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Postprint / Postprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Elsrud, T. (2008). Othoring through genderization in the regional press. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 11(4), 423-446. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549408094981>

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Othering through genderization in the regional press

*Constructing brutal others out
of immigrants in rural Sweden*

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ABSTRACT By far, most of the research into processes of discrimination and ethnification in Sweden considers urban settings. This article focuses on how the regional press in a rural area of south-east Sweden represents immigrants in a residential area in the outskirts of the Kalmar township.

It points at the urgent need for researchers and decision-makers to take into account both subtle and palpable stigmatizing processes that meet immigrants who reside the countryside. An analysis of two local newspapers shows a continuous construction of 'otherness' through pictures and texts, in which the identities of minority ethnic groups are stereotyped and subverted. One of the most persistent themes in this work of representation is the brutalization of the masculinity of 'others', stressed even further by a 'traditionalization' and feminization of a weak, caring female other. Both these gendered images serve a higher purpose, that of maintaining a positive image of a taken-for-granted Swedishness.

KEYWORDS *ethnification, femininity, genderization, masculinity, othering, regional press, representation, Swedishness*

Introduction

People who hardly know where Norrliden is, know all about the area. Prejudices? Rumours? Sure, it is true that Norrliden is a 'suburb',¹ that crime is sometimes committed there and, sure, it is true that there are many immigrants there. But what is it that makes Norrliden seem like a much worse place to live in than other places in Kalmar? *ÅXå* wanted to find out what type of place Norrliden really is through talking to those who should know best, the people in Norrliden themselves. (Bohl, 2005)

Under the heading 'A Visit to Reality', the editorial staff at the youth supplement of *Barometern* – a regional newspaper in rural south-east

Sweden – try to challenge the local myth that Norrliden is considered a problematic housing area in Kalmar, a place of ethnic segregation and crime.

From an emic perspective the journalists composing the text above probably went to Norrliden with the best of intentions: to question the myths. Yet from a structural and more critical perspective, applied throughout this article, that is not what they did. Rather, newspaper articles such as the one quoted here can be regarded as expressions of a continuous construction process where people of power – in this case, the authorities with access to the listening ear of journalists, and the journalists themselves – define the rights and wrongs, the reality and non-reality, of people of subordination (see Brune, 1998, 2004, 2005; Ericsson et al., 2002; Fiske, 2000; Hall, 1997; Hall et al., 1978; van Dijk, 2000). Arguing that media representations are manifestations of power relations is not to attribute to individual journalists or photographers an ‘evil mind’ or a premeditated intentionality when they participate in shaping images of others. On the contrary, effective power practices often take place without actors being aware of them and manifest themselves in everyday discourse, where they are usually taken for granted by both journalists and readers (Bourdieu, 2002[1991]; Foucault, 1997[1972]; Hall, 1997; Hall et al., 1978). The project from which this article emanates is not a critical study of contributions by individual journalists to a particular topic, but of the structures of the thought that journalists make use of, and share with others, in (re)creating the ‘world’.

The press is not the only language source with a strong influence over the way that people attach meaning to life, yet it has a rather prominent position when it comes to spreading images rapidly and broadly. Not everyone’s language is as influential when we speak of the capacity to influence others or communicate a convincing message to a wider audience. Newspapers have a particularly strong and natural access to family breakfast tables and workplace cafeterias. At the time of enquiry, regional newspapers such as *Barometern* and *Östran*, on which this research project focused, reached 43,000 and 16,100 homes and workplaces respectively (Newspaper Statistics, 2005), six days a week in the Kalmar region, which has 235,000 inhabitants (Statistics Sweden, 2005). This is a favourable position, in a time and place where many ‘voices’ compete for attention and space.

The newspaper representations of Norrliden presented in this article come from a qualitative study of how the ethnically diverse residential area Norrliden on the outskirts of the town of Kalmar (approximately 60,000 inhabitants) in south-east Sweden, is portrayed in text and pictures in the regional newspapers, with a particular interest in images and notions of ‘immigrants’ and ‘Swedes’ (see also Elsrud and Lalander, 2007).

All the papers published by the two newspapers during 2005 have been searched for content, in text or photos, relating to the area. All in all



210 articles and news items about Norrliden were gathered and thematically ordered into texts about theft and burglary (72), violent crime (30), damaging activities (26), other minor crime (12), safety and order-related problems (11), Norrliden's bad reputation (6), gang activity and a gym to prevent gang activity or crime (3), the need to improve Norrliden (14), 'exotic Norrliden' through texts on food, ethnic difference and racism issues (17), and a non-specific category of diverse stories such as church activities, school events and family get-togethers (19).

Subsequently the selected texts and images were analysed qualitatively in search of discourses and meanings attached to different situations and topics, with a particular focus on notions and images of immigrants and 'Swedes'. Such a discourse analysis approach involves interpretation at two different 'levels': one being the analysis of singular texts, images or articles, and the other one being identification and interpretation of 'intertextual meaning' (see Barker and Galasiński, 2001; Hall, 1997). The latter involves a distancing from singular articles while they are being related to the whole, not only to seek significance in one individual text, but to analyse how the representations in that text can be related to representations in other stories about the same residential area. In other words, the analysis has involved a distancing from the different obvious themes mentioned above in search of themes that are less spelled out, yet become identifiable through the 'accumulation of meanings across different texts' (Hall, 1997: 232).

Norrliden, a rural Swedish example

Large proportions of immigrants, and the 'problems' thought to be linked to their segregation, are expected to appear more often in Sweden's bigger cities, not in country towns. However, this article will challenge such assumptions in providing convincing empirical 'evidence' pointing to an urgent need to look more closely at the relationship between minorities and majorities in rural Sweden.

