

Seeing through the White Gaze: Racialised Markings of (Un)familiar Bodies in Swedish Transnational Adoption Policy

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This paper will explore racialised markings of transnational adoptees and adoptive families in current Swedish transnational adoption policy. Policy statements about transnational adoptees' physical appearance, and the significance ascribed to it in adoptive family relations and everyday life make up the empirical data. Drawing on critical social policy, postcolonial feminism, critical whiteness studies, and Foucauldian archeology, the paper offers an interdisciplinary reading of the discursive conditions structuring understandings of belonging and difference in this particular context. This paper concludes that the adopted subject is ascribed a natural orientation towards the birth country and the biological family in the documents. Dark skin colour is made a symbol of belonging to another nation, another family. This approach is an arrogation of destabilisation, with the purpose of challenging the ways in which transnational adopted bodies are constructed as revealing and disturbing elements in white Swedish imaginary. To conclude, racialised markings of transnational adoptees as familiar, but yet unfamiliar bodies make visible the symbolic boundaries withholding transnational adoptees unconditional national and familial belonging.

Keywords: Social Policy; Racialisation, Whiteness, Discourse, Transnational Adoption, Belonging, Difference, Sweden

Social policy and the discursive production of difference

Social policy is often associated with ideas of justice and equality. However, within European social policy research there is a tradition of theorising welfare as a differentiating practice. Such studies can be conducted from various viewpoints. Early approaches investigated social stratification and uneven distribution of material resources (Esping

Andersen 1990). As a consequence of the linguistic turn, more recent approaches have acknowledged the ways in which groups and social problems are constructed through social policy (Leonard 1997; Carter ed. 1998; Dean 1999; Lewis 2000). Departing from these developments, differentiation in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality have been studied in the field of critical social policy (Lewis, Gewirtz

and Clarke eds. 2000; Fink, Lewis and Clarke eds. 2001). As Lewis (2006:88) points out, discourses of the universal are still constitutive of intersecting power structures.

This paper explores Swedish transnational adoption policy and the research foci will be on questions of belonging and difference. I conceptualise social policy as a discursively embedded practice produced by, as well as productive of, identifications and categorisations (Lewis and Gunaratnam 2001, 145). Welfare theorists have argued that social policy constructs the nation as an analytical category. Drawing upon feminist and postcolonial perspectives, I understand nation formation as a parallel process of inclusion and exclusion. In context specific ways, boundaries are drawn between those assumed to belong 'here', and those assumed to belong to 'other places' (Williams 1989, 1995; Lewis 2000). National communities are imagined through ideas of a common past and myths of origin. Those myths are nevertheless real in their consequences, and construct some origins as more desirable than others (Yuval-Davis 1997, 26-27).

I will explore issues of belonging and difference, with regard to both nation and family. Within postcolonial feminist theory, symbolic links between these categories have been pointed out. In the European context, nation and family are both associated with notions of 'home'

and commonly illustrated by the blood metaphor (Brah 1996). As Ann McClintock (1993, 63) reminds us the term 'natio', from which 'nation' derives, means 'to be born', bringing myths of origins to the fore. A similar myth of origin is expressed in the significance ascribed to blood ties in the definition of family (Hill Collins 2000, 163-165). When imagining national community, Puri (2004, 161) argues that ideas of 'one single point of origin' are crucial. As I see it, these approaches contribute to an understanding of the relation between inclusion and exclusion of subjects and family practices within particular national realms.

In this context, bodies are made markers of (un)belonging. Bacchi and Beasley (2002, 331) describe social policy as a prime site for the articulation of bodies. Exploring how transnational adoptees and adoptive families are marked and discursively positioned through racialisation and normative whiteness is my main concern here. Policy statements about transnational adoptees' physical appearance make up the empirical data.¹ How is physical appearance accounted for? What significance is ascribed to skin colour in adoptive family relations and everyday life? Which are the discursive conditions making these statements meaningful, and which are the implications in terms of national and familial belonging? The theoretical framework sketched out above enables an analysis of how markings

of particular bodies in social policy could be read as discursive boundary making, regulating national as well as familial belonging in specific contexts.

