

‘Sweden Helps’: Efforts to Formulate the White Man’s Burden for the Wealthy and Modern Swede

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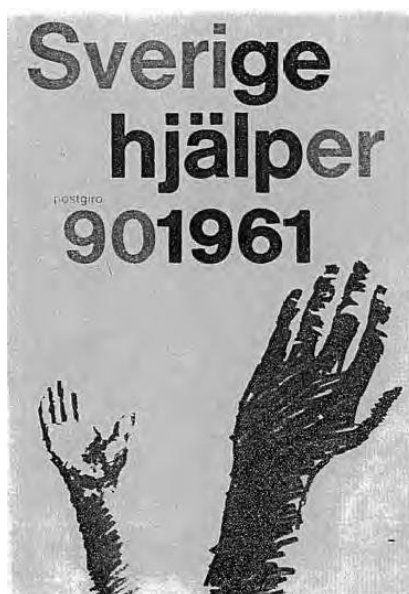


Figure 1

(The poster for fund-raising ‘Sweden helps’ campaign, 1961. The original is in colour, highlighting the letters in the text ‘Sverige **h**jälper 90**1961**’ translate as ‘Give help 1961’.)

Studies of Swedish development assistance suggest that Swedish development aid began as an altruistic venture, that is, an act grounded in a popular wish to support poor peoples outside of Sweden. This venture, which at times is seen as a continuation of Swedish international Lutheran missionary work, is described as being removed from commercial interests.¹ Some commentators argue that Swedish bilateral development assistance in the 1950s and 60s should be viewed as an internationalisation of the Social Democratic welfare platform. According to their account, the early form of development assistance was genuinely altruistic,

¹ See for instance, ‘The Missionaries were the First’, <http://www.sida.se/?d=733&a=4982> (Latest access Feb.26, 2009).

but later on, at a point in the 1980s, Swedish commercial interest tainted this idealistic approach.² The assumptions in this description of development assistance's origins are promising for analysis in a postcolonial framework. The claim for genuine benevolence suggests that commercial export interests are an improper motive for international development assistance, while a specific will to help others – an altruistic ideal – is by definition a proper motive. Secondly, it implies that Sweden compared to most other nations who are involved in international development assistance, has been the provider of altruistic and thus, *good* bilateral assistance. In this reading, Sweden, as a nation, is differentiated from other nations, because it is viewed as being without a colonial past, and because it is not considered to harbor neo-imperial aspirations. While this understanding of Sweden, within contemporary development assistance, has been challenged by both Maria Eriksson Baaz and Gudrun Dahl,³ this article analyses the historical origins of these perceptions and assumptions. Specifically, this essay discusses the individual and institutional actors involved in the early organisation of the Swedish development assistance as it contrasts an image of Sweden, promoted within Sweden in the 1950s, to images of other nations who were seen as less idealistic and therefore less good,. Originating from a feminist postcolonial perspective, this essay also examines the ideas and images that were posited in order to convince Swedish people to agree to send tax funds to countries far away during the two 'Sweden Helps' nationwide fund raising drives of 1955 and 1961.

In the analysis of development assistance of the 1950s and '60s, the distinction between altruism and commercial interests proves simplistic and constitutes a misunderstanding. To clarify, the distinction is not an either/or one; I argue that altruism and commercial interests are two sides of the same coin. In the late 1940s and early '50s the individuals who initiated Swedish bilateral development assistance represented Swedish export interests. They were employees of the Swedish state departments, who had close connections to national organizations and used their influence to promote the establishment of Swedish development assistance. Their objective was to facilitate access for Swedish

² See Susan L Holmberg, 'Welfare Abroad: Swedish Development Assistance', in B. Sundelius (ed.), *The Committed Neutral*, Boulder, Colorado., 1989, 123-166; Ole Elgström, 'Socialdemokratin och den internationella solidariteten', Hult/Misgeld (eds), *Socialdemokratin och den svenska utrikespolitiken*, Stockholm, 1990, 143-157; Steven W. Hook, *National Interest and Foreign Aid*, Boulder, Colorado, 1995.

³ Maria Eriksson Baaz, *The White Wo/man's Burden in the Age of Partnership: A Postcolonial Reading of Identity in Development Aid*, Göteborg, 2002, 164; Gudrun Dahl, *Responsibility and Partnership in Swedish Aid Discourse*, Uppsala, 2001

companies to the new markets, which were opening up during the era of decolonization. Popular Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) were not the initiators of development aid, but were recruited with the intention of creating a trustworthy formalised platform. This process resulted in 1952 in the creation of the Central Committee for Technical Assistance to Less Developed Areas (the Central Committee), which worked as the sanctioned platform for public education campaigns, and had, as its ultimate goal, the garnering of support for increased development assistance activities.⁴

Valentin Mudimbe, in *The Idea of Africa*, introduces the concept of a ‘colonial library’ to evoke a Western construction of knowledge and imagery of Africa, and then connects this ‘library’ to dichotomous and hierarchical worldviews.⁵ The altruist version, or as I coin it, *the altruist misery version* was a construction, based on the imagery already existing within the Swedish colonial library. Its objective was twofold; firstly, to rally public opinion and secondly, to promote possibilities for commercial profit to industrial leaders. My analysis of the strategies used for the altruist misery version within the public education campaigns show that they were to transmit colonial stereotypes and dichotomies directly from a colonial library, as well as, sketch a dramaturgy of poor peoples in desperate need of help from Sweden. At the same time, the ideas promoted also reinvented Swedish national identity and so improved the image of Sweden, for domestic and international consumption. The image of Sweden promoted was that of a good intentioned, non-colonial, modern – i.e. technologically and scientifically advanced – and prosperous nation of altruistic people willing to share their know-how. It was an image devoid of hidden agendas to promote Swedish national interests. This perception rested on the definition of *others* either as underdeveloped – the decolonizing countries and regions in the southern hemisphere – or as imperialists with hidden agendas, that is, the old colonial powers and the United States of America (US).