Describing the particulars of Norrliden in Kalmar in relation to other towns in Sweden or on an international scale deserves its own article. Here this article can only sketch out a few basic characteristics to contextualize the arguments that will follow. While problems related to social exclusion and segregation of minority ethnic groups in Sweden is often referred to as a big-city issue, relative social exclusion on ethnic and economic grounds also take place in less urban areas. One reason for the relative spread of immigrants and refugees in particular in Sweden is the 'whole of Sweden strategy'. It was initiated in the mid-1980s and through the establishment of rural refugee camps, regulations and economic sanctions, it was at least partly successful given its integrative purpose to spread refugees and newly-arrived immigrants over a vast majority of Sweden's 290 municipalities (Pred, 2000). Clearly, bigger cities such as Stockholm, Malmö and

Gothenburg have by far the largest 'immigrant' populations, but enough immigrants remain in, or move to, smaller towns in rural Sweden, where it is of urgent relevance to study processes of integration, segregation and discrimination. Similar to big city areas, smaller towns in Sweden also tend to have a segregated residential pattern, with people of non-Swedish origin residing mainly in rental apartments and areas on the outskirts of town. Norrliden is an example of a socially and economically segregated area in a relatively small town in a relatively rural setting, sharing many virtues and challenges with other town areas in similar 'rural' places all over Sweden. What differs from many of the large city areas is that the number of immigrants is smaller and that subsequently, groups of people with similar backgrounds, which can provide a sense of belonging and security in the new country, are also smaller. Due to this relative lack of social networks, immigrants in rural areas may be more vulnerable when encountering discriminatory practices and factors. In addition, rural Swedes are among those who have the most pessimistic view of immigrants (Swedish Integration Board, 2002), so we have compelling reasons to start looking at processes of integration and segregation in places such as Norrliden.

Of Kalmar's inhabitants, 3370 lived in Norrliden at the beginning of 2005, and of these approximately 40 percent had a 'foreign background' (Kalmar Municipality Statistics, 2004: 29), in contrast to 8 percent in the municipality as a whole.² The largest minority ethnic groups in Norrliden are from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Yugoslavia³ [sic] and Vietnam, but many other nationalities are represented. What distinguishes Norrliden and other Swedish minority ethnic town sections from similar areas in, for example, France, Germany, the UK or USA is the ethnic heterogeneity within the Swedish minority ethnic town quarters. (In fact, the most homogeneous quarters are likely to be those that cater predominately for upper or middle-class Swedes.) Housing segregation undoubtedly exists in Sweden, as elsewhere, between those regarded as Swedes and immigrants, resulting in minority ethnic areas such as Norrliden. Yet a striking difference of segregated areas in Sweden is that more often than not they consist of many different categories of immigrants, often with a large number of different nationalities residing in the same area (see Pred, 2000). The consequences of this are various: one aspect of particular interest is the tendency in Sweden to objectify 'immigrants' (*invandrare*) as a homogeneous group (Molina, 1997) rather than as 'Latino', 'Pakistani', 'Vietnamese', and so forth. This explains the focus in this article upon the social construction of immigrants (and Swedes) rather than upon potential differences applied to different immigrant groups. This objectification of the immigrant exists all over Sweden, but should not be misinterpreted as evidence of there being little or no difference between the amount of discrimination or racism a specific immigrant group encounters. In fact some categories, for example people with backgrounds in Muslim countries,



encounter more negative attitudes than others (see Swedish Integration Board, 2002), while discrimination against Western Europeans is rare.

It is also relevant to consider that, according to municipality statistics, this is the area in town where people on average have the lowest incomes, the least education and the highest levels of social welfare dependency. Therefore, addressing the social construction process of Norrliden taking place in the media, in particular its 'ethnic' qualities, is not only addressing issues of ethnicity but also of class, and as we shall see in the remainder of this article, issues of gender.

Reading the press: a critical approach

In studying media representations of Norrliden, the focus has been on how the area is portrayed, what the texts and photos say about Norrliden and its people, and understanding the dynamics through which the images and myths come alive. This perspective requires a detailed and interpretive reading in search of meanings, significations and values, which can be either symptomatic and dominant, or tendentious and uncommon (Barker and Galasiński, 2001; Brune, 2004). This discourse analysis approach has required reading and analysing at different levels (see van Dijk, 2000). At one level the present study has searched for codewords such as 'gang-related crime', 'brutal', 'better' or 'safe', all of which are loaded with cultural meaning, as will be argued in this text. At another level it has searched for meaning in whole sentences, complete texts and photos and the actual relationship between different texts. Such overarching, intertextual 'distanced' reading has allowed the study to see hidden themes, such as a tendency of authorities and newspapers to brutalize or pacify.

Working analytically in such a way follows upon ontological and epistemological points of departure, in which people are seen as active co-writers – both producers and consumers – of 'reality' through language, images and communication. Language contains not only concepts and images in order to communicate a notion of something, but also meanings, values and taken-for-granted cultural and social biases. If wanting to understand how people create their view of the world, how it is constructed and with what values, one must focus on language, on oral, written and imaged signs (Barthes, 1972; de Saussure, 1986). To understand how power is practised, how matters such as control, self-control, freedom and oppression are distributed among people, one must scrutinize the taken-for-granted meanings and messages channelled through oral, written and imaged signs (Bourdieu, 2002[1991]; Foucault, 1997[1972]).

