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Arabian nights in the midnight sun?

Exploring the temporal structure of sexual geographies¹

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Introduction: Sexual geographies

In 1993 the Longman dictionary described Bangkok as being "famous for its temples and other beautiful buildings and also often mentioned as a place where there are a lot of prostitutes." Many Thai people were outraged and saw the entry as "against all moral principle." Following a banning of all Longman's publications in Thailand, the company "complied with a Government request to 'correct' the entry in its Dictionary of English Language and Culture." Anthropologist Annette Hamilton provides the controversial dictionary entry as an example of the "libidinalization of Thailand".² While Thailand may not have been colonized in the traditional sense of the word, it is continually portrayed through imperial eyes as accessibly erotic.

One may of course suspect that the lust or desire driving this so-called libidinalization of Thailand might be less a property of the Thai prostitutes than a projection upon them by the sex tourists, often Westerners, who buy

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2. Annette Hamilton, "Primal dream: masculinism, sin and salvation in Thailand's sex trade", in Leonore Manderson & Margaret Jolly, *Sites of desire, economies of pleasure: sexualities in Asia and the Pacific* (Chicago & London 1997) p. 145.

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their services. Edward Said has famously theorized this Western vision of the East as "Orientalism." According to Said, "the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, [and] deep generative energies".³ In this context, Hamilton's choice of the term libidinalization is significant. It pertains to the Orientalist discursive dichotomy between rationality of civilization ("Us") and the desires of nature ("Them"). In the discursive construction of sexual Others, their deviance is explained by the forces of nature or primitivist traditions.

This libidinalization and sexualisation of the *Orient*, "the epistemology by which Europeans came to judge civilizations and cultures along the vector of something called 'sex',"⁴ has become a longstanding trope in Western thinking. As such, it has been abundantly discussed within its wider historical context.⁵ However, the same can hardly be said for the role of sex in intra-occidental constructions of what may be called the modern Other's sexuality. This article will thus take a closer look at a somewhat more unlikely, yet nevertheless well-established locality of sexualization, namely the North. In particular, it will consider how this has played out in the mid-20th-century construction, and consequent historical trajectory, of the popular stereotype of *Swedish sin*.

Of course, there has been a long tradition of associating sexual stereotypes with the North, just as there has with the South. Ranging from Tacitus' *Germania* (98) via Adam of Bremen up to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters written during a short residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), writers, critics, and travellers have told of remarkable sexual licence and related themes such as frivolity and nakedness in the Scandinavian North.⁶ The 20th-century case of Swedish sin offers an interesting contrast to this commentary in that it is rationality and not barbarity, backwardness, primitivism or nativism, which is at the root of this sexualized image.

Therefore, to the extent that Orientalism can be considered an analytical attempt to understand the philosophical geography of the erotic, we take it as a point of departure in our twofold aim. Firstly, it prompts us to examine

3. Said, Edward, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth 1985 [1978]) p. 188.

4. Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring arabs* (Chicago & London 2007) p. 6.

5. See for instance Massad, (2007); Anne McClintock, *Imperial leather: race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest* (New York & London 1995); Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial fantasies: towards a feminist reading of orientalism* (Cambridge 1998).

6. See Stephan Michael Schröder, *Mehr Spaß mit Schwedinnen? Funktionen eines deutsches Heterostereotyps*, Arbeitspapiere "Gemeinschaften" Band 3, Kulturelle Konstruktion von Gemeinschaften im Modernisierungsprozess: Schweden und Deutschland (Berlin 1996).

the sexualisation of Sweden in contrast to the libidinalization of the Orient: in what ways did autostereotypes and xenostereotypes of Sweden combine to make sex a dimension of modernity rather than of atavism?⁷ Secondly, Orientalism provides a fruitful heuristic parallel to the historical trajectory of Swedish sin by probing the role of sex in the construction of the exotically modern Northern Other. In what way, it prompts us to ask, was this Other similar in function, although clearly distinct in meaning, to that of the Oriental?⁸

In the following, these core questions will be explored with the help of a number of non-Swedish contributions to the image of Sweden, as well as with a sequence of conscious Swedish attempts to manage and shape that image. The latter is taken from the archives and publications of the quasi-official Swedish Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries.⁹

In a broader perspective, the approach taken here may be considered an attempt to problematize the nationalism inherent in the continued histori-

7. For a discussion of the concepts "autostereotypes" and "xenostereotypes" and the interplay between the two in the construction of the image of the Scandinavian model prior to the Second World War, see Kazimierz Musiał, *Roots of the Scandinavian model: images of progress in the era of modernisation* (Baden-Baden 2002).

8. This analogy is not to suggest that there is no difference between the affluent and independent North – here represented by Sweden – and the often colonized and sometimes subjugated Orient – as illustrated by the case of Thailand – with regard to culture, society, and power resources, which have affected the way in which foreigners, mostly Western Europeans and North Americans, have made sense of these cultures. Our argument merely points to the possibility of a functional similarity in how various images and stereotypes are applied to different societies and what purposes such philosophical geography might serve, whether to the East or to the North. It should not be taken as an attempt to align the Orient and the North with regard to the subjugation inherent in the creation of xenostereotypes. It is neither to suggest an anachronistic parallel between a theory originally applied to analyze 18th and 19th century thought with 20th century thinking. Peter Stadius has convincingly argued that the relative proximity between various "intra-occidental" imaginations of "the Other", for example Spanish images of the Nordic countries and thus a kind of intra-European exoticism, cannot very well be described as a kind of "borealism" along the same lines as Orientalism, as the latter derives so much of its intellectual power from imagining the Other from afar. We concur with these caveats, but nevertheless suggest that it is fruitful to take note of the way in which "sex" and "libido" have played in these peculiar subforms of philosophical geography (which may be considered examples of "sexual geography") and the way in which the Orientalist-Nordist thematic can serve to make this pattern more clear. Peter Stadius, *Resan till norr: spanska nordenbilder kring sekelskiftet 1900* (Helsingfors 2005).

9. The Institute was established in 1945, in part based on the model of the British Council in the United Kingdom. It was largely funded by the state, but also relied on subscription fees from private organisations (hence its status as "quasi-offical"). Among its responsibilities were the facilitation of international scholarship programmes, the administration of Swedish foreign aid, and the production of general information about Swedish social and cultural life in foreign languages for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. For an overview, see Per-Axel Hildeman, *Upplysningsvis: Svenska institutet 1945–1995* (Stockholm 1995). For further discussion on its foundation and organisation, see Nikolas Glover, "Imaging community: cultural propaganda then and now", *Scandinavian Journal of History* No. 3 (2002).

cal trajectory of Swedish sin. Among Swedish journalists it has become an entertaining national-narcissistic topic, while for Swedish business and the Swedish government it has come to be considered an asset of national brand recognition.¹⁰ As such, the myth continues to confirm nationalistic themes of pioneering radical Swedish progressiveness in the face of international backwardness. Historic criticisms of Swedish life made by "foreigners" have thus been absorbed into self-affirming narratives that support the notion that "we" have been right all along – even when "they" could not understand it. For instance, in 2007 Claes Britton, head of one of the marketing agencies employed by the Swedish Institute in its various nation-branding exercises, declared that "Volvo, IKEA, ABBA, the Dalecarlean horse, Borg and Bergman can go to hell – Inga from Sweden is still our most powerful global trademark!"

