless" and not dressed formally enough, arguing that this was a clear parallel to "racial persecution" in other countries (Phocas 1946). The collarless men may broadly be taken to represent working-class men and men in the military or naval services, including young men doing their compulsory military service. On a regular basis and from then on, these groups of men started to identify themselves and write about and designate themselves as Swedish N's or Sweden's N's in accordance with Phocas' suggestion, especially in the form of letters to the editor wherein

they complained that they sometimes had difficulties to be admitted to certain fine dining restaurants due to how they were dressed (Hoppfull Ing.-soldat 1953; L. Lg 1951; Reformatorn 1951; Svensk neger 1964; U-båtskast 1955).

Another early example of the expanded scope of the Swedish N-figure came from Thore Sandell, who described to the readers of *Aftonbladet* the existence of a “coloured line” in Jönköping, dividing the town’s religious and non-religious inhabitants, and comparing the situation to American race segregation (Sandell 1948). Yet another early example derived from Torsten Eriksson, who later became the director of the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, who in 1950 in an article in the social democratic theoretical journal *Tiden* argued that the prisoners and the Swedish under-class in general were “our Swedish Negroes” (Eriksson 1950; Jutterström 1970, p. 266). White Swedish prison inmates themselves could also from time to time describe themselves as Swedish N’s (see, for example, Curman 1968, p. 62).

In 1950, the signature Json described a visit to the USA by a delegation of the Swedish workers’ movement (Json 1950). He mentioned in his text a report that, during this visit, one of the female representatives had told the Americans that Sweden also struggles with its own N-issue, namely the situation of Swedish women. Json proposed that the Americans “must have been deeply interested”:

The report that the delegates, on one occasion, discussed the Negro issue in Sweden with their hosts, was actually moving.

(Json 1950)

Thus, Json’s (second- or third-hand) account of this event presented the analogy between Swedish women’s struggle and the struggle of American blacks as something affectively meaningful both to himself and to the American hosts of this visiting Swedish delegation regardless if Json was sarcastic or not when he brought this up in his article. The discursive figure in this way functioned to invest white Swedish social struggle with an international pathos somehow purloined or appropriated from the black civil rights movement, and again, it is difficult to say whether it was out of a true solidarity or rhetorical appropriation.

In 1951, Sam Johansson argued in the daily newspaper *Expressen* against the ongoing stigmatisation of Swedish Communists in the wake of the burgeoning Cold War. Communists or persons affiliated with Communists in Sweden were, among other things, sometimes at risk of losing their jobs or facing other social sanctions. Johansson (1951) recalled the story of a young man being denied entry to an officer training school for having fraternised with a girl who belonged to a Communist youth club. “Accordingly”, Johansson argued, “we have a Negro issue in Sweden”. Interestingly, Johansson developed the analogy by arguing that just as a “regular Negro” cannot shed his skin, a “white Negro” – that is, a white Swedish Communist – cannot abandon a deeply held political “inner conviction”. Thus, Johansson

not only used the analogy to give pathos to his defence of Swedish Communists but to construct political ideology as an essential or inescapable aspect of identity. He formulated this argument as a moral appeal to his readers, saying that this needs to be understood for a “resolution to this [Swedish N-]issue” to be possible:

Some people may also remember the story with the young man who was denied entry to a non-commissioned officer school, because at some point he accompanied a girl belonging to a communist youth club, and so on. So we have a Negro issue in Sweden. In resolving this question, however, it would be desirable if one could understand that as little as the regular Negro can change his skin, a white Negro can run away from a political opinion, which is equal to his inner conviction.

(Johansson 1951)

Although the discursive figure of the Swedish N-issue became increasingly prominent around this time, it was still principally used in reference to the Swedish woman’s issue throughout this time period. In 1952, in conjunction with the election taking place in September, both the social democratic *Aftontidningen* and the Communist *Norrskensflamman* wrote about the “Negro issue of the election debate” on their editorial pages, which means that the woman’s issue had firmly established itself as the Swedish N-issue and the Swedish women as Sweden’s N’s among the left by this time (Aftontidningen 1952; G.J. 1952). The latter newspaper’s famous editor-in-chief G. J., or Gustav Johansson, wrote that “women are treated like the Negroes in America”, referring both to election campaigning and to the status of women in Sweden in general. The *Aftontidningen* editorial indicated the conventionalisation of the originally idiosyncratic figure, noting that the expression the “Swedish Negro issue” had been coined some years prior and evaluating it as an “impolite” but accurate formulation of the state of affairs in Sweden:

As a pet phrase, the formulation may well have been rather impolite, but in fact it struck quite close to home.