My approach to the interpretation of documents, texts, and imagery (in which I apply *the partial perspective* as defined by Donna Haraway in her writing on situated

⁴ May-Britt Öhman, *Taming Exotic Beauties: Swedish Hydropower Constructions in Tanzania in the Era of Development Assistance, 1960s-1990s*, Stockholm, 2007.

⁵ Valentin Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, Bloomington, 1994, 213.

knowledges⁶) speaks to this article's feminist vision. As Haraway remarks there is no *scientific objectivity*, that is, no sited disembodied gaze, but all kinds of understanding are embodied in different human beings. Contextually, understanding and knowledge arises from different backgrounds, positions, interests and from individuals having different capabilities to express them, depending on their power position – in and outside academia, constituting for example, two such positions. In this essay, I express my understanding from my necessarily biased partial perspective. This article challenges earlier partial perspectives – that can be termed myths – these are often thought of as objective and are, in my informed understanding, the guiding principles for current Swedish international development assistance.

The Corporate Origins of Swedish Development Assistance

The idea that Swedish development assistance in its early form was an altruistic action, in the sense of Swedish people organised in non-governmental organisations working on a non-profit basis for international charity, is misleading. In research on development aid motives, Per-Åke Nilsson demonstrated as early as 1968, that the incipient organisation of Swedish development assistance was the result of initiatives by prominent Swedes who held important positions within the Swedish state, and that export and trade interests constituted an important part of these early activities.⁷ In a case study, a detailed examination of Swedish Hydropower Constructions in Tanzania, (published elsewhere) I analysed the institutions and individuals involved, identifying their backgrounds and social networks, demonstrating that the actors were indeed promoters of Swedish export interests.⁸ The corporate origins of Swedish Development assistance all started with the *Swedish Institute*, the platform created to provide Sweden with an enhanced standing after the Second World War.

Sweden emerged from the war with a tainted reputation in the allies' eyes, and there was widespread domestic concern that crucial international economic relations with the United States of America and United Kingdom (UK) were damaged. While the war raged, and after it became apparent that Nazi Germany would lose, a specific inquiry was set up to

⁶ Donna Haraway, 'Situated knowledges: The Science question in Feminism and the privilege of partial perspective, in Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge, 1991, 183-201.

⁷ Per Åke Nilsson, *Impulser, motiv och målsättningar för det statliga bilaterala biståndet till utvecklingsländer. Centralkommittén för svenskt tekniskt bistånd till mindre utvecklade områden 1952-1962* unpubl., Lund, 1968. Nilsson's thesis was presented in 1968, but remained unpublished and difficult to access until it was published – which only happened after I asked the author to do so in 2004.

⁸ Öhman, *Taming...*, 96-105.

improve Sweden's image – the America-inquiry (*Amerikautredningen*). Their report published in April 1944, on the eve of the D-day allied invasion of Northern France, included several measures to enhance the credibility of Sweden.⁹ One of the measures proposed to the Swedish government and soon put into effect, was to establish an institute for the promotion of Sweden's reputation through cultural manifestations and scientific exchange¹⁰ – the above-mentioned Swedish Institute. It was established early in 1945 and still operates in the 21st century.¹¹ As its initiators in the 1940s were worried that the Swedish Institute might seem to be a quango, something that was considered detrimental to its purpose of enhancing Sweden's international standing, measures were taken to have the institution appear free from state control. Among other things, they decided that half the board, which consisted of one hundred persons, was to be elected by the Swedish business sector, while the other half was to be appointed by the Swedish government.¹²

After its establishment, the Institute soon became the platform for other international commitments. When the United Nations (UN) was founded in the aftermath of the Second World War, efforts were made to use expertise from different countries for the reconstruction of economies of less 'developed' countries – partly through the establishment of the UN's program for the international exchange of experts and scholarships. In Sweden the exchange from 1947 was organised through the newly established Institute and a specific one-man department was created for the purpose – the Department for Technical Assistance, headed by Sixten Heppling. Heppling had earlier experience from the Foreign Ministry where he worked during the war; he would become one of the most important people in the development assistance work in the 1950s.¹³ Within the framework of the exchange program a large number of Swedes, within both industry and the social work field, lived in South

⁹ R. Ljunglöf, *et al.*, "Förslag till ett svenskt institut för kulturellt utbyte med utlandet", *Amerikautredningen, Betänkande med utredning och förslag angående Sveriges kommersiella och kulturella förbindelser med transoceaniska länder: Del 2*, Stockholm, 1944 ; Per Axel Hildeman, *Upplysningsvis: Svenska institutet 1945-1995*, Stockholm, 1995; Örjan Appelqvist, *Bruten brygga: Gunnar Myrdal och Sveriges ekonomiska efterkrigspolitik*, Stockholm, 2000, 54-56.

¹⁰ Hildeman, *Upplysningsvis*, p. 7.

¹¹ See <http://www.svenskainstitutet.se> (Latest access March 3, 2009)

¹² Statens offentliga utredningar, SOU, 1967:56, *Svenska institutet : principbetänkande om utlandsinformation och internationellt utbyte*, Stockholm, 1967, 19.

¹³ Sixten Heppling, Personal interview, 16th Feb., 2000; Hildeman, *Upplysningsvis*; Lennart Andersson, *Biståndet till utlänterna*, Uppsala, 1989.