It has never been us Swedes, but the rest of the world that has been pathologically and aggressively obsessed with this whole entangled nudity/sex complex. That's their problem, not ours, and if we could use our more relaxed and natural attitude in market communication while laughing at it all – why shouldn't we?¹¹

Such a view of history is of course a self-serving oversimplification. It does not consider how foreign obsessions on the one hand, and Swedish market communication on the other, have historically reinforced each other. Nor does it acknowledge that the untangling of the "nudity/sex complex" has in fact been considered socially and politically important – by foreigners and Swedes alike. Finally, it does not consider the wider political economy which ultimately has allowed Swedes to laugh at how they have been portrayed – while others, as the Thai case suggests, cannot. These are precisely the areas which this essay seeks to explore.

"The Sweden-sex nexus": Background and terminology

The concept of Swedish sin initially gained currency during the early 1950s as a consequence of the fact that a series of popular Swedish motion pictures

10. In 2005, for example, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs published *Images of Sweden abroad*. Based on studies of media coverage, interviews and surveys, the report attempted to comprehensively capture popular images of Sweden overseas. One of the report's conclusions was that "Clichés about sexual emancipation and beautiful, blonde women are among the strongest images of Sweden." Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Images of Sweden abroad: a study of the changes, the present situation, and assessment methods* (Summarised version) (Stockholm 2005) p. 52.

11. Britton, Claes, "Forget Volvo, IKEA, ABBA, Borg, Bergman and that kinky ol' Dalecarlean horse – Inga from Sweden is by far our most powerful global trademark!", *BrittonBritton* 25/6 2007, <<http://www.brittonbritton.com/blog/?page=2>>, accessed 11/1 2007.

were circulated internationally. They depicted nudity, premarital sexual intercourse, and related themes, and within popular culture these came to be associated with what was "typically Swedish".¹² As historian Frederick Hale has argued however, the fountainhead of more socially oriented critical reports on (sexual) sin in Sweden, was Joe David Brown's *Time* magazine article "Sin and Sweden," published in April 1955.¹³ The article dealt with what was perceived as radically liberal sexual education in Sweden, the allegedly morally lax Swedish Lutheran Church, and the supposed ease for Swedish women to have abortions. It caused reactions both at the Swedish embassy in Washington and at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stockholm, as well as a debate both in the Letters pages of *Time* magazine and in large parts of the Swedish press.

The widely noted piece in *Time* immediately touched off a wave of other articles about moral standards in Sweden [...] As early as August 1955, the monthly American pocket magazine *Focus* carried an article titled "Is it true what they say about Swedes and sex?" Without acknowledging his reliance on Brown's essay, its anonymous author stated that "recent reports have led many to believe that [Sweden] is a land of unlimited 'free love'."¹⁴

What began, then, as a question of national morality in the writings of foreign observers, evolved into more politically oriented discussions about Swedish sexual deviancy in the world of nations. The resulting mix of exoticism and critique, of fascination and disgust, can be summed up with Italian director Luigi Scattini's pseudo-documentary (or shockumentary) *Svezia, inferno e paradiso* from 1968. The film, of which an English version (*Sweden – Heaven or hell?*) was also screened in the United States, belongs to what has come to be known as the genre of mondo films. Most of these were made in the 1960's by Italian directors, and their common denominator was their use of a documentary style that blended ethnographic exoticism and pornographic voyeurism.¹⁵ *Svezia* consists of a series of staged episodes allegedly portraying life in Sweden, the filmmaker's gaze mainly directed at photogenic Swedish women. The sequences can hardly be said to form a coherent narrative, even

12. Frederick Hale, "Time for sex in Sweden", *Scandinavian Studies*, 75:3 (2003), p. 353.

13. Hale (2003) p. 371.

14. Hale (2003) p. 368

15. For an analysis of the mondo genre, see Mark Goodall, "Shockumentary evidence: the perverse politics of the mondo film", in Stephanie Dennison & Song Hwee Lim (ed.), *Remapping world cinema: identity, culture and politics in film* (London 2006).

if the dispassionate, academic-sounding voice-over purports to link the essentially free-standing episodes. Taken together however, they conjure up an image of an ultra-modern and affluent, but fundamentally sterile, society of rampant teenage sex, drugs and alcohol, swinger parties, state-sanctioned pornography and legal lesbian sex clubs.

Despite *Svezia's* sensationalist and obviously staged portrayal of the sexual decadence of Swedish affluence, the very fact that Scattini chose to make Sweden the subject of a film in a genre that scholars have described as an intoxicating blend of "porntopia" and "ethnotopia",¹⁶ suggests just how established the connection between Sweden and sex had become. Sex in Sweden was an obvious topic for a genre that sought the spectacle of Western civilization. And despite the blatant use of sensationalism and outright inaccuracies, Scattini's sexual "ethnography" of Swedish modernity is an extreme example of what other more nuanced commentators were undertaking at the time.

By the late 1960s then, the link between Sweden and sex had become firmly established among foreign observers of the country and its inhabitants. At times reasonably moderate in tone, at times wildly exaggerated, this varied, yet distinct discourse can be seen as the expression of a particular *Sweden-sex nexus* which is wider than just the historical concept of Swedish sin. This nexus includes not only sin but also more general notions of sexuality, promiscuity, and frivolity, and even eroticism and (female) beauty.¹⁷ Indeed, Swedish sin soon left its original moorings in various religious and moralistic notions of sin *per se* and became a rather general reference to the sex which allegedly prevailed freely in this Northern country. Therefore, we will use the concept Sweden-sex nexus as a device for analyzing how these notions have been related to that other master-narrative of Sweden as the incarnation of modernity.

One advantage of applying the historiographic concept of the Sweden-sex nexus, rather than the narrower historic concept of Swedish sin is that it allows us to trace analyses of sex in Swedish society not only over time but also across space: it does not confine us to quaint xenostereotypes, but draws our attention also to mainstream Swedish autostereotypes. For the observers who reinforced notions of the Sweden-sex nexus were not primarily engaging in a dialogue with each other about Sweden, but with political debates in their

16. Goodall (2006) p. 119.

17. While notions of female sexuality (and beauty) tend to dominate in popular accounts of Swedish sin such as Scattini's, the Swedish male is rarely problematized.

respective countries and with assertions about Swedish society that were emanating from within that country itself. Thus, the Sweden-sex nexus was not purely the result of some voyeuristic foreign obsession. It was simultaneously being reconfigured by self-appointed domestic interpreters of Sweden. As an example of this, we will look closer at the Swedish Institute's evolving engagement with the Sweden-sex nexus.