A peculiarity of the media, making it particularly important in the circulation of meanings and myths, is its very dependence on taken-for-granted meanings and myths in order to work successfully (Brune, 1998, 2004; Hall, 1997; Hall et al., 1978; Ristilampi, 1994, 2003). A lowest common denominator is aimed at, in order to attract as many readers as

possible. This leads to narrative forms and/or structures which (re)produce simplifications, amplifications and divisions of reality into black and white, good and bad, immigrants and Swedes. Complex social phenomena and individuals are categorized and dressed-up into easily consumed stereotypes. Many of these narrative structures are intrinsic to a media logic manifested in routines, expectations, restrictions and demands for specific forms of presentation (Brune, 2004, Hall et al., 1978), but it is not only media shortcomings that force these narrative structures upon reality. They also belong to a cultural requisite, embedded in dominant ways of speaking about a given topic in a given society. This means that the analysis of Norrliden representations is not just an analysis of situated short stories, but also of more general structures of thought. For example, the examined articles' strong focus on crime has not risen from a peculiarity among Kalmar journalists, rather from a much more general interest in crime *per se*, crime among immigrant populations as well as from the 'perfect match' between criminal activity and media logics. Crime is dramatic, separates the good from the bad, engages readers through its threatening nature, and its details are routinely handed over to the media by 'trusted' and professional experts, such as the police and court representatives (see Hall et al., 1978).

This 'marriage' between authorities and the media reminds us that 'blaming' individual actors for media messages solves little. Apart from their cultural and social content, media representations are often the product of many actors: authorities calling a press conference with a particular message in mind, journalists' and photographers' choice of angle and genre, night editors' selection of a heading, and so forth. Yet, much more than the people they portray, they all have in common the power to define what to say and how to say it.

The point that this article wishes to make is that this preference of portraying a neighbourhood as criminal and disorderly is a political and ideological act, imprinted with overt and/or tacit assumptions, not only about ethnicity, but also about gender.

Primitive masculinity: a threat to modernity

The rest of this text will deal with different aspects of a construction process through which the Norrliden area is given an identity that supports the notion of it as a place of and for the 'other', rather than a representation of the 'real' Sweden. When discussing the terms of othering, the present study has been influenced by postcolonial theory, and refers to the processes of stigmatizing social and cultural construction in which negative stereotypes are ascribed particularly to colonized people and from a western hegemonic position (Said, 1978). However, the term is employed today, and in this article, to describe a more general process in which a group is given the position of a 'negative' cultural counterpart through which the



cultural self can be uplifted and kept in a more favourable position. In Sweden such devaluing construction processes take place against people of many colours and geographical origins, as long as they are thought or found to differ in profound cultural or physical ways from mainstream Swedes.⁴ For example, as argued by Molina (1997) when she speaks of the 'objectification' of immigrants as a group in Swedish discourse, there is a clear tendency in Swedish discourse to shove ethnic groups together into one overarching category, which is devalued and differentiated from mainstream culture and society (see also Brune, 1998, 2004, 2005; Pred, 2000; Ristilampi, 1998, 2003).

This process of 'othering' is a subtle and complex process, which runs through a number of more obvious themes in the regional media. Also, it is a process involving many different and intertwining components. One step in this process of 'othering' is naturally the ethnification of place; another step involves brutalization of the ethnified other. Moreover, there is the construction of an urban jungle. All these othering processes have one thing in common: they all create a (potentially) brutal masculine other. This is an overarching, yet complexly interwoven, image and notion supported by stories of victimized and caring non-Swedish females. These different, yet dependent, construction processes will be exemplified and analysed below, but it is important to stress that analytical categories are precisely that. In real life, as in media texts and images, the themes mix, spill over into each other and conglomerate, making them all the more difficult to identify and challenge.

Othering through ethnification

The ethnification process appears both as a visible 'fact' and as a hidden message in the texts. Some articles speak explicitly about Norrliden as a place where minority ethnic groups are abundant, stating their percentage (Bohl, 2005), or that the Nova compulsory (comprehensive) school in Norrliden has long been 'known for having many students of different cultural backgrounds' (Thörning, 2005). In one editorial text, Norrliden is compared to other stigmatized 'ethnic areas' in larger Swedish cities such as Fittja and Gottsunda, and indirectly to the recent ethnic conflicts in Parisian suburbs (Dahl, 2005: 2).

Other texts send more implicit messages by discussing the need for 'better integration' in Norrliden (Jutefors 2005a: 5), a 'citizens' office' to facilitate contact between authorities and people in Norrliden (Ericsson, 2005: 7), or a need for parents at Norrliden's 'baby-café' to practise Swedish (Andersson, 2005b: 6; Kanje, 2005a: 1). There are also articles from Norrliden's Nova school, as students celebrate international events by treating visitors and students to a 'tasty journey' (Ollander, 2005: 7) or 'smells and tastes from around the world at Nova' (Adeen, 2005c: 13). In addition, interviewees from Norrliden often have names that are not traditionally Swedish. Thus, there can be little doubt among the readers

of the two newspapers about the relatively high proportion of minority ethnic groups in Norrlliden.

This in itself does not necessarily indicate a problem. Problems arise when this type of representation is connected to other representations of Norrlliden, namely the very strong focus on Norrlliden as a place of brutality and criminality and problems in general.

Othering through brutalization

This brutality is portrayed in blunt ways, such as the frequent use of terms such as 'brutal', 'crime wave', 'wave of burglary', 'gang violence', 'war zone', 'knifing drama' in connection with criminal activities of various degrees and types in Norrlliden. With the strong slant towards headings such as these and the lack of other types of reporting from Norrlliden, an image of a brutal population and a preoccupation with certain male activities, and not others, seems unavoidable.