(Aftontidningen 1952)

Also in 1952, in *Dagens Nyheter*, the outgoing chair of the influential social democratic women’s union, Disa Västerberg was interviewed. In an apparently unremarkable formulation, Västerberg lamented that “still today women’s issues are the Negro issue of democracy” (Joson 1952).

In yet another publication from 1952, the figure was however used in relation to another segment of the Swedish population. A letter to the editor, published in *Expressen*, complained about discontinued train service in the small town of Torbjörnstorp. The author signed the letter with the epithet *Fighter against the Swedish Negro problem* (*Bekämpare av svenska negerproblemet* 1952), suggesting that it was in fact Sweden’s rural population who were Sweden’s N’s.

A few years later, in 1955, *Aftonbladet's* Per-Anders Hellquist listed a total of four Swedish “Negro problems”, each of which was illustrated with a separate photograph. According to Hellquist, the four N-problems of Sweden concerned how people from the southern Swedish province of Scania were perceived by people from the capital, Stockholm; how people from Stockholm were, conversely, perceived by Scanians; how men clad in certain garments, for instance sailors, were not welcome in some restaurants; and how the Swedish Roma people were treated by Swedish society (Hellquist 1955). After identifying “Scanians in Stockholm”, “Stockholmers in Scania”, “uniformed sailors” and “gypsies” as the four Swedish N's, Hellquist finally reminded his readers that “we have many kinds of Negroes in Sweden, even if we are blind to the greatest Negro problem of all times – class division”. Thus we may take Hellquist's point to be somewhat satirical, enlisting the recently popularised notion of Swedish N-issues to reinforce his own argument that the real N-issue in Sweden was actually about class – that is, the situation of the Swedish working class and the labour issue.

However, it remained the case throughout the 1950s that the Swedish N-issue was primarily and first and foremost used in reference to Swedish women according to Sterner's original suggestion. During the course of the decade, a number of editorials and debate articles employed the expression more or less as a synonym for the struggle for women's rights (Attis 1959; *Expressen* 1957; Hallberg 1958; Holmberg 1953). For instance, when a local division of the Liberal Party's women's union was formed in 1956, *Dagens Nyheter* reported on this event that this local division was now set to tackle and take on “Sweden's Negro issue” (3Q 1956). Further, the figure was officially enlisted by representatives of the Swedish women's movement, for instance in an argument issued from the notable Fredrika Bremer Society that “the question of equal pay” was “a Swedish Negro problem” (Attis 1959).

The discursive figure quickly moved to the mainstream also in state politics. In conjunction with a debate in the Swedish parliament in 1957, the querulous liberal member of parliament Brita Elmén participated and made use of the figure in relation to the issue of equal pay, as reported on by *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* (*Aftonbladet* 1957; *Expressen* 1957). Thereafter, Elmén proceeded to refer to the Swedish N-issue both in further parliamentary debates and in an article in the ideological journal *Liberal Debatt* (Elmén 1959; *Riksdagen* 1960). It had actually happened on an earlier occasion that a member of parliament had framed women's struggle as a Swedish N-issue already in 1946, but at that point, it was seemingly not noticed in the mainstream media (*Riksdagen* 1946). *Expressen* commented on Elmén's 1957 statement approvingly, as follows:

There was thus ample reason for Ms. Elmén characterisation of this matter as a Swedish “Negro issue”.

(*Expressen* 1957)

Karl Larm of conservative *Svenska Dagbladet*, on the other hand, had an ironic take on the debate in the parliament and Brita Elmén's position in particular, which received a lot of attention during the year (Larm 1957). Larm constructed the figure of the Swedish N-issue as being, as it pertained to women's rights, alarmistic. In what reads as a mocking tone, he proposed diminishing the issue of equal pay for women to a "Negress problem" rather than a "Negro problem":

We have a Swedish Negro issue, we heard to our dismay from a women of parliament. This concerns the woman's demand for equal pay, no worse than that, so maybe it should just as well be called a Swedish Negress problem to not sound all too upsetting.