Changing autostereotypes: The trail of the Sweden-sex nexus

From its very first appearance in 1955, Brown's "Sin and Sweden" created a stir among the Swedish diplomatic corps. Historian Frederick Hale has showed how staff at the embassy in Washington immediately saw it as a potential long-term threat to Sweden's reputation.¹⁸ This suggests that accusations directed at the morals of the Swedish people were seen as directly detrimental to the international image of the Swedish welfare state. In this sense, the original reaction was similar to that of the Thai government in the case of the Longman entry. The official rebuttals ultimately proved fruitless, however, and one of Hale's conclusions is that "the defensive efforts of the Swedish embassy in Washington to counter the impact of Brown's essay show how accusations of sexual licentiousness can pack a heavier rhetorical punch than their denials".¹⁹ This, perhaps, was a lesson registered by the officials involved at the time too. For although this particular foreign portrayal of Swedish sexuality was considered worthy of outright refutation, subsequent contributions to that genre would be treated differently. This, at least, is what the Swedish Institute's publications suggest.

Although the Ministry for Foreign Affairs reacted to the *Time* article, there is no clear trace in the Swedish Institute's archives that talk of Swedish sin caused a reaction at the Swedish Institute. In a speech in 1961, the Institute's then Director, Tore Tallroth, provided an explanation for why. He declared that exaggerated foreign perceptions of Swedish sin "lay beyond the Institute's field of activities." All the Institute could do when it came to such topics, was to provide information that showed how Swedish developments corresponded to developments in other "civilized, or should we say, industrialized countries".²⁰ In Tallroth's modest commentary, we may detect an early

18. Hale (2003) pp. 359–364.

19. Hale (2003) p. 371.

20. Tore Tallroth, "Svenska institutets årskrönika", Årsmöte 15/11 1961. Svenska institutet (SI), Hemmamyndigheten (HM), Serie AI, vol. 2, Riksarkivet (RA). The translation from Swedish here, as in the following, is by the authors.

instance of the positive connection between modernity – i.e., "civilization" – and sexual liberalism which would later become fully embraced in Swedish contributions to the Sweden-sex nexus.

Indeed, the Swedish institute would continue to register an increase in the foreign associations made between Sweden, sex and beautiful women, throughout the following years.²¹ And this was bound to affect the Institute's relationship to the issue, because, as Tallroth explained in 1962, when it came to the promotion of Sweden:

One's work will be handicapped if one does not use existing interests and environments abroad, allowing the recipient country to dictate the direction of what it wants to know, see and hear. A proper information effort is always a compromise between what you want to speak about and what the recipient is interested in hearing.²²

Thus, when the Institute's *Public dialogue in Sweden – Issues of social, moral and esthetic debate* was published in 1964, author and editor of *Bonniers Litterära Magasin*, Lars Gustafsson devoted several pages to the issue of sex, morals and – in a new addition – the question of "sex roles".²³ Gustafsson begins by engaging in the popular talk about "sin in Sweden," and ends up by discussing the advanced state of women's rights and recent public debates concerning their future progress. The chain of association is significant. Gustafsson sets out by dismissing the "vulgarity" and "sensationalism" of popular reports on Swedish sin. Interestingly, he then admits that indeed there is promiscuity and even prostitution among young people, above all among "marginal groups of youth badly adjusted to society." The question of sex was thus in Gustafsson's book constructed as the subject of rationally implemented education, not morality. And to turn the focus of attention from here to equality between the sexes was the logical next step:

In addition to the criticism of society, and especially the schools, a more general criticism has also been brought forward – that our whole way of looking at things is full of irrational and unmotivated ideas. This is

21. See for example the Institute's Annual Reports: 1962 (Hägglöf; Kumlin); 1963 (Fontaine; French); 1964 (Hildeman); 1965 (Heckscher). *Verksamhetsberättelse 1961–1962; 1962–1963; 1962–1963; 1964–1965*. Sl, HM, BVII:2, RA.

22. Tore Tallroth, "Svenska institutets årskrönika, 61/62", Årsmöte, 20/11 1962. Sl, HM, AI:2, RA.

23. Lars Gustafsson, *Public dialogue in Sweden – Issues of social, moral and esthetic debate* (Stockholm 1964) pp. 97–110.

especially true of the view of the woman's role in sex life, the double standard of morals.²⁴

Gustafsson thereby used the Sweden-sex nexus to illustrate the most important characteristics of Sweden as it was presented by the Institute: rationality and realism. In the Institute's central treatise *Introduction to Sweden* from 1949, the director-general of the National Heritage Board and member of the Royal Swedish Academy, Ingvar Andersson, had argued that "[a]ll critics should perhaps give the Swedes credit for an honest willingness to negotiate, a certain ability to find the way to a fair solution of controversies, and a readiness to test the conclusions by means of practical action".²⁵ Just like Andersson, then, Gustafsson was reiterating well-known images of Sweden as the country of the "middle way" – as a society of experimental, pragmatic, and above all compromising people. The "means of practical action" which Gustafsson referred to in his case included secular morals, liberal sex education and increased debates about sex roles.²⁶ The Sweden-sex nexus, as it turned out, was despite its apparent libidinal connotations, after all not the antithesis of rational Sweden – but an expression of it.

Gustafsson's theme was developed by the Institute as it commissioned, and consequently published, family councillor Birgitta Linnér's *Sex and Society in Sweden* (1967). Presented as an authoritative discussion of Swedish sex attitudes, the study's first sentence read: "On the road toward sexual democracy, Sweden has made great strides in bringing about a gradual equality between the sexes in politics, education, employment, and civil rights, as well as in social and sexual relations".²⁷ Linnér, like Gustafsson, thus made the link between "Swedish sex" and "Swedish sex-roles." Also, she made that connection even clearer by integrating it into the overtly political concept of "sexual democracy." The Sweden-sex nexus was not only rational, it was also democratic. Rational, democratic and modern: it was being fully incorporated into the ongoing project of the Welfare State. Furthermore, in her study, Linnér effectively disarmed the concept of Swedish sin when she identified "[a] shift on a nationwide scale from the double standard of sexual morality to sexual

24. Gustafsson (1964) p. 100.

25. Ingvar Andersson et. al., *Introduction to Sweden* (Uppsala 1949) pp. 275–276. *Introduction to Sweden* was repeatedly revised and reprinted by the Institute, the fifth and last edition appearing in 1961.

