

Scientist or Racist? The Racialized Memory War Over Monuments to Carl Linnaeus in Sweden During the Black Lives Matter Summer of 2020

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Abstract: This is a study of the Swedish debate on statues and monuments to the world-famous Swedish natural scientist Carl Linnaeus that took place during the Black Lives Matter movement breakthrough in the summer of 2020. The purpose is to examine how understandings of race, racism, identity, and history were articulated in the debate. The empirical material consists of Twitter posts and newspaper editorials, which we approach through thematic analysis complemented with discourse analysis of illustrative examples and excerpts. Theoretically, we conceptualize the debate as a case of a Swedish racialized memory war. The results show that discourse participants constructed the terms of the debate as a matter of being “for” or “against” Linnaeus’ legacy, and consequently as a matter of being for or against science, reason, progress, and a supposedly non-ideological historiography, rather than as a matter of qualitatively renegotiating how we selectively remember and celebrate historical persons and legacies, and formulate tendentious narratives of the past that serve present agendas. In this memory war, discourse participants mainly representing the white majority population of Sweden mobilized a defense of a “canonized” understanding of Linnaeus’ legacy on the editorial pages of the Swedish newspapers and on Twitter. This defense, we argue, supports an ongoing effort to absolve Swedes of any substantial complicity in European and Western racism and colonialism. In effect, what is defended is a white-washed use and understanding of history – a status quo that largely remains unchallenged in Sweden.

Keywords: Carl Linnaeus, Sweden, statues, monuments, Black Lives Matter, race, racism, identity, history, memory war.

This study concerns the Swedish debate on statues and monuments to the world-famous Swedish natural scientist Carl Linnaeus that took place during the Black Lives Matter movement breakthrough moment in the summer of 2020. On June 2, 2020, the Swedish Black Lives Matter (henceforth abbreviated as BLM) movement went public following the mass protests in the USA after the police killing of George Floyd (Logan, 2021). Although the original US American BLM movement was born in 2012 in the aftermath of the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin, the Swedish BLM movement firstly debuted in the summer of 2020. It took the form of a protest meeting in solidarity with the American BLM movement outside of the US embassy in Stockholm and a simultaneous digital manifestation involving around 70,000 participants and reaching approximately 1.3 million people on the internet (Ekström & Kulneff, 2020; Grönvik, 2020). In

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2016, there had been meetings in solidarity with the original American BLM movement in, *inter alia*, Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö, but it was only in 2020 that a Swedish BLM movement proper took form (Grahn 2016; Jämte et al., 2020). Thereafter followed several well-attended physical Swedish BLM demonstrations in many of the bigger and mid-sized cities of Sweden, which altogether rallied thousands of participants in spite of the then ongoing Covid-19 pandemic (Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå, 2020).

Calls for the removal or tearing down of statues and other tangible monuments connected to racism and colonialism came to the forefront in many countries such as the US, the UK, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Australia and the Netherlands almost immediately after the death of George Floyd – a world news event which instantly made the Black Lives Matter movement global (Lindsey & Smith, 2021; Logan, 2021; McGonigle Leyh, 2020).

The Australian historians Kiera Lindsey and Mariko Smith have summarized this sudden transnationalization of the BLM movement in the following way:

Although such contestations are hardly new, there was something distinctive about the way the brutal police murder of African-American man George Floyd on 25 May 2020 in the United States of America inspired thousands across the world to defy the COVID-19 lockdowns, step beyond the safety of their homes and onto the streets to express their outrage at that terrible moment of injustice. As they did so, many statues, which were already subjects of considerable contestation, suddenly became sites of intense drama. Some were defaced, decapitated and in one notorious incident, dragged into the sea, triggering a conservative backlash among those who feared their ‘relaxed and comfortable’ perspective of the past was being fundamentally threatened. (Lindsey & Smith, 2021, pp. 4-5)

In Sweden, the question of statues and monuments came on the agenda on June 8, when an independent Black Swedish influencer and antiracist activist brought up the fact that there are statues of and monuments to Carl Linnaeus in many cities of Sweden. The influencer questioned the appropriateness of these monuments in a Twitter post written in English wherein she also referred to Linnaeus’ naming of Black Africans as *homo afer* (Schibbye, 2020) (Figure 1).