(Larm 1957)

As noted, the discursive figure also gradually came to be used in reference to workers' rights and the labour issue in the 1950s. The first example of an official representative of the Swedish workers' and trade union movement explicitly enlisting this analogy occurred in 1958. In an interview in *Expressen*, a chair of the Metalworkers' Union – the then largest and most influential affiliate of the blue-collar Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) – observed that Sweden's metalworkers had lower incomes than other groups. The figure of the Swedish N-issue was then enlisted to frame low-income metalworkers and manual workers in general as a disenfranchised and excluded minority of the Swedish nation:

One may well get the sense that we who belong to the lower income earners do not belong to the Swedish people. We may as well call ourselves the Swedish Negroes instead.

(Expressen 1958)

In 1959, the then president of LO, Arne Geijer, spoke at the congress of the Swedish Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Union. This union comprised a substantial majority of female workers within the then large Swedish industry of clothing, confection and fashion. In his speech, Geijer employed the notion of the Swedish N-issue in pleading for Sweden to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) convention regarding equal pay for equal work:

It [the convention] would be one means among many for stigmatising the ongoing discrimination of female labor, to eliminate our Swedish Negro question from the world.

(Dagens Nyheter 1959)

At the tail end of the 1950s, in December of 1959, *Expressen* interviewed Alf Wase, the so-called "king of the greasers" *raggarkungen* – *raggare* being a car- and music-centric working-class subculture roughly comparable to

American greaser and rockabilly culture. Wase employed the discursive figure in narrating his experience of getting fired as a car salesman. He had worked for a company selling used cars and had lost his job following complaints from neighbours to the landlord of the business venue resulting from frequent visits from Wase's friends from the same subculture that he himself belonged to (Rundberg 1959). Wase complained in the interview that his employer had "folded to the landlords' racial thinking"; that is, he compared the negative attitudes facing Sweden's *raggare* to racial discrimination. Even if Wase did not call himself a Swedish N, he clearly equalised the stigmatisation of his own subculture with the racial discrimination that African Americans were exposed to.

From its popular incipience in 1945, the discursive figure of the Swedish N-issue was employed in relation to the woman's issue with regard to the gender wage gap or in relation to specific subgroups of Swedish women. Soon, however, the rhetorical scope of the figure expanded, and the idea of racial struggle and the struggle of various Swedish N's being exposed to racial segregation and racial discrimination became increasingly productive. During the late 1950s, more and more groups in Swedish society came to be included and viewed as the Swedish N-issue and Swedish N's and in the beginning mainly the labour issue and blue-collar workers but soon also military conscripts and prison inmates. Thus, at a time when Swedish people became increasingly aware of and engaged in the plight and struggle of African Americans, they also found in this awareness a rhetorical amplifier of their own social struggles. As we will see, in the 1960s, this discursive figure became all the more diverse in application and amplified in rhetorical force.

The inflation in the Swedish N-issues and the Swedish N's of the 1960s

The 1960s began with Minister Ulla Lindström talking about the Swedish woman's issue as constituting "a Swedish South Africa" in connection with that year's May Day demonstration (Thomasson 1960). In other words, Minister Lindström claimed that the gender segregation of men and women in Sweden was analogous to the racial segregation of white and black South Africans in her official speech. Constantly new proposals on which specific subgroups of Swedish women who represented the most pressing Swedish N-issue also continued to be raised. "Away with Sweden's Negro problem, the unmarried mother!", exclaimed a writer in *Expressen* in 1960 (Människovän 1960). And in November 1960, in another parliamentary debate that dealt with the wage issue of working women, there was again open talk about "Sweden's Negro problems" among the Members of Parliament (MPs) in a then all-white Swedish parliament (Dagens Nyheter 1960).

The attribution of the "Swedish N" status to manual workers and the working class also increasingly competed with its attribution to Swedish women, especially in left-wing contexts (Gruvis 1961; Helén 1962). However, it was also within this context that the earliest clear criticism of the use of the N-word in relation to white Swedes was aired by a white Swedish person. In

1962, the signature Government officer (*Statstjänsteman*) on *Expressen's* letters to the editor page questioned the signature Painter (*Målare*), who had claimed that the workers were Sweden's N's:

Imagine calling yourself and your co-workers "society's Negroes". Here in this country, we are so enlightened that we consider people of colour as citizens and as good as ourselves. But the signature Painter perhaps has a different sense of colour? I wonder what a construction worker would answer if a simple white-collar official would call him a Negro.
(Statstjänsteman 1962)

The signature both questioned the whole rhetorical phenomenon of referring to white Swedes, and in this case white Swedish manual labourers, as N's and the negative tone behind the discursive figure which implied that black people were less valuable than white Swedes.