26. For a discussion of these three different yet related understandings of Sweden, see Carl Marklund, "The Social laboratory, the middle way, and the Swedish model: three frames for the image of Sweden," *Scandinavian Journal of History* No. 3 (2009).

27. Birgitta Linnér, *Sex and society in Sweden* (New York 1967) p. 1.

democracy".²⁸ This dichotomy of sexual morality and democracy, the old and the new, suggests a conscious ambition to locate *morality* in the sphere of traditional culture, in a pre-modern era. Sex, amoralized and democratized, had thus become an asset, and as such a recognized dimension of a political project on a national scale.

No longer interested in refuting, but rather in confirming, connotations between Sweden and sex, the Swedish Institute had thus found a highly effective way of introducing to the world the kind of Sweden that the world wanted to meet.²⁹ Thus, it was a topic that perfectly suited Tallroth's strategy of letting the recipient country "dictate [...] what it wants to know, see and hear" quoted above. Originally produced as an offset-print by the Institute itself, Linnér's study was reprinted and published by an American publishing house, and was provided with a preface by Professor of Family Life, Oregon State University, Lester A. Kirkendall: "For their courage, for their freedom from cant and hypocrisy, as they try to work through to humane yet responsible patterns of sexual expression, the Swedes as a nation should have our cordial respect".³⁰ This official embrace of the Sweden-sex nexus took place once the difference between sin, i.e., promiscuity in a traditional and moral setting, and sex as humanistic and natural liberation in a modern and democratic environment could be convincingly and sympathetically presented abroad. This was evident in other Institute publications too. Professor of sociology Hans L. Zetterberg, writing in the first essay of the Institute's 1967 anthology *Sweden in the sixties*, provided "the much discussed sexual freedom" as one expression of the social developments in Sweden that led him to understand it as the "land of tomorrow".³¹

Although Zetterberg and Linnér seemed to confirm the existence of Sexual Sweden, the culture editor of Sweden's leading daily, *Dagens Nyheter*, Ingmar Wizelius, argued otherwise in his foreword to *Sweden in the Sixties*:

This book was not written to dissuade people of other nationalities from thinking of Sweden as a country of "sin, sex and suicide". These misconceptions have already been waylaid so thoroughly by foreign writers that we

28. Linnér (1967) p. xv.

29. "Society and Sex in Sweden by Birgitta Linnér has been the by far most popular publication during the year" said the Institute's Annual Report. *Verksamhetsberättelse 1968–1969*. SI, HM, BVII:3, RA.

30. "Preface," in Linnér (1967) p. x.

31. Hans Zetterberg, "Sweden – a land of tomorrow?" in Ingemar Wizelius (ed.), *Sweden in the sixties: a symposium of facts and views in 17 chapters* (Uppsala 1967) p. 18.

run the risk of losing the mystique which has glamorized our country for the past 20 years or so. The time has now come to strip a second veil from the Swedes: they are, as it turns out, quite ordinary people. We regret to say that the disclosure lacks dramatic excitement, but it will surely serve to present a much more accurate picture.³²

Despite being a "sexual democracy" according to Linnér, Sweden was no country of sex, and in fact "completely ordinary" according to Wizelius. On the one hand then, the Institute was presenting Sweden in Linnér's book and Zetterberg's essay as characterised by "a great deal of sexual freedom." On the other it located the association between Sweden and sex bluntly in the minds of "people of other nationalities." Although Wizelius actually denied it, the prominent place of that denial in the book in itself merely contributed to what others were underscoring: that the popular association between Sweden and sex was recognized, and that the Sweden-sex nexus in itself invariably rested upon images of Swedish modernity.

Ultimately the Institute's acceptance of the Sweden-sex nexus was confirmed by its 1970 picture book *Love in Sweden*.³³ An ironic, animated "children's tale" that "explained" Swedish neutrality, industrial success, drunkenness and (hetero)sexual frivolity by means of following the depressed, frozen and nude "lovely blonde Swedish girl" and "the strong handsome Swedish viking" who together "invented Love" and thus lived happily ever after. The connection between the Sweden-sex nexus and Swedish progress and prosperity was admittedly ridiculed – but the self-conscious use of it as an attention-grabbing strategy nonetheless served to uphold it. In any case, it was clearly no threat to Sweden's reputation by this point – the Sweden-sex nexus was either a sign of progress/modernity, or at worst an ironic joke. Sweden was secure with its sexually charged reputation – because in the eyes of the Institute that reputation was an expression of its (unique) modernity.

Although this may intuitively be perceived a logical strategy, we may recall the example of the Thai reaction to the Longman entry to see that the possibility of pursuing such a strategy must be placed in a wider historical context. As the representatives of one of the richest countries in the world and a society which professed a commitment to social equality by the late 1960s, the Swedish Institute could afford to allow Sweden to become associ-

32. "Foreword" in Wizelius (ed.) (1967) p. 11.

33. Lennart Frantzén & Bertil Torekull, *Love in Sweden: background and reality* (Stockholm 1970).

ated with both sex and sin. The former – sex – could be subsumed into narratives of rational/national self-understanding, the latter – sin – carried very little potency in an international dialogue where the concept was gradually becoming associated with anti-modern traditional morality. If, as Linnér suggested, it was a question of choice between morality and democracy, between speaking of promiscuity and sin as opposed to freedom and sex, then the authors engaged by the Swedish Institute could certainly position themselves on the winning side of modernity and civilization. Through a conscious process of sexual rationalization, the trope of Swedish sin had been successfully translated into that of Sexual democracy. But not everyone agreed with this self-affirming tale of a modern, progressive, and sexually liberated Sweden which had supposedly moved beyond the confines set by tradition and oppressive morality. We will now turn to some of these dissenting voices.

Challenging xenostereotypes: Sexual democracy on trial

One of those who begged to differ was radical American essayist and public intellectual Susan Sontag. Sontag visited Sweden in the revolutionary year of 1968 on an invitation by Harry Schein and the Swedish Film Institute and wrote a report of her impressions in the radical American magazine *Ramparts* in 1969.

In her article, Sontag came across as startled, surprised, and a little bit disappointed by Sweden. She had hoped to "see through the familiar negative clichés about Sweden" – "the celebrated paradise of Social Democracy," yet she found many of them "disconcertingly confirmed." What surprised her even more was that she had no help from the Swedes themselves in unmasking the myths about their country. While silent and shy in many other matters, the Swedes in fact "love to talk about Sweden," she found. However, Sontag also noticed an unwillingness among the Swedes to make any connection between the lack of "quality of life" in Sweden on the one hand, and "the character of the country as a progressive, rational social experiment," on the other.³⁴ While Swedish culture and its quality of life – or lack thereof – was a source of derision which the foreigner and the Swede could share, the supreme quality of the welfare state was not to be questioned, Sontag quickly learnt.