On the same day, a digital petition in Swedish was initiated and started to collect names demanding the removal of statues of Linnaeus, or rather the removal of “the statue,” which most likely referred to the largest and most well-known Swedish monument to Linnaeus in Humlegården in central Stockholm (Malke, 2020). In the petition text, Linnaeus was said to have pioneered scientific racism on a global scale through his invention of the racial taxonomy of the four principal races, which European and Western racial thinking came to rely on after him. The petition, which was initiated by someone using the pseudonym Becks Malke, also demanded that the Swedish school system start educating youth about Linnaeus’ crucial significance for the development of European racism and colonialism. The petition further linked Linnaeus to the situation of non-white immigrants and minorities in contemporary Sweden and the racial discrimination which they are exposed to (our translation):

“Research” that contributed to making white Europeans realize that they were the superior race and that was used as a basis and explanation for dehumanizing Black and Brown people, for colonizing and looting etc. (...)

we demand that the statue of Carl Linnaeus be taken down as his “research” has contributed to the racism and oppression that everyone of non-Swedish origin has been exposed to and must endure in Sweden (and in the rest of the world) (Malke, 2020).

Figure 1

Twitter Post by Antiracist Activist

I mean he is everywhere: stockholm, malmö, Göteborg, uppsala mm mm mm. I hate the one in humlegården that always stared at me whikst i ate my lunch. Bet he was thinking look at that “Homo Afer” i mean he was right about the first half of that but still...

Översätt tweeten



1:01 fm · 8 juni 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

The physician and botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778), or Carl von Linné as he is known as in Sweden, is by far the most famous Swedish scientist of all times due to his groundbreaking taxonomy of animals, plants and minerals which he presented in his book *Systema Naturae*, which came out in various and new editions from 1735 and onwards (Broberg, 2019). In *Systema Naturae* and from the mid-1700s Linnaeus also gradually developed a taxonomy of human varieties, which is usually seen as the first scientific attempt to categorize humankind into four principal *varieties* (which varieties later came to be named and understood as “races”). Therefore, Linnaeus is sometimes also regarded within the history of ideas as the founding father of so-called scientific racism and consequently of modern racial thinking itself (e.g., Fredrickson, 2002; Müller-Wille, 2014). In relation to the BLM movement and the debate on the question of statues of and monuments to Carl Linnaeus, it is Linnaeus’ description of *homo afer* or *homo africanus* which is here of primary significance: “The African was black, phlegmatic, and relaxed; they had frizzly black hair, silky skin, a flat nose, and tumid lips; they were indolent, negligent, and crafty; they anointed themselves with grease; and they were governed by caprice” (Bethencourt, 2013, pp. 252–253).

In this description by Linnaeus, Africans were put at the bottom of a hierarchy of human varieties, and described as being lazy, cunning, lustful and careless, among other things. This description was alluded to by the Black Swedish influencer in her tweet as well as in the petition. The Black Swedish minority, or the Afro-Swedes (*afrosvenskar* or *afrikansvenskar* in Swedish), consisted of approximately 350,000 inhabitants in 2020, which means that Sweden harbors one of the highest proportions of Black people in Europe (Orrenius, 2020). The history of the Afro-Swedes goes back at least until the 1640s when two African slaves were brought to Sweden in the form of

two children and in the 1600s, 1700s and 1800s Sweden was engaged in the transatlantic slave trade albeit as a minor player with altogether around 10,000 Africans being enslaved by Swedes, and Sweden had also trade stations, slave forts and colonies in both West Africa and the Caribbean until slavery was abolished in 1847 in the last Swedish overseas colony Saint-Barthélemy (Ripenberg, 2019; Weiss, 2016). Today's Black Swedes, however, are instead rather immigrants and refugees, mainly from the Horn of Africa, or children of immigrants and refugees, in addition to mixed-race persons as well as persons adopted by white Swedes.