In 1961, another group debuted that claimed to be the Swedish N-issue and the Swedish N's, namely white Swedish pensioners:

Our elderly are otherwise our Negro issue. It's sad in this country to be anything but a teenager, and it's downright shameful to be old.
(Frederique 1961)

As for pensioners as constituting the Swedish N-issue, it even set aside an idea for a cultural production in the form of a theatre play by the world-famous avant-garde artist Öivind Fahlström – *Swedish Negro and Hammarskiöld on God* (*Svensk neger och Hammarskiöld om Gud*) – which dealt with the situation of Swedish pensioners as being Sweden's N's (Sassa 1965). The idea of the white Swedish pensioners as constituting the Swedish N-issue and the Swedish N's would then survive well until the 1980s on the letters to the editor pages (see, for example, *Pensionären – en svensk neger* 1984).

In 1963, Rune Johansson launched the situation of people with disabilities a Swedish N-problem on a broad front by, among others, writing a letter to all party leaders and even to the Prime Minister himself Tage Erlander pointing out just this (Johansson 1964; *Provinstidningen Dalsland*. 1963). Johansson's suggestion received a lot of attention in the media, and *Dagens Nyheter* commented on Johansson's letter in positive terms by bringing up South Africa's apartheid system:

It is not only in South Africa that there are Negro problems, they exist within Sweden's borders.
(Från *Dagens Nyheter's* korrespondent 1963)

Johansson obviously set a tone as the notion that people with disabilities and not least children with disabilities were Sweden's N's would then recur again and again throughout the 1960s and also in the 1970s (Ekström 1968; Rehnström 1971; Sterner 1968). In 1968, Richard Sterner himself wrote in

Aftonbladet, in his capacity as chair of the Swedish Association for Children with Developmental Disabilities (*Riksförbundet för utvecklingsstörda barn*), that there existed a kind of an “apartheid for the disabled” in Sweden and that it was about “the same psychology that is the root cause of Negroes in the United States and elsewhere are locked into the ghetto slums” (Sternér 1968). Shortly afterwards, the author and journalist Per Olof Ekström published an article in the same newspaper in which he reflected on “our need for intolerance” and listed different groups in Swedish society that he believed were exposed to the same type of discrimination that affected the “coloured”, including people with disabilities (Ekström 1968).

In 1968, Monika Brilioth stated in *Svenska Dagbladet* that “the developmentally disabled children” were treated “just like in Harlem” and constituted “the Swedish Negro problems”, meaning that they were as segregated and discriminated against (Brilioth 1968). In 1969, even the head of the special school system at the government authority the National Board of Health and Welfare Arne Larsson warned and exclaimed that “the disabled must not be our Negro problem!”, which means that at this time this expression had also been firmly established at an official authority level (Herthelius 1969). Besides, people with disabilities could also describe themselves as Swedish N's or as “white Negroes” (see, for example, *Vita negrer i Sverige*, Vällingby 1968).

In 1965, *Dagens Nyheter's* Jöson interviewed several northerners from the northern part of Sweden called Norrland who had moved south, including to Stockholm, and one of them said that “Norrland is Sweden's Negro problem” (Jöson 1965). This example was neither the first nor the last time when the inhabitants of the countryside and the peripheral areas of Sweden identified themselves with being Sweden's N's.

In May 1966, the writer Eveo attacked “our Negresses” as Eveo called the Swedish feminists while referring directly to the idea that the woman's issue was “the Swedish ‘Negro issue’” and Eveo rallied about how the representatives of the incipient second wave feminism got a lot of space and were heard on radio and TV:

Now, after all the May Day demonstrations for the oppressed coloured peoples in distant lands, let us pay some attention to our home Negroes. ... They themselves say that they have been the Southern Negroes of Swedish society.

(Eveo 1966)

Eveo was evidently angry at the Swedish woman's movement claiming that the Swedish women were like the African Americans in the American South.

In 1966, a contributor appeared in *Dagens Nyheter* who said that the hierarchy in the defence forces between officers and privates could well be compared to a “Negro problem” (f d neger till fots 1966). During the following two years, a formidable explosion of voices representing various segments of Swedish society started to claim that they were Sweden's N and constituted

Sweden's N-issue, such as, among others, shop clerks, sailors, singles, conscripts from Stockholm who were not always allowed into restaurants in the northern city of Luleå and many others (Arg expedit 1967; En proletär 1968; En statstjänstemannafru, Södertälje 1967; Förödmjukad av välfärden 1967; Nilsson 1968).