America, Asia and Africa, and in two European countries, Italy and Yugoslavia. Scholarships recipients also came to Sweden and the exchange period(s) lasted from months to years.¹⁴

In 1949, the newly elected US president, Harry S Truman, set the tone for the post-war era, which he launched as the development assistance era breaking with the colonial era. In his inaugural address, the president stated that more than half of the world's population were living in conditions 'approaching misery', their food 'inadequate'; they were 'victims of disease' and their economic life was 'primitive and stagnant.' Truman noted that this poverty was, a 'handicap and a threat to them and more prosperous areas'.¹⁵ The US would use its technological and scientific advancement to 'make the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of the underdeveloped areas'.¹⁶ But the US would apply methods that were different from the ways of European colonialism. He said, 'the old imperialism-exploitation for foreign profit has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair-dealing.'¹⁷

The Swedish establishment soon adopted President Truman's language of *misery*, used in relation to former and current colonised countries. The Truman administration took initiatives to convince fellow UN member countries to increase their engagement in multilateral aid activities; and plans were set in motion for the establishment of a new UN organisation, Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance, to take charge of the aid activities.¹⁸ While the organisation of the multilateral aid needed revision in Sweden, bilateral aid was still practically non-existent. The first initiatives to set up a Swedish, bilateral development assistance program came from the Department of Foreign Affairs. In Heppling's words this occurred on:

A beautiful day in the spring of 1952, I was called to the then cabinet secretary at the Department of Foreign Affairs, Arne Lundberg. He explained that he had felt that some kind of institutional arrangement was needed to develop a Swedish bilateral assistance program. Undén and himself had concluded that a committee

¹⁴ Svenska Institutet, *Översikt över Sveriges deltagande i Förenta Nationernas, fackorganens och ICA:s tekniska biståndsverksamhet i mindre utvecklade länder under åren 1956-1959*, Stockholm, 1960.

¹⁵ Harry S. Truman, *Inaugural Address*, Jan. 20, 1949, http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/50yr_archive/inagural20jan1949.htm (Accessed Feb.26, 2009)

¹⁶ Truman, *Inaugural Address*.

¹⁷ Truman, *Inaugural Address*.

¹⁸ Nilsson, *Impulser*, p. 2.

of NGOs should be created with the double aim to establish a development assistance program and perform an information and education campaign, to form a public opinion in favour of increased development assistance activities.¹⁹

According to Nilsson's research, Ragnar Sundén, one of the most important people within the Swedish business sector, helped initiate the process leading to this particular meeting.²⁰ In 1936, after he trained in economics and law, Sundén became chief clerk at the Ministry of Finances. From 1941-5 he was the Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Education and Ecclesiastical Affairs. Then from 1953-62 he was General Manager and authorised representative of the Swedish Steelproducers' Association (*Jernkontoret*). During two decades, starting in 1945, Sundén was also the vice president of the Federation of (Swedish) Industries. Furthermore, he was one of the first persons to go abroad within the UN exchange system, when he worked as an economic expert for the UN in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia from 1948-51. In 1952 Sundén, who also was a member of the organisational committee preparing for the establishment of the Swedish Institute and was a member of the board of the Institute since its start, became a member of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee.²¹

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Östen Undén, who favoured the ideas on bilateral aid presented by Sundén, passed on the task on to his cabinet secretary who then approached Heppling at the Swedish Institute.²² Hence it was not a popular NGO that staged a national developmental assistance committee, but individuals with close connections to the Swedish state and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Heppling, who had worked at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs during the war, also used his social network when preparing the national committee. He invited his old school friend, now the General Director of the Swedish Employers' Confederation, Lennart Cronqvist, to become a member of the Preparatory Committee.²³

¹⁹ Sixten Heppling, 'The very first years: Memories of an insider'. In Frühling (ed.), *Swedish Development Aid in perspective*, Värnamo, 1986, 13-26, 16.

²⁰ Nilsson, *Impulser*, 2.

²¹ Nilsson, *Impulser*, 2; Heppling, interview 16th Feb., 2000; Swedish Institute Archive, [SIRA], 2710,F1, C 4, Centralkommitténs arbetsutskott protokoll 25/9 1952 -8/12 1954 ; SIRA, 2711, Box B:3, Nämnden för internationella expert- och stipendiatärenden, Kommittén för frågor rörande förvaltningsorganisation protokoll 30/1 1953-30/6 1954; Harnesk, 1238.

²² Nilsson, *Impulser*, p. 2.

²³ Heppling, interview, Feb 16, 2000.

After an intensive planning period by the preparatory committee, in which they decided which NGOs to approach, the Central Committee finally was established in 1952.²⁴ They invited forty-four nationwide NGOs to become members, including student and other youth organisations (with the notable exception of the Communist youth organisation). Among the NGOs were also representatives of the trade unions, and organisations including, temperance movement organisations, sports organisations, Christian missionary organisations, as well as, organisations representing the business sector – the General Export Association, the Federation of Industries and the Swedish Employers' Confederation (SAF). The main purpose of the Central Committee was to organise and promote Swedish bilateral aid.²⁵ To cover the increasing Swedish participation in multilateral aid activities – mainly the UN international exchange program – another committee was established in 1953, the National Committee for Technical Assistance.²⁶ The Central Committee existed until the end of 1961, when its tasks along with those of the National Committee, were taken over by a state agency, the Board for International Development Aid.²⁷ This was eventually replaced by the Swedish Development Assistance Authority, Sida, in 1965.

A closer examination of the two committees in charge of Swedish development assistance in the early 1950s provides sound examples of the involvement of business actors through their professional and social networks. While the Central Committee and the National Committee for Technical Assistance were intended to deal with two seemingly different tasks, bilateral projects and multilateral assistance respectively, they had the same secretary, Heppling, and their secretariat was located at the Department of Technical Assistance of the Swedish Institute.²⁸ This meant that the development assistance work would be organised by the Swedish Institute, a state initiated institution, established by civil servants within the Swedish state aiming at promoting an improved image of Sweden abroad and thereby facilitating for the Swedish export industry.

²⁴ SIRA 2710, F1,C1. Protokoll fört vid sammanträde med Centralkommittén [...] den 2 sept. 1952.

²⁵ Cf Nilsson, *Impulser*, 13.

²⁶ The Swedish name of the body can be translated literally as “Board for International Expert and Scholarship Issues.” It was established in 1955, but its forerunners, three committees of advisers, were formed in 1953. SIRA, Protokoll för Kommittén för Internationella Expert- och Stipendiatärenden, 1/7 1954-15.4 1955, 2711, B:5; SIRA, 2711, B:1 Söderbäck o Granberg, Skrivelse till Konungen, 18 jan. 1954.

²⁷ In Swedish: Nämnden för internationellt bistånd, NIB.