Exploring whiteness

Within social policy, racialisation and the subtle ways in which whiteness as a norm is operating in welfare institutional contexts are of growing interest. In the introduction to a *Social Politics*' special issue on these matters, Hunter, Swan and Grimes (2010, 409) suggest that critical whiteness studies provides a means to name racialised power in welfare discourses and practices. A similar approach is to be found in Alastair (2010), exploring child care policies in Ireland. Following Lewis (2000, 64), I conceptualise social policy as a field of meaning production, constructing categories of belonging. From this perspective, an important aspect of racialised power is the power to define someone's national or familial belonging. This paper offers a postcolonial and feminist inspired reading of the discursive conditions structuring particular understandings of belonging and difference in Swedish transnational adoption policy. In an interdisciplinary dialogue, the paper centralises the discursive aspects of racial differentiation.

A useful discursive perspective can be found in Michel and Honegger (2010). They describe whiteness as a racialised mark-

ing process, where subjectivities and practices are positioned as 'white' or 'not white' in relation to naturalised attributes (Michel and Honegger 2010, 426-427). To analytically capture such processes, I have combined these theoretical insights with Foucauldian archeology, as it is outlined in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (Foucault 1968/2002). My choice of methodology is based upon a wish to construct a link between text and context that does not privilege the status of any individual authors. Statements of transnational adoptees' physical appearance are analysed as expressions of discourse. Discourse provides the conditions for how a topic can be meaningfully spoken about in a particular time and space. Furthermore, as discursive and social practices are conceptualised as interwoven, subjectivities and practices are negotiated in relation to prevailing discursive conditions.²

The empirical sample consists of political reports, research reports, social work guidelines and educational material on transnational adoption published in Sweden between 1997 and 2008.³ *Barn i homosexuella familjer* (SOU 2001:10) is a Swedish Government Official Report investigating gay parenting. *Internationellt adopterade i Sverige* (IMS 2007) is an official research anthology on identity development, social adjustment and mental health among transnational adoptees in Sweden. *Internationella adoptioner.*

Handbok för socialnämnder (NIA 1997) and *Internationella adoptioner. Handbok för socialtjänsten* (SoS 2008) contains guidelines for social work practitioners in the evaluation of adoptive parent applicants. *Adoption* (Lindblad 2004), and *Att bli förälder till ett barn som redan finns* (SoS and MIA 2008) are educational texts; the first addressed to undergraduate students, the latter to adoptive parents to-be. The texts are characterised by their authoritative function as they provide knowledge usually considered legitimate and trust-worthy. The racialising effects of these social policy genres are easily obscured by their assumed neutrality (Alastair 2010, 212).

It has been argued that the particular challenge for scholars studying whiteness is that racialised marking processes are usually hidden (Crenshaw 1997; Michel and Honegger 2010). Consequently, Michel and Honegger (2010, 435) observe that explorations of whiteness require an analysis of 'wording, valuing, and devaluing embedded in specific argumentative logics'. In my analysis I take Foucault's (1969/2002, 31) advice to consider every statement seriously, even though it at first may appear unimportant or even banal in its consequences. What makes this advice of particular relevance here is because descriptions of physical appearance usually do not stand out in the texts; rather they are mentioned in pass-

ing. Also, the advice is valuable in the analysis of the significance ascribed to skin colour in family relations and everyday life, where naturalisation of meaning is an issue.

Not only do discursive conditions make some statements possible, they also limit the possibility of uttering other statements (Foucault 1969/2002, 134). This issue is scarcely developed in the archeological approach, but later on Foucault (1976/1990, 27) indicates that:

Silence itself – the things that one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies [...]. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.

Thus, silences do not mark the limit of discourse, but are conceptualised as integral part of discourse. Following this line of reasoning, I suggest that social policy as a field of meaning production could be theorised as a play between what is present, and what is absent.⁴ A similar approach is to be found in Crenshaw (1997, 254), who argues that 'scholars must locate in-

teractions that implicate unspoken issues of race, discursive spaces where the power of whiteness is invoked but its explicit terminology is not [...].’ Within critical whiteness studies, whiteness has been described as an *un-named* position (Frankenberg 1997, 6). However, as Ahmed (2004) acknowledges, it is not everywhere, and for everybody, that whiteness is un-named. It is, she suggests, white normativity itself that tends to make whiteness invisible for those inhabiting it. In sum, I understand whiteness as an explicit, as well as implicit racialised marking process.