During the symbol-heavy revolutionary year of 1968, the literary scholar Staffan Björck reflected in *Dagens Nyheter* that more and more issues had begun to be called racism and been linked to race in Sweden such as the “mentally retarded” and the “sexually deviant”, as well as Christians, addicts and people from Norrland (Björck 1968). “Fighting races everywhere!”, Björck put it and which he described as a “metaphorical use of language” that could be both “clarifying” but also problematic as he referred to the sheer inflation in Swedish N-issues and in Swedish N's.

In 1968 in particular, the labour issue was in the focus at the time of the new Maoist-leaning left, a wave of strikes and a radicalisation of the Swedish social democrats. In relation to these dramatic events, it is perhaps not surprising that the white Swedish working class and the labour issue were talked about as Sweden's N's and the Swedish N-issue. For example, Yngve Persson, then chair of the Swedish Wood Industry Workers' Union, stated in *Svenska Dagbladet* that the relationship between blue-collar and white-collar workers was “Sweden's Negro problem”, and he attacked representatives of the white-collar trade union movement by claiming that “they want to preserve a society where the official is white and the worker black” (Nilsson 1968):

Sweden's Negro problem is the injustices between officials and workers, said the Wood Industry Workers' Union's chairman Yngve Persson on Thursday. Officials are treated as whites while workers are treated as Negroes.

(Nilsson 1968)

Svenska Dagbladet's well-known signature Sagittarius, i.e. the deeply conservative editorial writer Gunnar Unger, commented on Yngve Persson's argument that “the workers are Sweden's Negroes” by writing biting and sarcastically that “it is Sweden's Negroes who rule Sweden” – namely, Sweden's Social Democratic Workers' Party which had ruled Sweden for about 40 years in a row at that time (Unger 1968).

To talk about the manual blue-collar workers as blacks and the officials and white-collar workers as well as engineers and managers as whites seems to have occurred on a daily basis in Swedish factories at this time, judging by Folke Isaksson's and Jean Hermanson's reportage book about the Swedish foundry workers *The Blacks (Dom svarta)*, which Jeff Werner has noticed (Werner 2021, pp. 219–226). The book states that the workers themselves as well as their superiors could do this and workers could also call themselves “white Negroes”, and they drew direct parallels to South Africa's apartheid system when describing their own situation at the workplace and in society at large (Isaksson and Hermanson 1970):

We drink coffee together and come to talk about foremen, “long coats”. About foremen, overseers, officials and managers, Erik says this: “When I come down and hand in the job and see them there, *a whole herd*, I usually say: You can be happy that the blacks support the whites!” He mentions Africa, more seriously now. He means *South Africa*. He believes that there are also differences between us, between white and black; it’s just that it’s much harder to spot the difference here.

(Isaksson and Hermanson 1970, p. 87)

The interviewed foundry worker clearly identified as being black and even a black South African while his superiors were white for him, but at the same time, he was evidently aware that it was visually difficult to see the apartheid system between blue-collar and white-collar workers in Sweden, as they were all white. Several workers who appeared in Folke Isaksson’s and Jean Hermanson’s book expressed similar identifications with blackness:

A cleanser with a stone dust hose speaks jokingly and seriously about the blacks, the workers, who support the whites, managers and officials. A blaster says something similar, though more stinging. “It’s a *racial segregation*”, he says. “Those who sit inside, in the glass cabinets, they are white and we are black.”

(Isaksson and Hermanson 1970, p. 110)

At the end of the 1960s, the journalist Annmari Behring wrote in *Arbetet* about a feature article in the metal workers’ union magazine *Metallarbetaren*, which had been about the situation of divorced Swedish working-class men and Behring exclaimed ironically that “a Swedish Negro is a divorced man” as the article had apparently come to that conclusion (Behring 1969). Later in her text, however, Behring stated that “it is probably for the most part the woman who is the Negro in this country”, thereby arguing for the Swedish women being the Swedish N’s and not Swedish male workers.

About the same time, the always combative author Ivar Lo-Johansson suggested in an interview that it was white Swedish male athletes deriving from the working class who had become professional and famous athletes, and not least football players who were bought and sold between clubs, who were “our Negro issue”:

The athletes who come from the working class and think that they have taken the step over a class boundary is our Negro question.