Whether it was the lack of quality of life or the fact that it was simply rather boring, Stockholm's nightlife did not impress Sontag, despite popular rumours of wild orgies. She noted that in Sweden, alcohol took the place of

34. Susan Sontag, "A letter from Sweden", *Ramparts*, July (1969) p. 24.

sex as the national disgrace. The Swedes were just as obsessed with alcohol and alcoholism as the Americans and Europeans were obsessed with sex and eroticism. "Hence," she observed, "their somewhat misleading appearance of being sexually liberated".³⁵ While Sweden indeed epitomized the recent phenomenon of "post-puritan sexual mores," there was certainly nothing liberal about its treatment of alcohol, and "no other people has attacked the dangers of alcoholism with the punitive ferocity of the Swedes," responding to, just as much as it resulted in, "a national neurosis *about* alcohol".³⁶

Of course, Sontag saw a contrast between this immense apparatus of internal and external (self-)control in relation to alcohol on the one hand and "the official sexual 'policy' " on the other, which Sontag found "admirably enlightened".³⁷ As an example, Sontag mentioned that *Expressen*, one of the leading dailies, carried "a plain-spoken column written by a Danish couple giving advice and information on sexual matters, which encourages people to experiment with different positions and preaches tolerance for erotic minorities." "The Swedes are curious, no doubt of that," Sontag concluded, making a pun on Vilgot Sjöman's films *Jag är nyfiken gul/blå* (1967–1968): "The aptly named *I am Curious* quite exactly, and unintentionally, conveys the sexually underdeveloped atmosphere here, which is if anything reinforced by the pornography industry".³⁸ Indeed, Sontag doubted that the very visible and obviously flourishing pornography industry in Sweden managed to turn any of the country's inhabitants "on to sex." Instead:

Its prevalence seems rather one more barrier to eroticism, one more hurdle the Swede has to jump before he can be fully inside his own feelings, his own skin. So far as one can distinguish between pornography that degrades sexual feeling and pornography that stimulates and enhances it, what the Swedes have around belongs mostly to the first type

[...]

All those medium shots of women with their legs spread in the dozens of monthly photo magazines decorating the kiosks seem like illustrations for some mad gynecologist's encyclopedia, whose only service could be to cure a few people's anatomical ignorance.³⁹

35. Sontag (1969) p. 27.

36. Sontag (1969) p. 27.

37. Sontag (1969) p. 31.

38. Sontag (1969) p. 31.

39. Sontag (1969) p. 31. For a discussion about how Swedish pornography affected foreign perceptions of Sweden, see Klara Arnberg's contribution to this issue.

While arguably being "sexually liberated," the Swedes were neither particularly liberated (at least not in Sontag's sense of the word), nor were they particularly capable of enjoying their liberty in the sexual department, since theirs was a culture profoundly lacking in eroticism.

Otherwise careful not to confuse cultural eroticism with individual sexuality, capitalist pornography with Social Democratic sexual policy, youthful radicalism with puritan inhibition, Sontag nevertheless managed to somehow mix all these ingredients together into some kind of Swedish-sex cocktail, using its supposedly unique Swedishness as catalyst. Lingering puritanism, "physical-psychic inhibition," and "the famous Swedish 'clumsiness'" were all reflections of an even more central characteristic of the Swedes, namely their fear of each other and their fear of human contact and the possible conflict which may follow upon contact and communication between people.

Regardless of whether this massive repression which Sontag identified in modern Swedish culture – a kind of delibidinalization which favoured a false sense of sexual liberalism while driving legitimate aggression and true sexuality underground – was primarily an atavistic remnant from centuries of isolation in Northern forests, or whether it was caused by a too willing embrace of hypermodern capitalism, mattered little to Sontag. Her heroes were to be found elsewhere, among the brave North Vietnamese or the revolutionary Cubans, rather than with the sombre Swedes who despite their humane and ingenious reforms, had failed to liberate "new energy," or create "a New Man." In order to do so, Sontag concluded, "Sweden needs a revolution".⁴⁰

On one level, then, Sontag reiterated a theme which had been developed the year before by a West German leftist radical, namely psychiatrist Reimut Reiche in his *Sexualität und Klassenkampf* (1968).⁴¹ In this book, Reiche argued that "desublimation" – the liberation of the libido, that is, both with regard to sex and with regard to aggression – could equally well serve to oppress as it could liberate. Such "repressive desublimation" – a theme developed by Herbert Marcuse in his bestselling *One-dimensional man* (1964) – had evolved very far in advanced capitalist countries such as Sweden, Reiche

40. From whence such a revolution would come she did not care to say, but maybe her parting words can give us a hint to where her hopes went: "See you soon, ¡Hasta la victoria siempre! Love, Susan." Sontag (1969) p. 38.

41. For an analysis of the reception of Reimut Reiche's book in Sweden, see Lena Lennerhed, *Frihet att njuta: sexualdebatten i Sverige på 1960-talet* (Stockholm 1994) pp. 248–250.

concluded.⁴² Sexuality had become reduced to a commodity in the interest of *profit* and as amply evidenced by the increase of pornography and sex clubs in Western countries.⁴³

However, Reiche found that the greater risk rested in a kind of fake pseudo-sexualization whereby individuals lost control over their own libido, not knowing which desires to embrace and which ones to reject—and not feeling the difference. As people would lose contact with their own sexuality, their libidinal drive would fall under the control of *power*, which would turn the libido into a power of servitude instead of using its potential towards true liberation. What was even more alarming in the perspective outlined by Reiche was that this dual repressive desublimation and pseudo-sexualization produced a "false consciousness" through which people came to believe that they were liberated while they were in fact not, making them oblivious to the fact that they were living in a "society without opposition," as Marcuse had once put it.⁴⁴

Interestingly, and as Lena Lennerhed has noted, a similar analysis could emanate from a conservative critique of Swedish society as well. For example, when British-South African journalist and author Roland Huntford in 1971 summarized his impressions of Sweden where he had been stationed as a foreign correspondent throughout the late 1960s, he arrived at a similar diagnosis of Swedish sexuality as did both Reiche and Sontag.⁴⁵ However, where Reiche had seen Swedish sexual policy as a result of Sweden's character as an advanced capitalist society, serving the profit interest of business elites, Huntford rather concluded that Sweden represented an entirely new form of socialist control, its sexual policy serving the power interest of the political elite.

42. Herbert Marcuse, *One-dimensional man* (London, 2002 [1964]); Reimut Reiche, *Sexuality and class struggle* (London 1970 [1968]), p. 137.