Afro-Swedes are one of the most vocal minorities in today's Sweden in terms of antiracist activism while also being among the most marginalized and impoverished in terms of socioeconomic outcomes. For instance, in the labor market, at least 30 percent of them are unemployed compared to about 3 percent of the white majority Swedes (Hübinette et al., 2014; Wolgast et al., 2018). Further, the Afro-Swedish minority is proportionally the most affected by racialized hate crimes and likely also by instances of racial discrimination within the various spheres of Swedish society as well as by racial profiling by the police (Forselius & Westerberg, 2019; Wigerfelt et al., 2014).

The tweet and the petition combined became the starting point for the Swedish debate on monuments to Linnaeus, which can be found in numerous cities around the country in the form of statues, busts, and monuments, as well as names of streets, squares, buildings, whole city districts, and even a university. The debate mainly took place throughout the month of June 2020, across mainstream media, but arguably most heatedly on the newspapers' editorial pages and on Twitter. The debate was extensively focused on monuments to Linnaeus, but later on other monuments to Swedish historical figures connected to colonialism and scientific racism were also brought up, such as the slave trader Louis De Geer and the race scientist Anders Retzius (Åberg, 2020).

Contrary to most other Western countries, and not the least the US and the UK, the Swedish debate on the question of monuments to Linnaeus never led to the removal of any major statue or monument anywhere in the country during 2020, with the sole exception of a smaller bust of a race scientist at the main campus ground of the medical university Karolinska Institutet (Logan, 2021). Further, after the month of June the debate quickly fizzled out. For instance, there were only two editorials in Swedish newspapers that took up the question of statues during the following month (Birgersson, 2020; Björklund, 2020). In connection with the debate in June, on two occasions, Far Right activists were tricked into rallying around and physically guarding various statues of Linnaeus with their own bodies due to fabricated calls for gathering militant Anti-Fascists and Leftists to destroy or remove these statues (Karlsson, 2020). On one occasion, a Linnaeus statue was also partly painted red, and paper notes and flyers protesting against the celebratory memorialization of Linnaeus were attached to monuments in some cities throughout the same month. However, at the moment of writing, no lasting damage has been done to any monument to Linnaeus anywhere in Sweden.

As this study consists of a discourse analysis of how the debate was expressed on the newspapers' editorial pages and on Twitter it means that events that happened outside these two discursive spaces and in the physical world are not considered in our analyses. We do, however, present a tentative timeline of events as an appendix to this article (Appendix 1). Before continuing, it must also be pointed out that it is not possible to say which activities and events that were organized by the Swedish BLM movement proper and which ones that can be attributed to individuals or groups acting independently, without affiliation with or approval from the movement. It should also be noted that it was not until August 17, 2020, that a Swedish BLM movement formally constituted itself as a registered Swedish association with an elected board,

meaning that no formal BLM association existed at the time of the events studied in this article (Ekström & Kulneff, 2020).

The aim of this study is to examine how questions of race, racism, identity and history were articulated in the debate over statues and monuments to Carl Linnaeus in Sweden, in the summer of 2020. Theoretically, we conceptualize this debate as a case of a Swedish racialized memory war similar to other memory wars in other countries around the world. We do so in order to be able to shed light upon the mobilization of history and cultural memory in contemporary political discourse in the mediated publics of Sweden, a discursive context which is increasingly saturated with implicit or explicit racialized meanings. The empirical material consists of newspaper editorials and Twitter posts, delimited in time to the month of June 2020 and in scope to Swedish language editorials and tweets. We approach this material through thematic analysis, complemented with closer discourse analysis of examples and textual excerpts selected to illustrate key themes and discursive features of the material, guided by two research questions: How did discourse participants position themselves in relation to the controversy over statues and monuments to Carl Linnaeus? And how was criticism against calls to remove such monuments articulated in relation to understandings of race, racism, identity, and history? Following this introduction, the article continues with a presentation of the theoretical approach by which we conceptualize our study as a case study of a Swedish racialized memory war. Thereafter comes a section describing the material and methods, before the main themes are accounted for and analyzed as an example of how history is mobilized for certain current agendas and purposes. The study finally ends with a discussion and a conclusion summing up the main findings and their implications.