(Lo-Johansson, quoted in Lövvenhaft 1969)

The famous Swedish author probably associated the athletes with slavery as well as with the labour issue being the N-issue at the very same time when doing this statement, which probably sounded both edgy and provocative.

In 1969, the refugee Phike Sithole from what was then Rhodesia, that is present-day Zimbabwe, published an article in *Aftonbladet* in which she

critically raised the issue of the Swedish N-word, which according to her was used in all possible and impossible contexts in a totally naturalised way in late 1960s Sweden and not just the word “Negro” but also the word “Nigger”, which Swedes seemed not really to differentiate between (Sithole 1969). Sithole also used the term racism, the adjective racist and the noun racist in a way that only a few probably did in Sweden and in Swedish in her time, as well as deploring that many non-whites believed that Sweden was a “non-racist country” as they nurtured a highly romanticised view of Sweden and the Swedes as being anticolonial antiracists and the only white nation on earth being on the side of non-whites:

The Swedes have a tendency to believe in the myth that they are not racists. For example, they use racist terminology without bothering to analyse its racist significance. When an African student tells a Swede that he does not want to be called a “Negro”, the Swede does not understand this.

[...]

Others may be racist when they say Negro or Nigger, but the Swede is certainly not racist at all when he uses the word. In short, the Swede expects the black man to accept the Swede’s unconscious racism.

(Sithole 1969)

There were other black immigrants in Sweden who now and then published articles in the Swedish press of the time but Sithole’s article stands out as it so openly exudes anger and frustration, and it can well be said to have foreshadowed Hulumeni’s forthcoming article.

Throughout the course of the 1960s, the use of the discursive figure of the Swedish N-issue and Swedish N’s escalated out of proportions and the proposals on which these could be expanded across all boards and now included not only women and workers but also young people, old people, people with disabilities and many other marginalised groups in Swedish society. This was especially evident around the symbolic year of 1968, and it is clear that the American “Negro issue”, as it was called in Sweden, of that time, as well as the question of the apartheid system in southern Africa, gave many different groups in Sweden who felt oppressed, marginalised and exposed an underdog identification in ways that in retrospect may seem simply bizarre.

The 1970s and the end of a discursive figure

At the beginning of the 1970s, the inflation in groups in Sweden that felt that they were suffering from racism and claimed that they were victims of racial thinking continued unabated and among the proposals were youth who were addicted to drugs, developmentally disabled, internal migrants from Norrland who had moved to the southern part of the country, pensioners and people who were bullied and so on (Hellberg 1970; Hofsten 1970; Hoppfull 12-åring 1971).

In August 1971, Anna-Lisa Bäckman reported in *Dagens Nyheter* about a “militant women’s conference”, which had been held in Stockholm inspired according to the journalist by the American “Women’s Liberation” movement and in the article Bäckman mentioned that a new Swedish-language word had seen the light of the day at the conference – “sexism” – which was presented as “an equivalent to the word racism” (Bäckman 1971). The minutes from the conference, which took place in Stockholm, indicate that with this in its time new feminist term and vocabulary, it probably meant that it became less and less common to talk about the women’s issue as Sweden’s N-issue and about the white Swedish women as Swedish N’s at least within the more radical women’s movement which had started to develop its own language on sex and gender and thereby no longer had a need to use a racial language and identify with blackness.

In July 1972, *Göteborgs-Tidningen* published a debate article signed by the previously mentioned Msabalazo Hulumeni, which was a pseudonym used by a male black South African political refugee. Hulumeni, taking a forthcoming book entitled *The Women – Sweden’s White Negroes* (*Kvinnorna – Sveriges vita negrer*) as the point of departure, outright attacked the talk about the Swedish N-issue and Swedish N’s (Hulumeni 1972). However, he incorrectly named Ulla Balderson as the author, as it was in fact the then well-known Lennart Lindquist, known in the media of the time as the “Loan King” (*Lånekungen*), who had informed the press in advance that he intended to write a book bearing this title a year earlier (*Aftonbladet* 1971). Hulumeni questioned the use of the Swedish N-word as several other black people in Sweden had already done, and instead, he advocated the term African he also wrote as follows:

I wonder what kind of loyalty, generosity and willingness to cooperate Ulla Balderson shows by using a negative and insulting term for a large group of people.