Transnational adoption and race in Sweden

Northern European countries and Sweden in particular, have been described as prominent in terms of equality work. This is much due to social democratic re-distribution programmes and acknowledgement of women’s and children’s rights (Eriksson, et al 2005). However, researchers (Eriksson, et al. 2005; Pringle 2010; Sager 2011) have pointed out the risk of this progressive image obscuring ongoing differentiating practices. With regard to racialisation, Pred (2000, 1) forcefully demonstrates that Sweden should not be treated as an exception, but that ‘[t]he spectre haunting Europe, is the spectre haunting Sweden’. In many spheres of public life, the concept of racism seems to

be treated with suspicion. Molina and de los Reyes (2006, 295-296) trace such reactions to the fact that racism collides with historically important and predominantly social democratic ideas and politics of inclusion and modernity.

There is today extensive research on mechanisms of racialisation in Sweden. Research on the relation between ‘Swedishness’ and whiteness is crucial here. Mattsson (2005, 149-150) summarises the hegemonic discourse on Swedishness in a number of criteria, including formal as well as informal aspects of belonging. While citizenship represents a formal criterion of belonging, notions of blood ties, family resemblance and cultural knowledge represent informal ones. Mattsson (2005,150) argues that physical appearance is fundamental in the Swedish national imagination. Drawing upon eugenic discourse; white skin, blonde hair colour and blue eyes have been considered Scandinavian traits. To be unconditionally considered a ‘Swede’, ethnographic studies have thrown light upon the significance of looking ‘Swedish’ (Sawyer 2000; Lundström 2007; Hübinette and Tigervall 2008).

Hübinette and Lundström (2011) argue that the role of whiteness in the construction of the Swedish nation must be traced back to the history of scientific race classifications. Within this discourse, North Europeans was considered the “whitest whites” in the hierarchy of

race (Dyer 1997, 118). The establishment of the Swedish Institute for Race Biology in the early 1920s' and eugenic sterilisation programmes lasting until the mid-1970's, illustrate how race discourse has come into practice in Sweden (Hübinette and Lundström 2011). In European countries, Goldberg (2006) notes, race is located in the past, which limits the possibility of articulating contemporary race related issues. In the official Swedish national narrative, race is seldom an issue at all. As Catomeris (2004, 10-13) points out, the denial of these parts of history sets Sweden aside European racial histories, and makes room for the image of Sweden as a world conscious country.

The 1960s and 70s marked a shift in Swedish adoption policy and practice. From the 1920s onwards, national adoption – the placement of white children born outside of marriage, into the homes of white, childless, wealthy couples – became part of Swedish population policy (Lindgren 2006). However, by the 1950s the number of children available for national adoption decreased, partly due to the development of contraceptive technologies and liberalisation of abortion legislation (Markusson Winkvist 2005). Demands from various actors to facilitate the adoption of children born abroad (often of colour), contributed to the establishment of transnational adoption in the late 1960s (Lindgren 2006). Out of Sweden's population

of 9 million, 50 000 people have a transnational adoption background. Proportionally, this makes Sweden the leading country for transnational adoption in the world (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009, 335-336).

In the 60s, Swedish mass media portrayed transnational adoption as an act of solidarity with the 'Third World' (Markusson Winkvist 2005). In today's Sweden, transnational adoption is first and foremost described as a state sanctioned reproduction technique. Briggs (2003) has explored how the iconographies of 'rescue' and 'need' come into work in the politics of transnational adoption. Such ideas serve to legitimise transnational adoption practices in current Swedish social policy. Even though political and ethnic aspects of transnational adoption are pointed out in policy as well as public debate, the more fundamental critique is, I would say, controversial in Sweden (Andersson 2010).⁵ However, transnational adoption policy has changed over time. Historical studies (Lindgren 2006; Jonsson Malm 2011) have acknowledged a biologist turn in Swedish family policy, with implications for how the idea of what is in the best interest of the child is negotiated in adoption policy and practice.