The brutalization of Norrlliden and its inhabitants also appears in articles dealing with the physical area. Some articles deal directly or indirectly with the fact that the Nova school in Norrlliden now has a surveillance camera. *Barometern* (Andersson, 2005a: 5) has zoomed in on the surveillance equipment in one photo. This 'public eye' is said to have lessened the occurrences of vandalism. Although, according to the text, these cameras exist at two other schools in other areas in Kalmar, Nova in Norrlliden is chosen to represent this development. *Östran* also picked the Nova school as its example when it wrote about surveillance cameras at three schools (Adeen, 2005a). Its article contains a photograph of a dull and greyish block on the Nova school complex. These reports are rather explicit examples of how representations of the physical and material world can convey cultural meaning. Here is another example of such work:

On the back wall of the local grocery store such things as 'fuck the TBA' [sic] and 'fuck the Police' are written. This does smell of the suburbs. But it is also a way for young people to communicate. Someone writes something on a wall and someone else answers the same way. (Bohl, 2005: 5)

Although the journalist has given the 'young people' the benefit of the doubt by declaring their potential innocence, the message on a wall, of a neighbourhood in conflict with law and order, remains unchallenged. This image is emphasized further by a picture on the same page of a man, with a recognisably Kurdish name, sitting alone on a sofa in front of a sign saying 'Project Norrlliden'.

The man is staring into the camera. Despite it being a rather 'clean' picture with few objects in it, this image is loaded with cultural meaning and value. The man, unavoidably connected to the sign 'project' above his head, comes across as a project himself; an example of those Norrlliden qualities needing adjustment and social engineering before they are able to fit in.



Figure 1 Representing reality and masculinity

Source: *Barometern*, 28 September 2005: 5, *Åxå*-supplement.

Sometimes small and insignificant words convey significant meanings as when adding the word ‘yet’, ‘another’ or ‘continued’, exemplified in the following headings:

‘The Wave of Burglaries Continues in Norrliden’ (Jutefors, 2005c: 3), ‘New Burglaries in Norrliden’ (Kanje, 2005b: 3), ‘Yet Another Burglary in Norrliden’ (Anonymous, 22 June 2005b: 6), ‘Another Burglary in Norrliden’ (Anonymous, 13 June 2005a: 6), ‘Yet One More Burglary in Norrliden’ (Jutefors, 2005b: 5), ‘Another Strike against Barber’s Shop’ (*Östran*, 16 December 2005: 7), ‘Terrace Thief Struck Again in Norrliden’ (Adeen, 2005d: 4).

‘Yet’, ‘again’, ‘continued’ and ‘new’ underline the fact that this has happened before, which is probably true, as it also is in other parts of town where criminal activity occurs. However, as criminal activity in Norrliden is disproportionately covered, these extra words enhance the image of brutality even more. It is interesting to experiment with this type of addition in relation to other criminal activities, such as men’s abuse of women. During 2005 the two newspapers reported on hundreds of cases of men beating women, or men beating children. Transferring the journalistic methodology above to these, the headings would read ‘yet another man beats up wife’, ‘one more woman being beaten’ and

‘man beats woman and children again’. Used in relation to a particular gender, such journalism seems both aggressive and bluntly stigmatizing of a collective.

Other ways in which the brutality narrative is passed on are through the ‘voices of “well-doers”’. Many journalists, and the people they interview, speak about wanting to make the area ‘safer’, ‘better’ and ‘nicer’. While at first sight it may appear as a different, much more positive theme than some others, its meaning becomes transformed or even reversed through its connection to, and dependence upon, other texts. Wanting to improve Norrliden suggests that Norrliden today is not nice enough, safe enough or good enough. Regardless of the benign intention, wanting to make Norrliden better, the brutality narrative is obvious in some of these articles:

When darkness begins to fall over Norrliden and grown-up people hurriedly make their way home the concrete-grey boredom is suddenly broken by a tight, colourful group of representatives from different municipality administrations and schools *hunting* for increased safety in northern Kalmar. (Roos, 2005a: 3; emphasis added)

In this article a large group of municipality representatives visits Norrliden hoping to make it ‘safer’ and ‘better’. However, the narrative is built upon a foundation of Norrliden malevolence where well-doers are mirrored against (young, tacitly non-Swedish) elements that come out in the dark. Frightening darkness and people going on hunts do not normally indicate urban living. These themes are usually more common in other types of writing than in news journalism. The following section will show how images of a brutal other are stressed further by representations of Norrliden as a place with jungle-like qualities.

The creation of an urban jungle

The connection between stigmatized minority ethnic quarters and the jungle is not unique in Kalmar; it appears also in larger newspapers covering urban areas (Dahlstedt, 2004). However, it is an important piece in the creation of the overall image of Norrliden as a place with brutal qualities. Sometimes this jungle theme is narrated in plain language. In an article about a forthcoming improvement to the Norrliden environment, *Östran* states:

Here also, the Park Administration has sharpened their clearing saws and honed their chainsaws for a frontal attack as early as next week. They are to clear all foot and cycle paths in the area and the streetlights in the jungle will be revealed again. (Roos, 2005b: 7)

However, often this theme is more obscure, as when single metaphors awaken connotations of wilderness and uncontrollable animal-like rage. An examination of one citation from *Barometern* sheds some light on this:

Roofs are taken away, undergrowth pulled up. Nooks and crannies that become lairs for beer-guzzling youngsters are lit up with strong lights.