²⁸ SIRA, 2711, Box B:1, Avskrift av brev från Kungl. Utrikesdepartementet, Jarring, Carbonnier, Stockholm den 30 januari, 1953, till Svenska Institutet; SIRA, 2711, Box B:5, Skrivelse från Bergström, Wollin, Kungl. Utrikesdepartementet, Stockholm 5 juli 1954, till Svenska Institutet; Nilsson, *Impulser*, 12; Heppling, Pers. interview Feb. 16th, 2000.

Like the Swedish Institute, both the National Committee for Technical Assistance and the Central Committee were examples of Swedish corporatism that is, examples of the collaboration between state institutions, industry and popular NGOs.²⁹ The NGOs were in all three cases not the initiators of the committees' work but were invited to ensure the institutions would not appear to be state controlled, and also to give the three institutions the appearance of organisation with a broad appeal to the Swedish populace. People with close connections to the Swedish business sector and the Swedish state were actively engaged in promoting the bilateral development assistance. They included individuals from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as representatives of the Federation of Industries, SAF, and the General Export Association.³⁰ The tone was already set with the establishment of the Central Committee, when Axel Gjöres was appointed its first president. Gjöres had been Minister of Finances (1941-47) and Minister of Trade (1947-48). In 1952, he held the position of General Manager of the National Board of Trade (1948-1954).³¹

To further exemplify the importance of the Swedish business community's involvement in the early period of Swedish development assistance, it is worth mentioning that the General Export Association (GEA) was one of the most active organisations involved in promoting bilateral development assistance throughout the 1950s. The GEA organised several seminars, published numerous reports and booklets, and took part in a national inquiry into the future of bilateral development assistance.³²

In short the notion that early Swedish development assistance was an idealistic and popularly initiated NGO-venture, can be dismissed as a misunderstanding. The early Swedish post-war development assistance was not the result of pure, altruistic ideals and non-profit work by popular movements, but rather the result of the ideas and actions of key players within or closely related to the Swedish state, who either were or had close connections with actors with export and trade interests.

²⁹ Cf Bo Rothstein, 'State Structure and Variations in Corporatism – the Swedish case,' Rudebeck/ Törnquist (eds), *Democratisation in the Third World*, Uppsala, 1996, 95-118; Niklas Stenlås, *Den inre kretsen*, Bjärnum, 1999.

³⁰ SIRA, 2710, F1, Vol C1, Centralkommittén för svenskt tekniskt bistånd till mindre utvecklade områden, protokoll 12/5 1952-30/11 1961. See also SIRA, 2710, F1, C75, Aktuellt från centralkommittén nr 4, 10.11.1954.

³¹ Harnesk, 1962, 446; Nilsson, *Impulser*, pp. 13, 91; Centralkommittén för svenskt tekniskt bistånd, *Årsberättelse...* 1961, 6.

³² Öhman, *Taming...*, 100-103.

Sweden – from Colonial Power to Promoter of Development Assistance

Having disclosed the corporatist nature of the institutions behind Swedish development assistance and questioned the ‘altruistic’ ideals within these institutions, the next logical step is to analyse the discourses used for promoting their activities. I will focus on the Central Committee and the two national fund drives of 1955 and 1961. However, before discussing the methods (and images) used by the Central Committee, it is necessary to revisit the Swedish external colonial history to address the relationship between the Swedish involvement in colonialism and the rise of the new international orientation in the 1950s.³³

Officially, Sweden lost its status as colonial power in 1878, when it sold its slave trading base, St. Barthélemy, to France;³⁴ another 18th century colonial venture was the Swedish East Indian Company (1731-1813).³⁵ The question, why Sweden did not succeed in, or put more effort into, overseas colonisation in the nineteenth century has not received much attention. However, scholars discussing the internal colonisation of the northern part of Sweden and the accelerated colonisation of this area in the late 19th and early 20th centuries have argued that the Swedish state efforts were focused on the north.³⁶ Although Sweden was unsuccessful as an overseas colonial power, Sweden was, however, well represented in other countries’ colonial undertakings. The most important example is the large number of Swedes, who supported by the king and state, participated in the Belgian colonisation of the Congo (1880s-1930s).³⁷ Furthermore, Swedish missionaries had been active in Africa since the 1860s, when the first missionaries travelled to Ethiopia. The Swedish involvement in Ethiopia continued during the 20th century and included missionaries, along with state representatives and enterprises.³⁸ Not to forget that at the beginning of the 20th century, Swedish

³³Slave trade was in Sweden abolished as late as in 1847, to compare with the after the British abolishment in 1833. See for instance E.O.E Högström, *S. Barthelemy under svenskt välde*, Upsala, 1888; Ingegerd Hildebrand, *Den svenska kolonin S:t Barthelemy och Västindiska kompaniet fram till 1796*, Lund, 1951.

³⁴Högström, *S Barthelemy*; Hildebrand, *Den svenska kolonin*.

³⁵Mikaela Lundahl, ‘Nordic Complicity? Some Aspects on Nordic Identity as “Non-Colonial” and Non-Participatory in the European Colonial Event’, *Revisiting Nordic Colonialism*, Reykjavik, March, 2006. <http://www.rethinking-nordic-colonialism.org/files/index.htm> (Latest access Nov.25, 2006)

³⁶Sverker Sörlin, *Framtidslandet: debatten om Norrland och naturresurserna under det industriella genombrottet*, Stockholm, 1988; Staffan Hansson *Porjus: En vision för industriell utveckling i Övre Norrland*, Luleå, 1994.

³⁷See for instance Lundahl, *Nordic complicity*; Raoul J. Granqvist, ‘Romance and Racism’, Fincham/De Lange/Krajka (eds), *Conrad at the Millennium*, New York, 2001, 467-496; Lotten Gustafsson Reinius, *Förfärliga och begärliga föremål*, Stockholm, 2005.