43. I.e., the increase of pornography and prostitution was not the result of moral bust, but rather of capitalist boom.

44. Marcuse himself concluded that this repressive desublimation would be "infinitely more realistic, daring, uninhibited," than the sexuality of the past. However, "it is part and parcel of the society in which it happens, but nowhere its negation. What happens is surely wild and obscene, virile and tasty, quite immoral – and, precisely because of that, perfectly harmless." Herbert Marcuse, *One-dimensional man: studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society* (London 2002 [1964]) pp. 80–81.

45. Roland Huntford, *The new totalitarians* (London, 1971). For a discussion of the reception of Huntford's book in Sweden, see Frederick Hale, "Brave new world in Sweden? Roland Huntford's *The new totalitarians*," *Scandinavian Studies*, 78:2 (2006). Huntford himself today characterises his book as "a youthful indiscretion written with far too much emotion," "Review", *The Observer* 27/12 2008, p. 11.

Huntford saw Swedish sexual policy as problematic on two accounts: It represented a thoroughly totalitarian strive to control the totality of life, including the most private and intimate feelings that individual people may have for each other. By "mechanizing" sex, by transforming it from being an expression of love to becoming a natural need, Swedish sexual policies strove to reduce any "feeling" which may compete with the loyalty to the state. While this was bad enough in the mind of the self-professed romantic Huntford, it was even worse that this move in fact turned the young into loyal Social Democrats, grateful to the regime which had "won them over through their gonads," as Huntford phrased it.⁴⁶

Sweden's much publicized sexual liberalism was thus little more than just another aspect of the wide-scale control, manipulation, and social engineering ushered in by Sweden's governing elite, "the new totalitarians." As such, Swedish sexual liberalism was the result of a cool and rational instrumentality, rather than of any drive towards liberty and humanism – sexual or otherwise. The reason why these universal tendencies towards collectivism, socialism, and totalitarianism had gained so complete control in Sweden was because Sweden – in Huntford's view "an extension of Siberia" – largely lacked a strong humanistic and European culture of its own.⁴⁷ If not entirely a *tabula rasa*, culturally speaking, its culture was "incompletely western" which allowed for the complete control of the citizens by the bureaucrats – the "mandarin" as Huntford called them, toying with an affinity between Oriental and Northern forms of submissiveness and despotism.⁴⁸

The Sweden-sex nexus and the cosmology of civilization

How, then, are we to make sense of these contradicting reports on the origins and content of Swedish sexual liberalism? There is a feature which seems to unite the Swedish cultural diplomats in their transformation of Swedish sin into Sexual democracy with these disparate critical foreign commentators. It is the concentration on Swedish sexual mores as fundamentally "modern," profoundly "civilized," yet liberated and natural, and at some critical level also "made" – whether through purposive politics from above or through conscious social change from below. Social anthropologist Jonathan Friedman has suggested a tri-polar structure, a "common civilized cosmology," which allows for the analysis of self-definitions as expressions of "civilized identity."

46. Huntford (1971) p. 329.

47. Huntford (1971) p. 14.

48. Huntford (1971) pp. 9, 19.

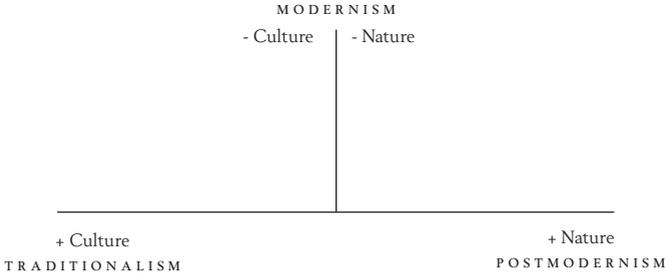


Figure 1. Source: Jonathan Friedman, *Cultural identity & global process* (London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi 1994) p. 85.

As Figure 1 indicates, the three (extreme) positions in Friedman’s structure are Modernism, Traditionalism and Postmodernism respectively. Each self-definition is characterised by its positioning in relation to Culture and Nature. While the Traditionalist (or Culturalist) pole sees (particularly capitalist) civilization as a negation of culture, the Postmodernist extreme considers it the repression of nature.

Thus, the opposition of the traditionalist to the postmodernist is based on an opposition between the need to return to culture and that to return to nature. The opposition has numerous implications; the postmodernist might well define himself [*sic*] as future-oriented, his “primitivity” lying in a psyche yet to be liberated, as well as in distant time and space, while the traditionalist has a more definite past in view. Just as traditionalism and postmodernism are reactions against modernism, the self-definition of modernism is opposed to both nature and culture.⁴⁹

By applying the set of oppositions provided by Friedman’s typology to the various historical interpretations of the Sweden-sex nexus that emerged during the 60’s, the different authors can be related to one another.⁵⁰ Roland Huntford’s conservative stance contributed to the Sweden-sex nexus by considering Swedish views of sex as a lack of national culture. In this sense, his critique

49. Jonathan Friedman, *Cultural identity & global processes* (London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi 1994) p. 85.

50. Essential to understanding Friedman’s terminology is his definition of “civilized identity.” For him, what defines such an identity is its specific structure—that is, one that builds on an opposition between a self-in-the-centre and a periphery either “out there” (such as nature, tradition, the savage), or “inside” (such as the libido). Consequently, in Friedman’s view, the civilizing process is a universal “ideology of social identity”—not one “specific to Western expansion since the renaissance.” Although the “contents” of that ideology may vary, its structure, then, is universal. Friedman (1994) pp. 85, 43.

might in Friedman's terms be characterised as Culturalist. He saw modernity without roots, allowing for a totalitarian system with a built-in "safety valve" in the form of fake sexual liberation. Huntford's version of Swedish modernity thus emphasised, in Friedman's words, the "continual annihilation of the past" inherent in civilization, in stark contrast to the "structured meaningful scheme of human existence" of "authentic culture".⁵¹ Luigi Scattini's caricature of Sweden could similarly be understood in such terms.

In contrast, Sontag's New Left position might be said to have much closer resembled that of Friedman's Postmodernist pole which, rather than distinguishing between culture and civilization, critiqued culture *as* civilization in opposition to nature. Sontag's emphasis upon a "near pathological" Swedish fear of aggression, her analysis of the "anti-erotic" quality of Swedish pornography and the self-alienating function of sexual liberty, adhered clearly to what Friedman sees as the Postmodernist "Freudian model of ego-superego control as model for social order," where nature stands for "absence of control, freedom of total expression" – that spontaneity which Sontag sought in vain among the Swedes.⁵² Where Huntford emphasised (structural) *oppression*, Sontag homed in on (psychological) *repression*. Reiche, for his part, saw the socio-economic structure (capitalism) as producing an individual psychological pattern (consumerism) which in turn resulted in "repressive desublimation" and false consciousness.