The ideas were flowing at Wednesday's adult hike on paths which are to be made safer. (Zenkert, 2005: 4)

There is reason to pay this citation extra attention, due to its revelation of the subtlety with which a notion of the problematic jungle can be passed on to a reader. Swedish concepts corresponding to English shrubberies, nooks, crannies and paths usually appear in nature films and magazines, and not in relation to city or town areas. Not only do some of the terms used connote forests and jungle exploration rather than housing areas and city-life, they also carry negative connotations. 'Lair' is such a word; its Swedish translation 'tillhåll' is commonly used in relation to some sort of negative character, event or place – it refers to rather fishy goings-on. Nooks and crannies, in the context used here, have similar negative meanings: they usually refer to holes and hideaways in the ground into which animals crawl for protection or stalking. However, the text is not referring to animals but to the young residents of Norrliden. So in a subtle way the citation above combines two messages: that of the jungle-like character of Norrliden, and of a jungle-like Norrliden being inhabited by rather shady characters.

Representing Norrliden's jungle-like qualities is achieved through referring to real animals. In two articles in *Barometern* (Krantz, 2005c, 2005d), rats in Norrliden are declared a problem. 'Brown rats are a frequent problem, particularly in one of the housing-blocks at X [street address]', claims *Barometern* (Krantz, 2005c: 3). Although the municipality is blamed for their existence, not the inhabitants of Norrliden, there is always the chance that readers, having read other texts accrediting the area with jungle-like qualities, could connect Norrliden with uncontrollable wildlife and the untidiness usually linked to rats in domesticated areas. Also, prior to 2005, Norrliden was invaded by wild animals, such as when *Barometern* reported on adders biting children at one of the Norrliden playgrounds in summer 2003.

In the representation of Norrliden as a jungle there is a subtle conflict present which is best described as a polarization between 'them' and 'us', between 'their' jungle and 'our' progress, between 'their' lack of control and 'our' control. The nooks and crannies and their shady characters are not just there to complain about. Something is going to be done about it by people from outside of Norrliden. They are going to be lit up by modern means, by electricity and strong lights. Similarly, the abovementioned text is accompanied by pictures of these adult evening 'hikers', representatives of municipality administrative offices, who are all wearing bright orange vests with reflector tape (Zenkert, 2005; Roos, 2005a).

At first glance they may be mistaken as shields, or bulletproof vests. One of these pictures strongly articulates the distance between Norrliden residents and the authority representatives. In the centre of the picture are what appear to be a couple of policemen or guards and a group of adult

Vandring på väg mot bättre miljö

KALMAR

Tak tas bort, buskage slits upp. Hörnor och hålor som blir tillhåll för pilsnerdrickande unga lysas upp med starka sken.

Idéerna flödade under onsdagens vuxna vandring på stigar som ska göras säkrare. Men några frågetecken kvarstår. Var ska ungdomarna hålla till i Norrliden när de vill vara ifred utomhus? Var kan de unga ha roligt utan att störa andra? Och varför ska det klottras på vägar och pinkas i sandlådor och begås inbrott och skadegörelse på löpande band?

Hur ska samhället kring Nova-skolan bli trevligare? undrade den församlade skaran vuxna med rektor Nettie Börjesson i spetsen. Runt henne samlades personal från gatu- och parkkontoret, samhällsbyggnadskontoret, kommunledningskontorets utvecklingsenhet, engagerade boende, nattevandrarna och kommunalrådet Birgitta Elfström för att se vad var och en kan bidra med för att skapa en finare närmiljö. Promenaden gick i en cirkel runt Konsum mitt i Norrliden. Man inventerade barnens vägar till och från skolan.

De fyra bosniska barnen Emin, Elvedin och Mustafa Samardžić och Elvis Osmanović tycker inte alls att det är otäckt på kvällen, inte ens när mörkret har lagt sig. Men för att göra stället roligare både natt och dag vore en basketplan och tredvid den en grillplats kanon.

– Hela familjen skulle kunna grilla och äta ute och sedan kunde vi barn spela basket, säger Elvis Osmanović.

Kunde man sedan som gräddde påiset fixa en rejäl rutschkana och ordna en liten närliggande fotbollsplan skulle saken vara bifälld anser de fyra.

– Fast det är nog för dyrt, tror Elvis Osmanović.



Trygghetsvandringen var för politiker och tjänstemän vid kommunen men också för engagerade människor som bor i den norra stadsdelen. Denna vandring ska mynna ut i en bättre miljö när inventeringen ä

Figure 2 Municipal representatives are imaged, dressed in bright vests as they 'hike for a better environment'

Source: *Barometern*, 14 April 2005: 4.

'hikers' dressed in vests. Watching them from a distance, and photographed with their backs towards the camera, is a group of young, dark-haired boys, posed with their legs slightly spread, hands in their pockets. The four boys appear inactive, which in Sweden is a common image characterizing immigrant behaviour. The text under the photo reads:

The boys watch as grown-ups hike on well-trodden paths around the Nova school. On Wednesday night municipality people, employees from the Bergavik school and other committed people hiked around Norrliden in search of unsafe places. (Zenkert, 2005: 1)



There are other examples of texts and images that relate to this conflict between control and lack of control and to some extent also to the conflict between nature and culture, upon which the overarching story about a Norrliden with jungle-like qualities is told. In a longer article in the *Barometern* youth supplement *åXå* (Bohl, 2005), journalists and photographers try to deal with Norrliden's bad reputation. Yet it contains phrases and images that transfer it right into the pile of articles ensuring Norrliden's subordinated position. Having initially promised, in positivistic style, to find out what Norrliden is really like by asking the people living there, the authors seem to go on a quest for empirical evidence of the area's character in stories and pictures. This article carries a number of images alluding to the conflict between an uncontrolled jungle and a controlled materialistic world. In one picture a dark-haired young boy has been placed far away from the camera, at the outskirts of a dense forest. In the foreground lies trash, a discarded pizza box, as if the cameraman wanted to point out the uncertain position of his object, with an immigrant boy placed as if he is 'inbetween', not totally in the 'jungle' or in the civilized world. The text underneath says '[NN] lives in Norrliden with his parents and seven siblings. He didn't think it was hard to move to Sweden and he likes Norrliden' (Bohl, 2005: 6). There appears to be nothing in the text to explain the type of photo produced. An explanation of why the boy is placed far away from the camera, at the edge of the forest rather than in the housing areas, and framed by trash, is more likely to be found in more subtle layers of cultural meaning and value, where notions of disorder and lack of control are often ascribed to immigrant communities.