³⁸ Viveka Halldin-Norberg, *Swedes in Haile Selassie’s Ethiopia, 1924-1952*, Uppsala, 1977.

international trade depended largely on its contacts with the UK and its colonies.³⁹ Swedish involvement in colonialism is readily apparent, and the colonial experience returned to Sweden as it did to other European countries involved in colonialism imagery and ideas that were reproduced variously, as Granqvist among others have pointed out.⁴⁰ As I show in the following sections, these images fed the public imagination in the 1950s when development aid was established.

Shaping the Swedish Minds – ‘Sweden Helps’

During the 1950s and early ‘60s, two different ways of depicting decolonised countries existed. One was what I referred to in my introduction as *the altruist misery version*, containing discourses and images arguing for Swedish state supported activities – including bilateral development assistance. The other version was drier and more nuanced, it involved discussing countries from an economic perspective. Swedish state support for, among other things, trade liberalisations was an outcome of this perspective. This version also served private enterprise, which attempted to discourage over involvement by the Swedish state in international trade.⁴¹ Between these depictions of the decolonizing world, a line can be drawn between the business sector and the sector that represented NGOs and political parties. An example of the discussions and arguments forwarded within the business sector was exemplified in a 1961 report, ‘The Swedish Commercial Sector and the Underdeveloped Countries. Produced by a working group within the Swedish Centre for Business and Policy Studies (founded in 1948), the report was based on nuanced analyses of countries and regions. By contrast, within the NGO sector the world was presented in a more black and white manner; ‘poor peoples versus developed peoples’, or ‘primitivism versus progress’. For instance, in the first inquiry into bilateral Swedish development assistance, produced by the Central Committee in 1959 and called ‘Sweden Helps – a programme for action’ – the decolonising areas, or the majority of countries in the ‘south’, were presented as ‘poor countries’, in general, without any subtle distinctions between the countries and regions.⁴²

³⁹ Thor Andersson, ‘Sveriges utförsel från och med 1886’, *Sveriges Allmänna Exportförening 1887-1912*, Stockholm, 1912, 75-80. 78.

⁴⁰ Granqvist, *Romance*.

⁴¹ The positions taken by the business sector must be seen in the light of the postwar socialisation debate in Sweden. Cf Leif Lewin, *Planhushållningsdebatten*, Stockholm, 1967; Therese Nordlund, *För näringslivets bästa? nätverk, planhushållningsmotstånd och företagande med fokus på Axel Ax:son Johnson (1876-1958)*, Ekonomisk-historiska institutionen, Univ., Stockholm, 2003.

⁴² Öhman, *Taming...*, 103-108.

Eventually, through state support and massive promotion to the Swedish population, the altruist misery version predominated, while the more nuanced version faded out. In the following section, I will show how the altruist misery version was advanced in the two national fund raising campaigns, ‘Sweden Helps’, and how this relates to the question of educating the Swedes into a particular mindset.

1955 – Welfare versus Misery and Destitution

The fundraising of 1955 had been one of the earliest planned activities by the Central Committee. Delayed by, among other things, the 1953 Netherlands catastrophic floods, on February 7th 1955, it was launched after this period of deferral through a direct appeal to the Swedish people. Local and national newspapers published the public notices about the campaign that had been designed by the Central Committee and its Sub-committee for Information and Propaganda – with Heppling as one of the key instigators. The formulations used in the appeal had been difficult to decide. The difference from earlier fund raising drives, (i.e. the support for Norway and Finland during the war whose problems Swedes were considered to have some knowledge about) was that in this case the appeal had to educate Swedes to send funds to countries and peoples far away.⁴³ The public announcements were signed by the Committee’s majority of member organisations while the business organisations, SAF and the Federation of Industries, refrained from being seen to authorise the appeal, but contributed in other ways.⁴⁴

Despite the initial hesitant approach from the business organisations, the 1955 campaign succeeded in the breadth of participation and in the amount raised – by the end of the drive, this totalled SEK three million.⁴⁵ It became a nationwide campaign, involving both the average Swede as well as the business sector – with both small and large companies participating, alongside representatives of the business sector organisations.⁴⁶ While designed as a fund raising campaign, the collection was not considered an end in itself. The ultimate objective was instead to raise public awareness – to educate Swedes about the misery and malnutrition of the ‘poor peoples’ of the south. Encouraging people to donate their own

⁴³ SIRA 2710, F1, C13 Protokoll fört vid upplysningsdelegationens sammanträde 23.12.1954.

⁴⁴ SIRA, 2710, F2, 6, Korrespondens M-Ö. 1955, Upprop för Sverige Hjälp.

⁴⁵ Centralkommittén, *Sverige Hjälp*...1959, 297.

⁴⁶ Öhman, *Taming*..., 110-111.

money, as well as, to instigate their own fund raising activities, were considered ways to stimulate interest in future state funded development assistance.⁴⁷ This was the ultimate objective as the ideas and the design of the campaign were developed by a specific committee for information and propaganda.

The Sub-Committee for Information and Propaganda was established in 1953, with Heppling as its secretary and Sven Arne Stahre from the Social Democratic Study Association, (ABF) as its chief.⁴⁸ Five full-time staff employed at a specific fund raising drive secretariat performed an important part of the design and promotion work.⁴⁹ The actions of those involved in the organising committee and their networks played a crucial part in the successful outcome of the operation. All the actors were prominent individuals within Swedish society, with direct links to the government, the media and the industrial sector. For instance, the success of the fund raising drive was guaranteed by the Swedish Government, which undertook responsibility for the whole campaign. The Minister for Development Assistance, Ulla Lindström, had ultimate responsibility; in addition she worked actively on certain practical issues. She was the one who arranged a site for the secretariat, and she convinced the Swedish king, Gustav IV Adolf, to promote the campaign in a speech on national radio in December 1954.⁵⁰

The visual impact was helped by the fund secretariat's agreement with all the major cinema distributors to show a three-minute film, on the appeal, during the eight weeks of the campaign, aided the campaign's visual impact. The brief film showings were followed by a collection of monies.⁵¹ Another successful strategy by the fund raising drive secretariat was to send pictures from the 'less developed areas' to the press, pictures that could be used to illustrate articles on the fund drive.⁵² Hans Haste, an editor working at ABF was employed

⁴⁷ See for instance SIRA, 2710, vol C13: Protokoll nr 1/1954, sammanträde med upplysningsdelegationen inom Centralkommitténs arbetsutskott, 9 April 1954, kl.16.00; Hans Haste, *Välstånd och Världsnöd*, Stockholm, 1955.