Evasive markings

Yngvesson (2003, 7-8) argues that stories about roots have a hegemonic status in transnational

adoption. These stories ascribe considerable significance to physical appearance. Bodily markers such as skin tone and hair colour are assumed to connect those people sharing bodily markers. Consequently, physical appearance works as a symbol of both belonging and difference. In Swedish adoption research, the terms 'visible adoptees' and 'invisible adoptees'⁶ are established ways of categorising adoptees. The distinction between visible and invisible refers to the possibility of being able to determine, by sight, whether or not a child and its parent(s) have the same descent. Originally, the terms grew out of an objective to distinguish between transnational adoptees and national adoptees (Hübinette and Tigervall 2008, 300). In contemporary Sweden, national adoption is very unusual in comparison to transnational adoption.⁷ The idea of 'visible' and 'invisible' adoptees are part of the discursive conditions that make statements of physical appearance in current transnational adoption policy meaningful.

Statements about transnational adoptees' identity work and social relations in and outside of family, illustrate the ways in which stories about roots structure transnational adoption policy in Sweden (Andersson 2008; 2010). An assumed lack of resemblance with the majority of the native white population is the departure point in the statements of transnational

adoptees' physical appearance. According to official statistics from the Swedish Inter-country Adoptions Authority (MIA), of those children arriving to Sweden through transnational adoption between 1969 and 2009, the three largest groups are born in Asian, South American and European countries (MIA 2011). I argue that statements of physical appearance in the texts are implicitly based on the group defined as 'visible adoptees'. Children of European descent seem to be excluded from this category, and when they are discussed it is made explicit.⁸

Brekhus (1998) emphasises that language plays a crucial role in marking processes. 'The very act of naming or labeling a category, simultaneously constructs and foregrounds that category', he notes (Brekhus 1998, 35). As such, a label makes certain subject positions available and others unavailable for those included in the group. In the texts, transnational adoptees' bodies are marked in mainly two different ways. Firstly, there are articulations describing their physical appearance as 'different',⁹ 'atypical'¹⁰ or 'exotic'.¹¹ When these descriptions appear in the texts, what the bodies are assumed to differ *from* is not articulated. In other words, the point of comparison remains unmarked, which implies that transnational adoptees are described as different, atypical or exotic *per se*. These statements become meaningful in a context where darker skin and hair

colour have been made symbols of difference (Mattsson 2005, 150). Compared to the terms different and atypical, the term 'exotic' stands out as it draws upon a colonial romanticisation of 'the other' (Loomba 1998).

Secondly, there are statements describing physical appearance as 'non-Scandinavian',¹² 'non-Nordic',¹³ and 'non-Swedish'.¹⁴ A similar, but slightly more developed way of arguing is to be found in statements announcing that transnational adoptees' physical appearance 'differs from the Scandinavian [appearance]'¹⁵, that it 'differs from the common Nordic [appearance]'¹⁶ or that their physical appearance 'separates them from the Swedish majority'.¹⁷ Here, physical appearance is constructed as closely related to geographic region. It is implied that there is something that can be characterised as Scandinavian, Nordic or Swedish looks. As in previous examples, *what* characterises these looks is not defined. The terms seem to be used interchangeably, resulting in a linkage of these geographical spheres as in the Nordic race myth. Since Scandinavia, the Northern European countries and Sweden are imagined as white communities, defining Scandinavian, Nordic or Swedish looks becomes unnecessary.