Another image, to the right of the boy in the forest, is of an empty, rusty and partly broken steel sofa. 'The broken steel benches smell of the suburb' (Bohl, 2005: 6), the author claims. Although the picture may have been chosen to represent authoritative neglect and economic hardship, related to other explicit and subtle meanings in other pictures and stories, it conveys a message of failed materialistic development. The rusty bench and the boy by the forest's edge are images blown up and placed together on a newspaper page, which fit into a mediatized system of representations of Swedish (ethnified) housing areas as examples of 'defeated modernity', of nature having eaten its way into the modern creation (Brune, 1998; Ericsson et al., 2002; Ristilampi, 1994).

The conflict between the jungle and modernity is expressed also through suggesting a tacit oppositional relationship between the journalists and their objects. In the same article the journalist tells the reader:

We manage to get into a backyard and meet a man and a woman sitting on the stairs to one of the blocks of flats. (Bohl, 2005: 6)

Again, there is a subtle tone noticeable only in some of the terms, yet it becomes understandable because of the strong messages conveyed in other articles and images. Semantically, people do not normally manage



Figure 3 A young immigrant boy posing at the forest's edge, framed by a discarded pizza box and a rusty bench, signalling disorder and nature's presence in the neighbourhood

Source: *Barometern*, 28 September 2005: 6, ÅXå-supplement.

to 'get in'. We walk in, enter or visit – but when one wants to cross a line, a border of material or mental qualities, one enters against some sort of odds; one manages to cross over. Read in relation to the other texts and images representing Norrliden as jungle-like, this is the language of an anthropology of the past, where the 'modern' (represented by the anthropologist) explored the 'primitive' (people of otherness), where the anthropologist was (and sometimes still is) seen to be an objective scientist entering, and eventually leaving behind, some sort of 'authentic' and 'primitive' field of investigation (see Clifford, 1990, 1992; Elsrud, 2004; Mulinari, 1999). The primitivistic slant to reports about Norrliden during 2005 is not as prevalent as the brutality theme discussed above, and jungle metaphors seem to appear most abundantly in specific articles but not others. Yet, importantly, newspaper information contradicting and challenging these types of stories is scarce, making them all the more powerful.



There is yet another powerful construction process through which the brutal character of Norrliden is conveyed. This is the theme in which the brutal and ethnified other has their masculinity subverted.

The omnipresent, brutal, masculine other

The text above has avoided highlighting or singling out one quite obvious theme running through all the other othering processes. Most texts and photos mentioned above are pregnant with notions about gender – with images of (a potentially brutal) masculinity, which is something that research into discrimination in ethnified areas often does not discuss.

As Brune (1998) has shown, Swedish media at both the national and regional level tend to be preoccupied with male activities when it comes to representing immigrants or refugees. This pattern is evident in the reading of Kalmar's regional press. Returning to the othering processes discussed earlier, boys and men are singled out often in photos illustrating the area's lack of safety, and less explicitly through a strong focus on general brutality and need for safety. This is a place of abundant 'brutality', of 'burglaries' and 'robberies', and most of these crimes are committed by men, as is conveyed to a reader through simple phrases such as 'two young *men* threatened the driver' (Karlsson, 2005a: 4; emphasis added) or '28-year old knifed by two unidentified *men*' (Ughemark, 2005: 1; emphasis added). Recurrent reports about criminal action are significant when it comes to forming a general 'intertextual' image of Norrliden and, most likely, also provides a 'gendered' backdrop against which other types of reports are viewed.

Counting all articles in all themes related to criminal activity, including those about efforts to make the area safer and better, approximately 75 percent of media images of Norrliden relate to crime, thus to predominantly male activities. This image of a masculine character setting the agenda for Norrliden – by far the largest, yet most taken-for-granted in the newspaper reporting of 2005, running throughout all topics as well as the present themes of analysis – is so thoroughly embedded within stories about immigrants and 'problematic' town sections that we forget it is there. In addition, this brutalization of a masculine other receives even more energy from yet another process in which genderization of the other is involved. The brutalized masculine other is intimidated between the lines in texts about weak women.

The victimized and feminized other

In the many texts about crime, robbery, brutal knifings and crimewaves – the majority of the texts about Norrliden – almost all the actors are identified as men. When women appear in texts about criminal activity, on a less frequent basis, they are usually victims of a particular crime. Even when they are not direct victims, this is the potential role that they are given in other texts, as in the following extract from an interview with

a young woman from Iran in *Barometern* headed 'Crimewave Worries Norrliden – Residents Demanding Local Police Officers after Latest Disturbances':

Norrliden is a good place, she states, and describes a visit to the area as a round-the-world trip. – I am not afraid. I know self-defence, she says and laughs – I take boxing classes here. I feel strong and can defend myself. (Krantz, 2005a: 4)

While this woman clearly defines herself as an agent, a non-victim of potential crimes, her boxing – and not the area's safety – seems to be emphasized as the reason for this self-esteem. Another woman is interviewed in the same article and according to the journalist she feels safe because she has a dog. The message is that women in Norrliden are safe only if they are aided by external forces such as dogs and boxing skills.