⁴⁸ SIRA, 2710, F1, Vol C26, PM med några synpunkter, som framkom vid sammanträde med studiegruppen för CKs upplysningsverksamhet fredagen den 20 febr. 1953.

⁴⁹ SIRA 2710, F1, C13. Protokoll nr 3/1954, 5/1954, 6/1954, sammanträde med upplysningsdelegationen.

⁵⁰ SIRA, 2710, F1, C 27, Stenografiskt protokoll fört vid upplysningsdelegationens sammanträde 23.12.1954 & Sammanfattat stenografiskt protokoll fört vid upplysningsdelegationens sammanträde 30/12 1954.

⁵¹ SIRA, 2710,F2, 5. [Förf. okänd] Utkast till cirkulärskrivelse till hel- och halvtidsanställda ombud i ABF:s, SLS', IOGT:s och TBV:s tjänst.,

⁵² Ibid.; SIRA 2710, F2, 7, Korrespondens. 1955, Brev fr Pressens Reportagebyrå, Stockholm 23/2 1955 till insamlingen Sverige Hjälper,

because of his networks and his public relations skills.⁵³ Another part of the campaign was directed at schoolchildren, who were encouraged to participate in the collection by selling the ‘Sweden Helps’ pins. Their contribution enabled them to participate in a competition, a sort of lottery, with many prizes, first prize being a bicycle.⁵⁴

The above mentioned activities were just a few of many carried out during the fund drive, all of them encouraging the Swedes to take personal action to assist poor people in far away countries. All the texts, images and actions of the operation focussed on the needs of people in misery and starvation and contrasted these with the wealth of the Swedish people; there was little room for proposals that would bring more nuanced perspectives. This altruist misery version further manifested in two campaign posters (reproduced below, Fig. 2 and 3), described in the minutes of the Propaganda Committee as a ‘picture of a Pakistani boy’, and a ‘woman dressed in white with a child in her arms in a desert-like landscape’.⁵⁵ The only text featured on the posters were the words the ‘Sweden Helps Campaign’, and the account number to which donors could send their money.

The posters were the result of the work by the organising committee, discussing possible campaign themes and slogans such as ‘Cultivate Progress: Cultivate Peace’ and ‘Their Progress: Your Future’ and sending out these to advertising agencies for accompanying artwork.⁵⁶ This resulted in the two mentioned posters by two different artists.⁵⁷ The two campaign posters revealed a dichotomic worldview, that is, a representation of passive and incapable ‘poor peoples’ in the southern hemisphere. The images stress helplessness and inability conventionally featuring women and children.⁵⁸ The ‘woman in white with child... in a desert landscape’ is isolated in a sterile environment, with seemingly no possibility of changing her own situation, or that of the child she carries in her arms. Their vulnerability is overwhelming and the poster calls upon the Swedish people to help her, this incarnation of the *underdeveloped* peoples, by sending them money. The large letters in ‘Sweden Helps’ are a

⁵³ SIRA 2710, F1, C13, Protokoll nr 3/1954 upplysningsdelegationen 30/10 1954.

⁵⁴ SIRA, 2710,F1, 4, Skoltävlingar.

⁵⁵ SIRA, 2710,F2, Vol. 5, [Förf. okänd] Utkast till cirkulärskrivelse till hel- och halvtidsanställda ombud i ABF:s, SLS’, IOGT:s och TBV:s tjänst,

⁵⁶ SIRA, 2710,F1, Vol C13, Protokoll nr 1/1954, sammanträde med upplysningsdelegationen, 9/4 1954,.

⁵⁷ The artists were Lars Bramberg and [Gunnar?] Bergenholz, SIRA, 2710, F1, C13 Protokoll nr 5/1954, upplysningsdelegationen, 1/12 1954.

⁵⁸ Cf Donna Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto*, 1991, 177; Valentin Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa* Bloomington,1988.

powerful manifestation that Sweden and the Swedes can and must lift her and her child from their plight. Both the ‘Pakistani boy’ and the ‘woman in white’ break with the notion of a Swedish national imagined self-contained community, that is, a Swedish national iconographic rhetoric of strength and capability.⁵⁹ The desert landscape poses a sharp contrast to the mass produced images of Sweden through illustration of a conventional Swedish landscape within which modernity was seen in the pictures of industry and entrepreneurship: – blast furnaces, electrification lines, power plants, log floating, as well as, harvesting work.⁶⁰ The images of the woman and the Pakistani boy also operate as contrasts to an established image of the Swede as the fair-skinned, active Swedish *man* – often represented as the ‘silent man of the Swedish north’ (the Norrlander), the Dalecarlian musician, the fisherman of Bohuslän or the good-natured Scanian farmer.⁶¹

The nationwide distribution of the posters enlisted work representatives at community levels in all Swedish municipalities. The state authorities dealing with communication facilitated the dissemination of the message by displaying the posters (available in three sizes) in all railway stations, telecommunication stations, and post offices. Trams and buses displayed the posters as well; an advertising agency was appointed to attend to their distribution. An issue of one of the posters, ‘The Pakistani Boy’, was used as a decoration for letterhead.⁶² Hence, for two months the images of poor people in the shape of women and children in foreign countries, in need of help, were displayed all over Sweden accompanied by the message that the Swedes could and should help them.

⁵⁹ Orvar Löfgren, ”Nationella Arenor”, *Försvenskningen av Sverige*, Ehn, Frykman, Löfgren (eds), Stockholm, 1993, 107-108.

⁶⁰ Löfgren, ”Nationella Arenor”.

⁶¹ Löfgren, ”Nationella Arenor”.