In Ahmed's (2000, 21) terms, the statements of transnational adoptees' physical appearance construct the adopted body as 'out of place',

of non-belonging. Ahmed (ibid, 44-46) theorises skin as a border, marking out bodily spaces. Skin differentiates bodies from other bodies and regulates encounters in various social spheres. Ahmed is directing her focus away from the concept of 'otherness', and conceptualises racialisation through the question of 'strange(r)ness' (ibid, 21). She challenges the ontological status of 'the stranger', and explores how racialisation constructs some bodies as already stranger than others (ibid). The evasive markings of the adopted bodies in the texts naturalise, as I see it, notions of strange(r)ness. Ahmed (2010, 150) proposes that 'whiteness could be described as an ongoing and unfinished history, which orients bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space. Conceptualised as an orientation, whiteness functions as a norm withholding adopted bodies unconditional belonging, not permitting them to take up that space.

As previously discussed, I understand silences as integral part of discourse, rather than its absolute limits. I suggest that the lack of definitions regarding Scandinavian, Nordic or Swedish looks in the texts may be conceptualised as a discursive absence meaningful only in relation to what is actually present in the texts. Discourse produces a legitimate space for some statements, while limiting the space for other statements. As I mentioned earlier, there is a reluctance to talk

about race in Sweden today. I am not aiming to fully explain this reluctance, but to consider the discursive conditions making statements, as well as silences, meaningful. The point I would like to make is that descriptions of transnational adoptees' physical appearance in non-terms implies a particular form of marking. In their evasiveness, these labels contribute to the reproduction of the image of Scandinavia, Northern Europe, and Sweden as white communities. The adopted body is not marked in itself, it is marked in relation to something constructed as unmarked – whether it is made explicit or not. In other words, the adopted body is marked when it is envisioned through the white gaze.

In the documents I have analysed, physical appearance is made an important matter in the everyday life of transnational adoptees in Sweden. In one of the texts, the significance of physical appearance is summed up in a section about transnationally adopted youth and identity work. Referring to established Swedish adoption research, it is noted that adopted teenagers 'have to learn to handle' that because of their looks, they will at times be 'treated as immigrants, while they feel like Swedes'.¹⁸ There are at least three points to make here. Firstly, this 'discrepancy between ethnic self identification and external identification',¹⁹ as it is also formulated, is naturalised in the texts. Identifying as a 'Swede', but

not being recognised as a 'Swede' because of one's looks is described as a fact, rather than a problem. Secondly, resisting racialisation is made a responsibility of the adoptees, rather than of society. As a final point I would like to mention the use of the term 'immigrants'. It is common in Swedish welfare discourse, but has been widely criticised for its exclusionary and even racist implications (Pringle 2010, 22-23).

Preparing for difference

In previous work (Andersson 2010), I have drawn the conclusion that the construction of the adoptive family in Swedish transnational adoption policy is built upon assumptions of difference. These differences are discussed with regard to the relation between parent and child, and the relation between the adoptive family and their social surroundings. With regard to family life, differences in terms of genetics as well as appearance are discussed and in this paper, I will focus on the latter. In my analysis of social work guidelines used in the evaluation process, differences appear as facts. Furthermore, adoptive parents are advised to take these differences into account, when reflecting on their own parenting abilities. An issue that is likely to be part of the evaluation is whether the applicants have particular wishes regarding descent of the child. In this context, physical appearance is a closely related topic.

In current social work guidelines, published in 2008, there is a short statement about the importance of this discussion.²⁰ In previous guidelines, published in 1997, the issue is dealt with in more detail:

Many adoptive parents to-be have already before the evaluation thought through their experiences of bullying and racism in Swedish society, and how this may affect them and their child. Because of that, it occurs that a family wishes for a European child, or that they only would like a fair skinned child. A family may say that they could accept whatever country, but not a child with negroid features. These families often say that it does not matter for them, but that they think of the child and what is in its best interest.²¹

This statement is structured around an example where the applicants have certain wishes regarding the descent and appearance of the child. The example is framed in a way which makes the adoptive parents appear conscious about their choice. Not wishing for a particular child is made legitimate if the motives could be interpreted as 'in the best interest of the child'. I suggest that the argument of 'the best interest of the child' becomes a legitimising device to this kind of wish.