Moving away from the area is another portrayed option for women who want a sense of safety. In *Barometern* a story, pregnant with gender assumptions, is told of a couple who had 'had enough of a rowdy area' and moved elsewhere in the Kalmar area:

I think you should be able to leave the house. I had to take my husband in order to feel safe. It was unpleasant when I walked past a gang of six or seven boys outside the store. (Krantz, 2005b: 10)

With few exceptions, women are represented as real or potential victims of the brutality of Norrliden, and men as the brutes in relation to crime reports from Norrliden.

There are themes where women are allowed access to a much greater extent (see also Hultén, 2006). These are narrow compared to those focusing on criminal activity, yet they present another, alternative version of Norrliden, where the image of masculine jungle-like brutality becomes juxtaposed with a traditional, more domestic and controlled, caring and entertaining feminine character. One such theme is related to domestic preoccupations. Women appear in greater numbers than men in Norrliden articles about international cooking. Under headings such as 'Students Were Offered Tasty Journey' (Ollander, 2005: 7) and 'Tasty Journey Around the World' (Adeen, 2005b: 1) young dark-haired women are the focal point of both photos and text as they are serving food.

Another domestic theme relates to women as practitioners of handicraft where young women entertain with different types of artwork. A section in one of the articles reads:

The sisters [NN] and [NN] have only been in Sweden for seven months but they already speak good Swedish. The youngest sister, [NN], writes our names on a piece of paper and tells us about the art the girls make out of small pieces of coloured paper. On the table there is a pineapple and a swan, which they have made from glittering pieces of paper. They smile shyly when we ask if they have done these themselves. Yes of course, they answer as if it was the simplest thing in the world. (Adeen, 2005b: 13)



Smakfull resa runt jorden



Figure 4 Representing femininity: two young immigrant women appear to be offering, as the heading says, a 'tasty journey around the world'

Source: *Ostran*, 16 November 2005: 1.

Not only do they engage in an activity – detailed artwork – often labelled with feminine qualities, but they work with 'glittering' paper and they smile 'shyly' when the journalist asks if they have done these themselves, enhancing the image of a gentle and withdrawn (feminine) subject. While perhaps this citation is not startling on its own account, it becomes problematic when linked to the overarching pattern of female representations. The pattern, which appears rather acutely from reading the 2005 articles about Norrliden, is that of women as traditional and domestic carers and entertainers for a common good. They fix the food at the Nova school. They participate in family activities (Ekstrand, 2005), they paint colourful images on the walls of a corridor at the Nova school (Krantz, 2005e), set up entertainment at the same school (Svensson, 2005) or learn Swedish by singing children's songs and doing simple conversation practice at the local childcare centre (Kanje, 2005a).

However, there is one noteworthy exception to the pattern. In some articles about the new gym recently opened in Norrliden, women appear

to be transcending traditional gender norms. The gym, located in 'an old shelter', is said to 'strengthen Norrliden' (Danielsson, 2005: 6) and as part of the local 'safety-plan' it is 'free' for those living in the area (Johansson, 2005: 40). The main picture in one of the articles of two women leaning against a punchbag, gives an image of strong and active women. At first glance, this article seems to contradict most of the articles mentioned earlier. However, reading the text, a more complex narrative appears, with a mixture of weak versus strong women. While the women are represented as prepared to make the gym their place, they have been granted one day a week for women only. Both local newspapers mention this. *Östran* explains why, under the heading 'The New Gym: Important Part of Safety Plan':

Furthermore Wednesday evenings are reserved for women. [NN] has worked out at gyms before and is used to working out together with men, yet she thinks it is good to have a night for just girls. Maybe some [girls] think it is more difficult to perform with men in the room. (Johansson, 2005: 40)

It is perhaps a relevant question to ask – whether a women-only night is needed – at any gym. However most, if not all, Kalmar gyms do not offer this to their customers, yet in Norrliden they do. So even when the women of Norrliden make claims to a piece of the 'action', they are reduced to potential victim status by claims such as the one above, where it is assumed that women will find it harder to be active with men around.

In consequence, the Norrliden female, however much of a fighter she is portrayed to be, cannot overcome the notion of also being a victim. Female action is converted into defence rather than offence, and female immigrants remain potentially subordinated in relation to their male 'counterparts'.

Conclusion

Making 'Swedishness' by subverting gendered others

Above is an interpretation of the texts and images that acknowledges the presence and cooperation of different construction processes, of interdependent narratives resulting in an overarching story – an intertextual message (Hall, 1997) – of Norrliden as a place ridden by brutal and masculine otherness. Thus, the representation rests upon a foundation of sub-stories, tacit intertwined processes, othering, ethnifying, masculinizing and brutalizing the people of Norrliden. At the same time the area is ascribed jungle-like, non-modern and non-Swedish characteristics. The representation is nourished also by the tendency to ascribe women of Norrliden with traditional feminine qualities or specific areas in which to be portrayed, such as the domestic zones, but above all the tendency to subordinate the women as potential victims of crime, even when they are active.



The representation by Swedish media of the gendered identities of the other is, with some exceptions (such as Bredström, 2005; Brune, 1998, 2004, 2005; Hultén, 2006), an often-overlooked peculiarity involved in processes of othering. Research commonly directs attention towards the ethnification, brutalization and exotization of immigrants and places in which 'they' live, thus acknowledging the active subjectivity demonstrated by the media in forming the world rather than describing or mirroring it. Yet the active moulding of a brutal and potentially criminal masculine other is perhaps the most persistent impression after a close study of the empirical material in this project.