How does Ulla Balderson’s book title contribute to associating Negro with something negative, something lower? She, perhaps unknowingly, prolongs, along with many others who use the same technique, the humiliation of the “weak” of all kinds – including women. I ask you who are reading this to consciously stop this.

(Hulumeni 1972)

Hulumeni designated the discursive figure of the Swedish N-issue as a “technique”, by which he meant the rhetoric of talking about in this case white Swedish women as N’s, and he urged all the readers to finally stop using the expression the Swedish N-issue and the designation Swedish N’s, as he found it humiliating both for black people and for those white groups that were seen as or saw themselves as Swedish N’s. After Hulumeni’s powerful intervention in the form of this article, the use of the term the Swedish N-issue and the talk about Swedish N’s also seemingly largely disappeared from established

contexts in the form of editorials, op-eds and among feminists and labour movement representatives, politicians and MPs.

In the depths of the Swedish people, however, these expressions had settled down, and symptomatically enough, they also mostly appeared on the letters to the editor pages after 1972. Among the ordinary citizens writing agitated and at many times angry letters to the editor in the various Swedish newspapers throughout the 1970s, it is clear that the creativity knew no bounds when it came to claiming that the writer's group was Sweden's N's. White Swedish women such as housewives or women who felt that they were not welcome as guests at beer halls could argue that they were Sweden's N's and so could also representatives from various professions such as, as always, blue-collar workers and even archivists (Besviken 1975; Jakobsson 1973; En svensk neger 1975; Morin 1973; Ruhmén 1973). It is noteworthy also that as late as 1977, the conservative Member of Parliament Alf Wennerfors could still talk about the woman's issue as a Swedish N-issue in a parliamentary debate, although by this time he was probably seen as a bit odd and old-fashioned by doing that:

And unfortunately, for many, the issue of gender equality is something of a Negro issue.

(Riksdagen 1977)

In the 1980s, pupils who took shorter, practical vocational programmes in high school could still express that "we are the Negroes" in relation to those who took the longer theoretical programmes, and who the former experienced saw themselves as better than them and looked down upon them as if they were Sweden's N's (Westerberg 1987, p. 95, 120). It is probable, as Johan Fornäs och Ove Sernhede have noted in their studies of white Swedish youth subcultures in the 1980s and 1990s, that the identification with being Swedish N's stayed longer among certain segments of young people than in the public as a provoking and edgy way of expressing a desired underdog position (Fornäs 1992; Sernhede 1994).

Finally, the last vestige of the use of the discursive figure the Swedish N-issue in the examined text material can be found on the letters to the editor page of *Expressen* in 1992 when a seemingly male reader used the term Swedish N's to denote successful Swedish women who others and implicitly jealous women were said to describe as "men in female form" (Fridén 1992). This last example shows that the writer of this letter to the editor had forgotten or misunderstood how the expression had once been used previously in its heyday of the 1950s, 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, as it was here not a question of a marginalised group of women which he considered to be Swedish N's but instead business women and professional highly educated career women, and thus it shows that the discursive figure the Swedish N-issue had at the beginning of the 1990s completely lost its use value and semantic meaning.

The origin of modern Swedish antiracism as a white transracial desire

To sum up, the birth, development and waning of the discursive figure of the Swedish N-issue correspond at large with the transitional period between the white purity period and the white solidarity period, which took place during the years of 1950–1968, which coincided with the beginning of the emergence of the world's first and most colourblind nation and the adoption debate, which will be accounted for in the following chapter. This transitional period is also associated with the development of an incipient Swedish antiracism which was closely connected with Sweden's and the Swedes' strong support for the African American civil rights movement and the anti-apartheid movement in southern Africa as well as for struggling non-white people and minorities in general all over the world. It is within this specific post-war Swedish context that the rhetorical phenomenon and expression of the Swedish N-issue and Swedish N's must be located according to our analysis, which means that even if it is somewhat tempting to today just dismiss the whole discursive figure as an expression of a white Swedish shameless and not least racist appropriation of black struggles and suffering black people, it was not what the Swedes of the time perceived it as.

Instead, it is clear that the discursive figure, at least from when Richard Sterner popularised it in his 1945 *Vi* article, was about an expression of solidarity and not about a disparaging and pejorative view of blackness and black people such as is clearly the case in the form of colloquial Swedish-language expressions like calling heavy manual work a “Negro job” (*negergöra*). It is true that the Swedish N-word, and even the American English N-word, was widely used among Swedish speakers during the course of these decades and that several African American and black African immigrants in Sweden also criticised this use intermittently for being insensitive and hurtful for them, but the vast majority of white people in Sweden of the time seem to have used the N-word in a positive, solidaristic and even antiracist way at least in relation to the talk of the Swedish N-issue.