The formulation of the 'child with negroid features' is somehow ambivalent. On the one hand, it clearly

draws upon colonial and eugenic discourses (Mattsson 2005, 143). On the other hand, it is used as an illustration of an 'authentic' context, with the consequence of displacing the responsibility of what is actually stated. The example functions as a linguistic resource enabling a crossing of certain discursive boundaries. In the previous section, I read the descriptions of transnational adoptees' 'non-Scandinavian', 'non-Nordic' and 'non-Swedish' looks as a reproduction of these geographical spheres as white communities. However, in comparison to the most recent example, these descriptions might also be read as a wish to avoid more obvious racial classifications, or in other words, as benevolent efforts of de-racialisation.

Disturbing differences

The assumed differences within the adoptive family are continuously made relevant when portraying the adoptive family. As I have mentioned earlier, these differences regard the relation between parents and child and the relation between the adoptive family and their social surroundings. In current compulsory educational material for adoptive parents to-be in Sweden, the first time with the child is described as follows:

In the beginning, the adoptive parents appear as strangers to the child. The child has to get used to the fair skinned people who speak oddly, smell different, and

behave in peculiar ways. The parents have to get used to the child and its character, its different appearance, smell, and its ways.²²

In this statement, the first time seems to be a crucial moment in adoptive family life. Both parents and child are ascribed the need to get used to each other, because in the meeting, the differences between them appear. The differences are about looks, smells, and ways of being. The parents are mainly accounted for through their actions; they 'speak oddly' or 'behave in peculiar ways'. The child, on the other hand, is provided with a 'character'. In that sense I would say the child is attributed an identity as different.

I find it hard not associating this statement with the idea of the colonial meeting (Loomba 2008). Here, representatives from two groups constructed as different – or sometimes even opposites – have to confront each other's ascribed differences. The relation between them is that of an uneven dependency. The example illustrates the overlapping of national and familial communities. McClintock (1993, 64) has acknowledged how the nation in the colonial context could be imagined through an iconography of the family, 'a family of black children ruled over by a white father'. In a Swedish context, Catomeris (2004, 59-60) has discussed how Swedish foreign aid resembles a parent-child relation, where 'We' should assist

'Them' in their 'development'. These examples contribute to a theoretical framing of the statement, which brings intersecting differentiation processes to the fore.

In one of the texts it is concluded that the physical appearance of the adopted child 'makes the adoptive family stick out and no longer be anonymous'.²³ In this statement, the adopted subject is constructed as embodying difference in a way that marks the adoptive family as a whole. Compared to previous quote, the parents appear to have lost their strange(r)ness. Marking processes are multifaceted. In the educational material, an adoptive parent is quoted when noting the possibility of becoming 'recognised as an immigrant family'.²⁴ Another text discusses how the adoptive family 'may be affected by existing attitudes towards immigrants in Swedish society'.²⁵ It is stated that '[a]doptive families need to acknowledge and be aware of what different physical appearance could bring about'.²⁶ Apart from the risk of racist or other insulting comments, it is reported that transnationally adopted children could be made objects of curious questions and physical approaches.

One of the texts mentions that 'it is not unusual that unknown people approach younger adoptive children with non-Nordic looks in an unrestricted way, referring to that he or she looks so pretty or precious' and that 'they may even think that they have the right to pet or touch the

child.²⁷ The adoptive parents are clearly advised not to be tolerant of such behavior, and also, to give this message to their child. Statements regarding the significance of physical appearance include racialised and normative positioning as well as a confirmation that unpleasant encounters may occur. Some of the statements illustrate how whiteness operates as a norm in the construction of the adopted subject and the adoptive family. Other examples offer an opening of resisting racialisation in everyday life. As we can see in the above statement, these two mechanisms may also come into play simultaneously.

The statements about the adoptive family are structured by ideas of the importance of family resemblances. As Witt (2005, 141) points out, resemblance has a strong symbolic value; its meaning transcends itself and becomes a symbol of familial belonging. In the texts, the lack of blood ties between parents and child in the adoptive family is expressed in both inner and outer assumed differences. The lack of blood ties seems to cause a particular scarceness in the adoptive family that is impossible to remedy. Furthermore, this makes family life difficult, and the relational ties unstable. Through these statements, the biological family is ascribed natural attachments, while the adoptive family is portrayed as a family where attachment is a challenging project. The strange(r)ness ascribed

to adoptive family relations, implies ordinariness in biological family relations. The stability of the adoptive family is threatened by the fact that the child resembles *another family*, and *another nation*.