Finally, and crucially, the position Huntford, Sontag and Reiche were criticizing was that represented by the Modernist structure of civilized identity in Friedman's typology. This was the identity expressed by the authors of the Swedish Institute's publications. In accordance with Friedman's definition, these authors spoke of a sexual democracy as an expression of civilization and a "mentality of rational praxis applied to all the separate activities of life, equated with the values of fairness, basic equality and democracy, the goal of self-fulfilment through development".⁵³ In this view sexuality was to be rescued from both the irrationality of the barbaric state of nature, as well as from the irrational, religious and oppressive (moralizing) imperatives of traditional culture. The very concept of sexual democracy presupposed civilization, the control of nature and a conscious break with timeless tradition.

Friedman argues that "these polarities mark the *extrema* of a field of cul-

51. Friedman (1994) p. 83.

52. Friedman (1994) p. 83.

53. Friedman (1994) p. 84.

tural strategies in capitalist civilization. They do not correspond to particular strategies as such but to the tendencies that they exhibit".⁵⁴ Here, Friedman's polarities help us to see how these three images of "Sweden through sex" break loose from the classic dualism in the image of modernity as vanquishing both the cultural and the natural. His model allows us to see how the cultural and the natural may be "colonized" by the modern and precisely through this process produce a kind of essentializing and exoticizing – not to say Orientalizing – perspective of modernity itself, in this case through Sweden, the Swedes, and their "national" and "rational" forms of sex. Thus, in the present context, the model first and foremost provides a heuristic terminology with which to contrast the positions taken by the authors discussed above. But the unifying backbone of Friedman's model, its actual structure, simultaneously serves to highlight what those authors have in common: all the texts are positioning themselves in a field that considers the Sweden-sex nexus as (for better or worse) an expression of modern society.⁵⁵ In this regard, they can all be seen as contributions to a specific form of anthropology of reason which sought to make sense of the ambiguous experience of being modern.

Conclusion: The sexual geography of modernity

Applying Friedman's typology thus allows us to begin to discern the internal differences in the constructions of the Sweden-sex nexus and where the fault lines between the different authors went. The Institute publications were proud to emphasise sexual liberation as a modern and rational aspect of Swedish life, while Huntford saw it as sinister product of totalitarian instrumentality, Reiche perceived it as a result of advanced capitalist dominance, and Sontag considered it a pathological suppression of a truer, more emotional, and possibly more fundamental sexuality.

It is however possible to use Friedman's structure to go further than this, as it in fact allows us to reconnect to the question of Orientalism with which this study began. "Modernist identity," writes Friedman,

depends on expanding horizons, the possibility of the individual and social development, mobility and liberation from the fixed and concrete structures of surviving non-capitalist forms: family, community, religion. This

54. Friedman (1994) p. 93. Emphasis in the original.

55. In the case of Huntford and Sontag, it is clear that the cultural and historic setup of the Swedes have made them uniquely capable to reject their past and to accept modernity – and at the same time modernity's possibly most hapless victims.

in its turn depends on the existence of an expanding modern sector of a global system, that is, an expanding hegemonic center.⁵⁶

Friedman goes on to argue that it is when such economic expansion turns to decline, that the Modernist identity increasingly comes under fire from the Postmodernist and Culturalist poles. In this way, he suggests, there is a connection between "cycles of hegemony, cycles of shifting centers of accumulation in the world system and cycles of cultural identity."⁵⁷ For Friedman then, there is a connection between constructions of identity and broad historical developments.

This suggests how the historical sexualizations of the Orient and the North can be related to each other. As the hegemonic centre of Europe expanded, so did the dominance of the Modernist pole of the identity space. Thus, the long tradition of the libidinalization of the Orient, to which Hamilton connects the Thai case, emanates from a centre that strictly differentiated itself from the periphery in terms of a dichotomy Civilization ("Us") and Culture-nature ("Them"). Furthermore, political scientist and intellectual historian Joseph A. Massad has shown how, in the case of the Arabic speaking world, this colonial xenostereotype of the Other was internalized by Islamic intellectuals who – as a consequence of the crisis that European subjugation had caused their society – sought blatantly historical, culturalist explanations for Islamic defeat and "decadence".⁵⁸ Among such explanations was the supposedly deviant sexual history of Orientals. In this way the Orient was libidinalized in Culturalist terms – negatively from the point of view of the hegemonic, modernist centre, and critically from within because of the economic and political crisis. This tradition is amply exemplified by the Longman entry: apart from the reference to prostitution, the only other ascribed characteristics of the city are its traditional, historic attributes: "temples" and "beautiful buildings."

In direct contrast however, 1960's Sweden was an increasingly affluent part of an ever expanding hegemonic centre.⁵⁹ Even if criticism was directed

56. Friedman (1994) p. 94.

57. Friedman (1994) p. 94.

58. Massad (2007) pp. 15–16.

59. Even if, within Europe, Swedes often saw themselves as actually belonging to the periphery, for better and for worse. Usually, in fact, for the better. Of course, post-war Swedish public debate also often emphasized that Sweden largely "lacked" a hegemonic and colonial past – perhaps it should be rephrased as lacking a profitable and successful hegemonic and colonial past – and strove to disassociate itself from many of the negative sides of the hegemonic centre and Western modernity, such as racism, imperialism, and capitalism.

at this stronghold of the Modernist identity, Culturalist and Postmodernist critiques were still peripheral to dominant Swedish identity space. Unlike the Orientalist world-view where the Oriental Other was sexualized in terms of nature or culture, inter-occidental constructions of the North – despite their internal differences – began to see Sweden as sexualized by civilization. For this reason, even critical notions of the Sweden-sex nexus fundamentally confirmed the basic assumption of the hegemonic Modernist identity articulated by the Swedish Institute: Swedish sexuality was a dimension of modernity. If, as sociologist Bryan S. Turner has argued, "the orientalist discourse was ultimately about the origins of the West, not the origins of the East,"⁶⁰ then it might be argued that the "Northernist" discourse analyzed here was ultimately about the *future* of the West – a discourse that nicely coincided with Swedish autostereotypes. Thus even if the subject matter of the Sweden-sex nexus was introduced by foreign observers, it was possible to appropriate it into the temporal structure of a worldview shared by both observer and observed. In this sense, the emergence and persistence of the Swedish-sex nexus should be understood as a confirmation of Sweden's (privileged) place in a wider international political economy.

Bearing that in mind, it may not be so surprising after all to find that in 1969 when the Sweden House in Stockholm was completed – a building purpose-built to house the various agencies involved in Swedish overseas information services – the Swedish Institute and the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs attempted to procure the rights to show a film which had been characterized as the director's vision of "a Nordic Babylon": *Svezia, inferno e paradiso*.⁶¹ From the horizon of the expanding centre, the film's wallowing in what Claes Britton would later call the whole "nudity/sex complex" was clearly "their" problem. "Our problem" was merely finding ways to yet again reaffirm Sweden as the focus of attention for anybody with an interest in modernity.⁶²

What we find then, is that Friedman's model provides us with the tools to analyze the various contributions to the Sweden-sex nexus in relation to wider economic and political structures. But if it has indicated the specific

60. Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, postmodernism, and globalism* (London 1994) p. 100.