Furthermore, the *ad hoc* analogy that was made between black American and black South African and white Swedish struggles and sufferings, respectively, through the talk of the Swedish N-issue and Swedish N's was also according to our analysis an expression of a white Swedish transracial identification with black people which can be conceptualised as a strong and even desperate desire for blackness and for non-whiteness in general. This interpretation can in its turn be linked to the fact that Sweden was a massively white country between 1945 and 1972, which we have identified as the main period for this discursive figure, with very few black and non-white inhabitants living permanently in Sweden at that time.

In other words, we argue that the birth and development of a modern Swedish antiracist consciousness and movement took place in a heavily white setting and with solely white actors instead of non-white actors, as in the case of the Anglophone world. The white Swedes instead identified themselves deeply with black and non-white people. The transracial aspect of this early

Swedish antiracism may also explain why the antiracist movement continued to be a white movement up until quite recently and why non-white Swedes were relegated to the margins of Swedish antiracism as late as the 2000s as will be evident in the fifth chapter, focusing on the perspectives, emotions and voices of non-white Swedes.

Another aspect of the rhetorical use and discursive figure of the Swedish N-issue was the sudden disappearance of a German-inspired racial thinking and racial vocabulary which became almost taboo to make use of in Sweden after 1945 and which was practically overnight then replaced by an American understanding of race, including not the least the so-called black-white colour line or the black-white divide. As the process of decolonisation also started to set in after the war and continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s and into the 1970s, it was probably necessary for Sweden and the Swedes to identify with blackness and non-whiteness and to such an extreme extent that this transracial desire can be interpreted as an almost desperate attempt at and a radical escape from both Sweden's pre-war racial thinking and from a whiteness tainted with Nazism and the Holocaust as well as with European imperialism and colonialism, and white supremacy ideas in settler states like the US and South Africa.

Here, it has to be pointed out that there are also some parallels to other countries as well as to other minorities, meaning that the discursive figure of the Swedish N-issue is not unique, nor is a white identification with blackness. It is well-known that the woman's issue could be talked about as an N-issue and white women as N's also in other countries; one telling popular cultural example is John Lennon's and Yoko Ono's song "Woman Is the Nigger of the World" from 1972. Further, Perry Johansson has shown how the Swedish left, and not the least the radical left of the 1960s and 1970s, also identified strongly with the suffering of Jews and the Holocaust in its anti-imperialist rhetoric and propaganda (Johansson 2021). However, the popularisation of the specific Swedish N-issue goes back already to the end of WW2 and to the spring of 1945 and the sheer frequency of the use of this rhetorical expression and transracial identification well into the 1970s must be said to be remarkable both in its early post-war appearance and in its normalisation in the mainstream public where the talk of Swedish N's was heard of both from MPs and politicians, trade union representatives, leaders of feminist and labour movements and many others belonging to the Swedish establishment of its time. In its most extreme articulations, we argue that this discursive figure manifested a kind of appropriation – a desire to replace the black, non-white and minority other when it comes to being the victims of racism and thus to reinstall the white Swedish subject and in the end Swedish whiteness itself at the centre of the Swedish nation.

Finally, one may wonder where this white, Swedish, transracial and antiracist identification with being a marginalised and suffering underdog survived after the final waning of the explicit linguistic talk of the Swedish N-issue and Swedish N's sometime in the 1980s and 1990s? Although it may be a bit far-fetched it might perhaps at least partly be argued that the current talk of

“reverse racism” (*omvänd rasism*), which in Sweden is known as so-called hostility towards Swedes (*svenskfientlighet*), a term that has been coined and heavily propagated by the far-right party the Sweden Democrats since the 2010s, has at least taken over the idea of Swedish N's suffering from racism, as the whole notion of “hostility towards Swedes” is about white Swedes being the victims of non-white racism in the form of for example sexual harassment and sexual violence against white women and the mugging and beating up of white men, in both cases often with a sadistic element in the criminal acts. However, this time it is not about a solidaritarian white transracial identification nor is it about any claim that white Swedes would be black or non-white, but it is nonetheless about the same desire for being a sufferer and not a perpetrator, to be able to position oneself as a marginalised inferior.

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