In the older version of the social work evaluation guidelines, not wishing for a particular child because of its looks is also made legitimate through the argument that a child that physically differs from the adoptive parents '[most often will] make that obvious, which may still be a very sensitive issue; that the spouses cannot have a biological child.'²⁸ I suggest that the adopted body is constructed as a revealing body; a body that deprives the parents the possibility of passing as a biological family; a body that risks being a constant reminder of shortcomings regarding biological reproduction. In the statements of how the adopted child provides the family with public visibility, the adopted body is constructed as a disturbing body; a body that causes the adoptive family to be in a vulnerable position in terms of exposing it to racialised curiousness and assaults; a body which unsettles the white surface of the family and the national imagined community.²⁹ Taking the contribution of Puwar (2004) into account, the question that needs to be explored further is how the presence of the adopted subject is negotiated in spaces imagined as white.

The logic of blood and roots

The empirical excerpts analysed here, have to be located within a broader context. As I (Andersson 2010) have suggested elsewhere, current transnational adoption policy in Sweden centralises problematic consequences of separation from birth country and biological family. Through essentialist notions of national, cultural, and ethnic belonging, transnational adoptees are advised to cultivate their origins. Integrating into the adoptive background is constructed as a means to reach a sense of wholeness, and unity. Creating openness around these issues is described as a particular adoptive family challenge. However, the ultimate challenge seems to be the striving to overcome the assumed differences between parents and child.

By means of a logic of blood and roots (Andersson 2010), the adopted subject is ascribed a natural orientation towards birth country and biological family. Skin colour is made a symbol of belonging to another family, another nation. Describing the looks of transnational adoptees of colour as 'non-Scandinavian', 'non-Nordic', or 'non-Swedish', implies a reproduction of these geographic spheres as white imagined communities. Also, these 'non'-labels reinforces an already existing avoidance of dealing with racialisation. With regard to family relations and experiences in everyday life, I have found that transnational adoptees

are ascribed a more or less permanent difference and strange(r)ness. This is expressed in the way the adoptive family is marked through the colour of the child.

I argue that discourse analysis provides not only useful, but also necessary tools to deconstruct social policy categorisations. Discursive productions of sameness and difference do not exist in a vacuum, rather they are embedded in the particularity of context, and have to be explored taking such specificity into account. By making use of postcolonial and feminist conceptualisations of national and familial belonging, discursive perspectives on racialisation and Foucauldian archeology, I have constructed a theoretical and methodological framework, enabling certain research questions, readings, and conclusions regarding normative whiteness. Such an interdisciplinary approach is an arrogation of destabilisation with the purpose of challenging the ways in which transnational adopted bodies are constructed as revealing and disturbing elements in white Swedish imaginary. To conclude, racialised markings of transnational adoptees as familiar, but yet unfamiliar bodies, make visible the symbolic boundaries withholding transnational adoptees unconditional national and familial belonging.

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Endnotes

¹ The term 'physical appearance' is translated from the Swedish term 'utseende', used in the empirical material.

² With regard to transnational adoption in Denmark, see Myong Petersen's (2009) discussion of the ambivalences of racial subjectification in a discursive context where race is not acknowledged.

³ The empirical examples analysed here, are also included in previous analyses of transnational adoption policy in Sweden (Andersson 2008; 2010)

⁴ In a different setting, the theme of presence/absence has also been explored by Burman, Smailes and Chantler (2004), drawing explicitly upon the work of Anne Phoenix.

⁵ While the term 'transracial adoption' is established in the U.K and the U.S, 'international adoption' is the term used in Sweden. The difference between these terms is that the first immediately identifies the race dimension.

⁶ My translation of: 'synligt adopterade' and 'osynligt adopterade'.

⁷ Family placement, on the other hand, is a developed practice. For overview see Höjer (2006). As opposed to adoption, family placement does not imply juridical separation between the child and the biological parent(s). This makes it an interesting case with regard to familial belonging.