61. Telegram from Sune Persson, *Kollegiet för Sverigeinformation*, to the Swedish Embassy in Rome, dated 15/1 1969. Serie Fla, vol. 220, Upplysningsberedningen och Kollegiet för Sverigeinformation i utlandet (SIU), RA; "Svensk synd på italienska väcker protest i Amerika," *Dagens Nyheter* 30/10 1969.

62. In this context, it is perhaps of value to note that from the Italian perspective of mondo films, it was very possible that Sweden was both an inferno *and* at the very same time a paradiso, while the American title indicates that it could only be either Heaven *or* Hell.

characteristics which allowed it to inform – rather than contradict – Swedish autostereotypes, there is still something to be said about why it remained an important ingredient in xenostereotypes of Sweden.

Whether Sweden more or less lacked authenticity, yet triumphed in naturalization of sexual needs, as in Huntford's version, or whether it was somehow culturally destined to suppress authenticity and to control natural sexuality, as in Sontag's report, it is worth noting that another bewildered exile in the North, Michel Foucault, referred to the country as one of the most thoroughly "over-medicalized" and protected societies he had encountered.⁶³ Foucault's observation can perhaps provide an indication of the overall relevance of this interest in the Swedish "case" which seems to have been shared by Swedes and foreigners alike. Modernity, and especially Swedish modernity, seemed to unite ambivalent features, combining both emancipation and discipline, both liberty and servitude.

What we have seen then has been how a sexualization of the North allowed for the emergence of a modern Other – perhaps an inhabitant of the distant future? – which combined with a kind of exoticism of rationality. If the libidinalization of the Orient largely served to sculpt a rational, modern Self against the inverted figure of a natural, dangerous, and Oriental Other (which the former sought to control), the notion of sexual democracy with which the Swedish Institute sought to create an affinity between the rational and the natural was an alignment which critics such as Huntford, Reiche, and Sontag found difficult to accept. Theirs was rather an image of an inauthentic and falsely hyper-sexualized modern Other, who stood, utterly helpless and harmless, in contrast to their various visions of an individual in contact with his or her libidinal drives. For the as-yet untamed Occidental Modern, the Northern Other could be held up as a warning of what was to come.

Expressed differently, while Said's Orientalists saw the libidinalized East as representing "fecundity" as well as "sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, [and] deep generative energies," the sexualized North suggested rather the opposite, at least in the view of the critics discussed here. Rather, notions of antiseptic sterility, sexual *ennui*, clumsiness, delibidinalization and its concomitant over-civilization dominate in these accounts. It is perhaps significant that Said's pre-Freudian 18th and 19th century Orientalists differ from "our" post-Freudian 20th century "Northernists" in

63. Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx: conversations with Duccio Trombadori* (New York 1991) p. 75.

that where the former saw the free reign of the libido as enslaving the ratio, the latter considered reason to be the enslaver of the potential revolutionary: the deviant individual.

Indeed, this reformulation of the Sweden-sex nexus – from notions of an “authentic,” natural, and libidinalized Northernness which had once attracted the attention of Tacitus and Mary Wollstonecraft, *via* the images of Sweden as the epitome of humane and rational modernity to the counter-image of the country and its inhabitants as suffering from “over-civilization” and “inauthentic” sexualization in the late 1960s – occurred while great social and political changes were taking place. These changes drove a deep wedge between traditional modernizers and bureaucrats on the one hand and more radical critics of modernity itself on the other – critics not only from the New Left but equally from the Old Right. From this perspective, it is perhaps not so surprising that Sweden would present a welcome target for those with more radical visions of politics, society, and human existence than those of the Swedish “middle way”.⁶⁴

We should probably understand the civilizational critique of the Sweden-sex nexus in precisely that context, and not just as another example of crude “sexploitation.” If the Oriental Other was a construction whose “pastness” legitimized the economic centre’s political control of the periphery, the Northern Other’s alleged “futureness” contributed to a cultural critique of hegemonic modernity from within itself. And it is from this perspective that this article has attempted to link those otherwise seemingly disparate popular stereotypes of Thai prostitution and Swedish sin. Unpacking the specific power relationships, in terms of gender, class and ethnicity, within which those images have been historically (re-)produced would demand a far more thorough investigation.

Here it may simply be observed in conclusion that while the Oriental Other has at times made more or less successful attempts to resist such categorization (as in the case of the Longman controversy), the Northern Other has seemed markedly more prone to embrace its attributed personification of modernity – even though at times it has been part of a wider discourse of Northernism which has denied the Northern Other spontaneity, authenticity and the joy of life.

64. For a discussion of the function of this reinterpretation of sex as a property of modernity in modern philosophical geography during the 1960s and 1970s, see Carl Marklund, “Hot love and cold people: sexual liberalism as political escapism in radical Sweden,” *Nordeuropaforum*, No. 2 (2009).

Tusen och en natt i midnattssolens sken? Utforskandet av den temporala strukturen i sexuella geografier

I fokus för artikeln står den historiska framväxten och utvecklingen av stereotypen om *Den svenska synden*. Denna historiska koppling mellan nationalitet och sexualitet studeras med hjälp av det analytiska begreppet *the Sweden-sex nexus*, varigenom både svenska självbilder (autostereotyper) och utländska intryck av Sverige och svenskarna (xenostereotyper) kan inkluderas i analysen. Med utgångspunkt i detta ställs frågan: på vilka sätt kan orientalismens välutforskade sexualisering av Orienten användas för att historiskt belysa den populära, diskursiva kopplingen under efterkrigstiden mellan Sverige och sex? Svaret söks både i officiella svenska självbilder och i utländska tolkningar. Å ena sidan genom studier av Svenska institutets arkiv, och å den andra sidan genom analyser av några längre utländska utläggningar om den svenska sexualiteten. En slutsats är att kopplingen i fråga har tjänat till att bekräfta väletablerade tolkningar – både inom nationens gränser och utanför – av Sverige som moderniteten inkarnerad. I sammanhanget har den försett både konservativa och radikala modernitetskritiker med en sexualiserad *Nordlig Andre* (Northern Other) vars *funktion* i mycket liknat den som den sydliga Orientalen haft – även om de tillskrivna *egenskaperna* hos nordbon och orientalen i det närmaste utgjort varandras motsatser.

Keywords: national identity, history of sexuality, Swedish sin, orientalism, stereotypes