⁶² SIRA, 2710,F1, Vol C 75, *Aktuellt fr Centralkommittén*, 6, (1955) ; SIRA, 2710,F2, 5 ,[Förf. okänd] Utkast till cirkulärskrivelse till hel- och halvtidsanställda ombud i ABF:s, SLS’, IOGT:s och TBV:s tjänst.; SIRA, 2710, F2, 1, 1955, Diverse korrespondens Kommunala Representanter; SIRA 2710, F1, C13, Protokoll nr 6/1954, sammanträde med upplysningsdelegationen, 22/2 1954,

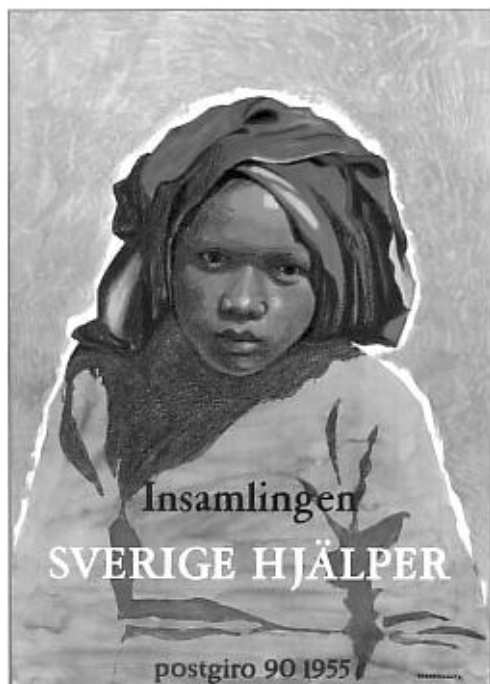


Figure 2

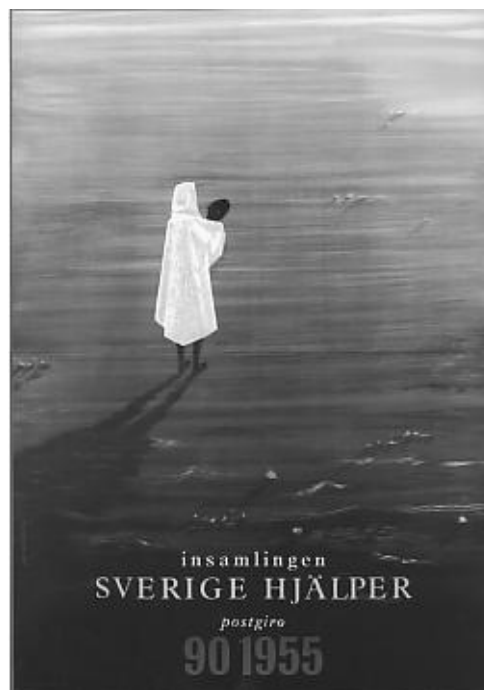


Figure 3

(The posters ‘Pakistan Boy’ Fig. 2, by Bergenholz, and Fig. 3 ‘Woman Dressed in White with Child in her Arms in Desert-like Landscape’, by Bramberg. Source and reproduction: the National Library, Stockholm.)

Another part of the campaign was the production of a twenty-four-page campaign pamphlet, ‘Welfare and Destitution in the World’.⁶³ It was sent to the member organisations of the Central Committee for distribution; some 40,000 copies were produced.⁶⁴ The pamphlet falls more explicitly within colonial discourse than the two posters, in terms of imagery and text. As a viewer can see below, the front page features an older woman and a little girl, squatting passively, as if waiting for something to happen.

⁶³ The author’s (May-Britt Öhman) translation of the title of the pamphlet: ”Välstånd och världsöd”, Haste.

⁶⁴ SIRA, 2710, F1, C 75, ”Aktuellt fr centralkommittén”, 6, 4/2 1955; 8, 14/2 1955; 12, 21/3 1955.



Figure 4
(Front page of the folder *Välstånd och världsöd*, Haste, 1955)

Their situation, and need for Swedish help, is underlined by a poem on the back of the pamphlet by a Swedish poet, Stig Dagerman, appealing to each donor to assist the less fortunate in the world:

One Brother More⁶⁵

You can't change the whole wide world yourself,
calm down, just do what you can.
Reach out a hand to your neighbour: give
aid to your fellow man.
Doing that makes such a difference
that stars seem more bright than before.
One person no longer hungry
means you have one brother more.

The pamphlet divides the countries of the world into three levels of development. Sweden is among the first, and is, consequently, described as one of the richest and most developed countries. The pamphlet ends with an appeal to the Swedish people to participate in a sort of people-to-people-aid, and thereby to show the Swedish parliament and government that the Swedish people are prepared to help. Participating through giving is described as taking part in an 'unofficial referendum' on future Swedish policy in this area.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Translated from Swedish by Laurie Thompson

⁶⁶ Haste, *Välstånd*..., 5.

The Campaign of 1961: 'Sweden Helps' Again

In 1956, an initial opinion poll ascertained the attitudes of Swedish citizens to development aid. The poll was carried out as part of a larger political survey close to the general elections, and consisted of only one question: 'Whether Sweden should help poor countries in Africa and Asia?'.⁶⁷ As there was no earlier poll for comparison, this poll did not state much about the impact of the 1955 fund-raising drive. However, one result of the national fund raising drive, which became apparent, was that it gave a goodwill spin-off effect to the participating NGOs. Encouraged by the Central Committee campaign, a number of different fund raising drives occurred between 1957 and 1960.⁶⁸ In 1955, the Sub-Committee for Information and Propaganda had discussed how to educate people; by 1961, their task was less complicated. The second national fund drive by the Central Committee started in January 1961; like the previous one it began with an appeal to the Swedish people. This time all member organisations of the Central Committee, including the business sector representatives, signed it. The campaign was linked to the international campaign of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN entitled 'Freedom from Hunger', which was initiated in 1960 and the UN catchphrase was used in the campaign.⁶⁹

The methods applied in the 1961 were modelled on those of the 1955 campaign. As in 1955, money was collected at work and school children also raised funds.⁷⁰ Members of parliament and local councillors made monthly deductions from their salaries for twelve months, for the benefit of the fund raising drive.⁷¹ One vehicle for inducing children to contribute to the fund drive, and for educating the Swedish children about the misery of African children's lives, was the travelling exhibition, 'A Letter from Africa', which was displayed at many schools. Photographs from the exhibition were published in various Swedish newspapers, together with a text explaining the perceived miserable situation of young Africans that was taught to Swedish children:

⁶⁷ Jörgen Westerståhl, Bo Särilvik, *Svensk hjälp till mindre utvecklade områden, en attitydundersökning. Valundersökning 1956*, unpubl., Göteborgs Univ., 1957; Ann-Marie Ekengren, Henrik Oscarsson, *Solidaritet med omvärlden?: Biståndsviljan i Sverige 1956-1998*, Göteborg, 1999.