Tacitly, both men and women have been attributed restricted and stereotyped characteristics where the image of one gender is supported by a counter image of the other. Masculine qualities such as brutality, crime and potential aggressiveness in jungle-like surroundings are strengthened and balanced by attributing to women a more passive, defensive and caring character. Whereas the men of Norrliden are potentially dangerous, women are potential victims.⁵ Both these gendered characters, in a Swedish context, contradict the dominant discourses defining the proper ways for men and women to act. In a 'modern', 'secular' and 'developed' Sweden, men are expected to perform as 'civilized' and controlled, while women are expected to be active, participating and on an equal footing. Thus, the 'masks' of masculinity and femininity ascribed to people of otherness lead to subordination of the groups into which they are fitted. The othering process described in this article is strengthened profoundly by this subversion of the gender relations of others. So, why is this happening? There are no clear-cut answers, but different perspectives present different possible understandings.

Some light can be shed by the fact that the media is predominantly white and middle class (see Brune, 2004; de los Reyes et al., 2005; Fiske, 2000). Journalists, photographers and authority representatives seldom have experience of what it is like to grow up in a stigmatized neighbourhood or to belong to a minority group, which normally means that they have no insight into what life is like in such circumstances. They write and produce images about realities they have not experienced and consequently are dependent upon information they receive from others: this is how stereotypes can be produced and reproduced. The 'anthropological touch' in some of the texts discussed supports this view. The journalist, arriving from the outside, enters somebody else's backyard in search of a truth that they, and the reader, are not yet familiar with. The result becomes both an outcome of, and a source for, imagination. This type of journalism is a clear example of power-in-action, or what Bourdieu (2001) would perhaps label as a case of 'symbolic violence'. The people of Norrliden must accept being written about, not writing. Representations of their experiences of reality, their everyday life, will be filtered through the interpretive work of someone else.

Another way of understanding this othering process is to acknowledge its persistence over time. Some scholars regard the efforts by mainstream society to 'other' and 'subordinate' minority groups living in places such as Norrleden as a continuation of the European tendency, since colonial days, to honour and legitimize European civilization and exploration at the expense of others (Brune, 2004; de los Reyes and Mulinari, 2005; de los Reyes et al., 2005; Elias, 1982; Ericsson et al., 2002; Essed, 1996; Hall, 1997; Jordan, 1995; Said, 1978; Spurr, 1993). Belief in the good and favourable progress of Europe and other western regions, thought of as civilized and modern, needed a mirror image to make itself present and durable. Material and economic poverty provided a side-stage upon which a story about the 'other' – a primitive and underdeveloped type – could be told. This view, some claim (Brune, 2004; de los Reyes and Mulinari, 2005; de los Reyes et al., 2005; Ericsson et al., 2002; Essed, 1996; Hall, 1997; Ristilampi, 1998), has 'returned home' under post-colonial conditions, now manifest as a dividing line between a normal civilized lifestyle and the primitive dwelling of the encroaching other in marginalized sections of European cities.

Regarding processes of othering as ways of constructing 'selves' directs attention to the taken-for-granted 'Swedishness' which is silently present and powerful through the articles. Discovering and getting to know an assumed 'Swedishness', while analysing media representations, also means becoming acquainted with the story of 'normality' being produced between the lines and pixels of texts and pictures that are preoccupied with the sensational, the 'abnormal', the different. There is no need to spell out what the opposite of otherness is. It is still there, in the assumed arguments, in the linguistic 'matter of course' through which the writer addresses the reader on topics such as 'myths' about Norrleden, or the need to make the area 'safer', 'cleaner', 'better'. There is definitely a built-in common story in the portrayals of all that is different in Norrleden. Consequently, when constructing negative, unfavourable others, such as brutal men and weak and victimized women, these newspapers simultaneously make readers feel better about their own little defects. It is a bit like saying; 'Real Swedes are more civil. Swedish men are cultivated and well-tempered. Swedish women may still do most of the cooking and cleaning at home, but at least they are free.' The 'other', the negative counter-image of the self, must go through steps of ethnification and genderization to become the counter-image of a dominant cultural self (see de los Reyes, 2006; de los Reyes and Mulinari, 2005; Weber, 2001): a phenomenon needing much more attention in rural areas of Sweden.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Professors Philip Lalander, Lory J. Dance, Dr Susanne Johansson and Dr Jesper Andreasson for support through research and writing.



Notes

1. The term 'suburb' has a negative connotation in Sweden compared to that in English-speaking countries. In Sweden it indicates relative poverty, ethnic others and low-class citizens. While important from an international perspective, a discussion positioning and comparing city regions with 'ethnic classes' is extensive and cannot be considered in this article.
2. Figures from 2007 show little changes in population proportions. Of 3365 inhabitants in Norrliden in 2007, 41.5 percent had a 'foreign background'. Information supplied by Kalmar municipality official via telephone conversation, 20 July 2008.
3. The term is used by the municipality and refers to what is sometimes called 'rest-Yugoslavia', encompassing the two contemporary nations Serbia and Montenegro.
4. Despite the very Swedish tendency to categorize immigrants into one group, it should be made clear that not all immigrants are thought of as immigrants when the term is used in official or private discourse. Immigrants with a Muslim background can expect to encounter more racism and discrimination than other groups (Swedish Integration Board, 2002). Similarly, people from the Nordic region can expect fewer problems related to discrimination than other, often darker, immigrants.
5. This theme of female victimized 'others' supports another strong theme present in the studied newspapers, but not mentioned in relation to Norrliden. It is interesting to note that during 2005–7, so-called 'honour killing' and 'honour-related violence', described as a gendered and ethnic crime specific to mainly immigrant groups with a Muslim background, has been a recurrent topic, both locally and nationally. Critics have argued that the ethnification of domestic violence turns the focus away from the Swedish context, and from gendered violence committed by non-immigrant Swedes (de los Reyes, 2006).

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