⁸ One example where such clarification is explicitly made is a section where explanations to unemployment among transnational adoptees are discussed. It is argued that since "also adoptees born in Eastern Europe" (Lindblad 2009, 229, my translation) face unemployment; the explanations cannot be reduced to ethnic discrimination. In my reading, the assumed whiteness of transnational adoptees born in Eastern Europe, legitimises biological explanations for unemployment among the group (Andersson 2010, 108-112).

⁹ My translation of: 'annorlunda' (IMS 2007, 111).

¹⁰ My translation of: 'avviker' (SoS and MIA 2008, 94).

¹¹ My translation of: 'exotiskt' (IMS 2007, 114).

¹² My translation of: 'icke-skandinaviskt' (IMS 2007, 19).

¹³ My translation of: 'icke-nordiskt' (Lindblad 2004, 194).

¹⁴ My translation of: 'icke-svenskt' (IMS 2007, 205; SoS and MIA 2008, 94).

¹⁵ My translation of 'avviker från det skandinaviska' (SoS and MIA 2008, 19).

¹⁶ My translation of: 'skiljer sig från det gängse nordiska' (NIA 1997, 20).

¹⁷ My translation of: 'utseende som skiljer dem från den svenska majoriteten' (IMS 2007, 18).

¹⁸ My translation of: '[...]bemöter andra människor dem således ibland som invandrare, samtidigt som de själva känner sig som svenskar' (SOU 2001:10, 140).

¹⁹ My translation of: 'diskrepans mellan den etniska självidentifikationen och den externa identifikationen' (SOU 2001:10, 140)

²⁰ SoS 2008, 65

²¹ My translation of: 'Många blivande adoptivföräldrar har redan före utredningen tänkt igenom sina erfarenheter av mobbing och rasism i det svenska samhället och vad det kan komma att betyda för dem och deras barn. Därför händer det att en familj önskar barn från Europa, eller endast kan tänka sig ett ljust barn. En familj kanske uppger att den kan tänka sig vilket land som helst, men inte ett barn med negroida drag. Ofta säger dessa familjer att det kvittar för deras egen skull, men att de tänker på barnet och dess bästa' (NIA 1997, 20).

²² My translation of: 'För barnet är adoptivföräldrarna till en början främlingar. Barnet måste vänja sig vid de ljushyade människorna som pratar konstigt, luktar annorlunda och uppför sig märkligt. Föräldrarna måste vänja sig vid barnet och dess karaktär, dess annorlunda utseende, lukt och sätt att vara' (SoS and MIA 2008, 76).

²³ My translation of: '[...] adoptivfamiljer sticker ut och inte längre kan vara anonyma' (MIA and SoS 2008, 19).

²⁴ My translation of '[...] registrerad som en invandrarfamilj' (SoS and MIA 2008,

92).

²⁵ My translation of: '[...] kan komma att påverkas av olika synsätt som finns på invandring i det svenska samhället' (SoS and MIA 2008, 19).

²⁶ My translation of '[a]doptivfamiljer behöver vara uppmärksamma på och medvetna om vad det annorlunda utseendet kan medföra' (SoS and MIA 2008, 93).

²⁷ My translation of: 'inte ovanligt att främmande människor närmar sig yngre adopterade barn med ett icke-nordiskt utseende på ett gränslöst sätt med hänvisning till att han eller hon ser så söt eller gullig ut" samt att "[d]e kan till och med tycka att de har rätt att klappa eller ta i barnet' (Lindblad 2004, 194).

²⁸ My translation of: '[kommer] att göra det uppenbart, det som kanske fortfarande är så känsligt: att makarna inte kan få ett biologiskt barn' (NIA 1997, 20).

²⁹ In my reading of the constructions of the adoptive body, there is a parallel to Douglas' (1966/2002) suggestion of using the polluter as an analytical figure to explore constructions of purity. Critical whiteness researchers (Dyer 1997; Mattsson 2005) have theorised purity as part of the construction of whiteness, which is partly related to the symbolic meaning of white as a colour.

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