⁶⁸ Kungl. Maj:ts Proposition 1962:100, 128-130.

⁶⁹ Kungl. Maj:ts Proposition 1962:100, 39; Centralkommittén, *Årsberättelse*, 1961.

⁷⁰ Centralkommittén, *Årsberättelse*, 1961, 42f.

⁷¹ Centralkommittén, *Årsberättelse*, 1961.

These days living conditions in Africa are taught in the Swedish schools. The pupils learn that there are no medical doctors in the villages, that the children get no milk, no fish nor egg, on their tables, not even at Easter. That is, if they even have tables, of course...⁷²



Figure 5

(‘A Letter from Africa...’ From the ‘Sweden Helps’ campaign of 1961, the image and text were distributed to Swedish newspapers.)

As in 1955, two posters were produced for the fund raising drive and the new posters share the iconography with the previous campaign’s images. One poster shows the face of a girl with dark hair and dark eyes. The text reads, ‘Sweden Helps’ together with the account number.⁷³ The print run of this poster was 110,000 copies.⁷⁴ The second poster was the result of a competition, for which thirty-six entries were received. However, as the winning contribution was not considered expressive enough for the needs of the campaign the poster finally selected, by the organising committee, was one by Bo Liljedal; it shows a person’s

⁷² SIRA, 2710, F2, 27, Degerfors Tidning, March 24, 1961: ”Ett brev från Afrika”.

⁷³ Centralkommittén, *CK rapporten* 2, 1961, 1.

⁷⁴ SIRA, 2709:2, Vol C110, 2, Gunnar Dahlman, PM angående insamlingen Sverige Hjälp, 30 June, 1961,

hands, stretching up in the air, awaiting help or salvation from the text above, ‘Sweden Helps, 90 1961’.⁷⁵ There is also a play on words on the poster, the highlighting of certain letters in red, becomes a call to ‘give help’.⁷⁶ If the posters of 1955 did not clearly speak the language of misery and poverty, this poster is a clear statement of people in need. The fund raising drives organisers underlined the ‘poor and destitute’s’ extreme deprivation to eradicate any doubt or hesitation about the necessity for donations from the Swedish community. As in the first fund-raising drive, the posters were distributed with the aid of various state enterprises, the post office, the telecommunications administration, and the state railways. Four political parties, although not the communist party, distributed the poster, and in addition, it was sent to labour organisations and employers.⁷⁷

The two fund raising drives of 1955 and 1961 were clear manifestations of how the proponents of a state-funded development assistance promoted imagery of a world divided in two. The helper, the rich, the active, the modern, as opposed to – and having a higher position on the ‘scale of development’ than – the helped, the poor, the passive, the primitive. Sweden belonged to the ‘helpers’, a circumstance readily found in the title of the fund raising drives, along with the images, methods, and rhetoric used. Sweden, a country with a high level of technology and science, should and would help poor people in misery, who could not take care of themselves.

Conclusion

Debates regarding the nature of Swedish development assistance have, for some time, argued the question whether commercial activities that drive these activities, i.e. something *bad*, or, on the other hand, are they motivated by altruism, i.e. something *good*. Whereas some authors have promoted the idea that Swedish development assistance was pure and free from commercial interests in its early days, and only later became tainted with national interests, I have demonstrated that national export interests were behind the first initiatives and that Swedish bilateral assistance was never was an altruistic non-profit venture. During and after the Second World War, representatives of the Swedish state set out to safeguard Swedish

⁷⁵ Centralkommittén, *CK rapporten 2*, 1961, 20.

⁷⁶ SIRA, 2710, F1, C 31 Protokoll insamlingsutskottet 27/12 1960.

⁷⁷ SIRA, 2709:2, C110, 1, Sixten Heppling, PM angående insamlingen Sverige Hjälp, 12 June, 1961,

international exports, and the international development assistance became an aspect of this. The benevolent ideals should rather be seen as a kind of garnering, that came, as a package, with the popular NGOs, which were recruited to be part of the institutions behind the promotion of Swedish development assistance. The aim was to create a trustworthy formalised platform for Sweden.

While the wish to support Swedish export companies was obvious and not in any way hidden within of the early Swedish development assistance, what was promoted officially, especially through the first two national fund raising campaigns, was an altruist misery version, stressing the need of helping poor peoples in countries far away. What then becomes interesting to this scholar is the deconstruction of the altruist ideals within these campaigns. Deconstructing the altruist ideals means a colonial imagery emerges. Ideas and imagery from, a 'colonial library', to use Mudimbe's term, were promoted through state-funded campaigns. Their intent was to educate Swedes, of all ages starting from schoolchildren, to understand what Sweden was, and what poor people in underdeveloped countries were, according to a dichotomous and hierarchical view. The helper, the rich, the active, the modern – represented by male-dominated technology sectors – versus those to be helped, the poor, the passive, the primitive – represented in images of dark-skinned children and women. Seen from a postcolonial perspective, the early origins of Swedish development assistance were to largely educate Swedes into a colonial mindset, which simultaneously paralleled an active forgetting of the colonial past (and present) of Sweden. The Swedes of the 1950s and early 60s were to be educated to believe that Sweden was a modern, wealthy nation, with no colonial past or guilt, and with the obligation to reach out to the poor nations of the world, offering Swedish help, through Swedish commercial enterprises, Swedish technology and know-how.