The Debate on Monuments to Linnaeus as a Racialized Memory War

On a theoretical level, we frame our study of the debate over monuments to Linnaeus in relation to the notion of a *memory war*. A memory war is a form of politically and ideologically polarized struggle over competing interpretations of various forms of memory, including physical monuments (Cubitt, 2019; Stone, 2012). The questioning and contestation of historical statues in the public spaces in many Western countries that came to be associated with the BLM movement in 2020 is intimately related to a growing interest in the use of history, memory, identity and representation which has permeated the world since at least the early 2000s. Statues of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, monuments to Lenin and Stalin in the former Soviet Union and in post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe, Franco monuments in Spain and memorials connected to the German colonial genocide in Namibia are but a few of many examples of tangible monuments that have gone from being deeply revered to highly contested within a relatively short time span (cf. Niezen, 2018). Similar battles have also flared up concerning issues of colonialism and racism, for example in Australia and the US (Lindsey & Smith, 2021). In the US, statues and monuments in the South that are associated with the Civil War, the Confederacy and slavery have been exposed to what is commonly called iconoclasm, that is, the desire to overthrow and tear down previously sacred relics (cf. Olick & Teichler, 2021). Conflicts over memories often take place physically around tangible monuments, but they also occur in other fora such as in newspapers and in social media (Steinberg, in press).

We regard this recent phenomenon of contesting the acceptability of statues and monuments and, further, lobbying or taking action to remove and destroy them, as part of a form of a memory war wherein negotiations, interpretations, and representations of the past become central resources for mobilizing political change and arousing public opinion in relation to social, cultural, and

political issues in the present. The BLM movement in particular also brings to the fore the often-transnational character of cultural memory, that is events, symbols and persons that are not just national affairs, and the 2020 BLM debate is a good example of that. The contested memory related to the so-called Black Viking in England, the debate on Germany's role in the genocide in Namibia and Chilean memorials to Salvador Allende in Spain are other current examples of how interpretations and negotiations about how the past should be remembered that go across and beyond national borders (Colomer, 2022; Montgomery Ramírez, 2021; Niezen, 2018).

Concerning research there is an increased interest in symbolic historical representations of various kinds and the controversial meanings they embody within several disciplines and fields (Cubitt, 2019; Hunt, 2018; Parkes, 2007; Taylor, 2010). Studies of the use of history, memory, and cultural heritage are situated in a broad and multidisciplinary field of research. For example, art history, history of education, architectural studies, history of ideas and economic history all deal with questions of heritage to some extent. A common focus is the connection between history, heritage, nationalism and identity. The overall idea in this broad field of study is that cultural heritage and historical narratives have a crucial role to play in the formation of different sorts of communities, such as national communities or minority communities. For example, both the British and American BLM movements also came to activate other minorities in addition to Black Brits and Americans who demanded that statues and monuments associated with colonial oppression should be removed (cf. Roberts, 2021; Steinberg, in press).

This process of mobilizing history and memory includes the construction of what the community is and who belongs to it, as the description of the members of a community plays a fundamental role in any kind of community building. Memory culture and historical culture are seen as a part of a signifying system within which a social and political order is reproduced, experienced, explored and communicated (Berger, 2015; Carretero et al., 2012; Rüsen, 2004). This signifying system can also be related to the historical culture of a certain society since it concerns the practice of both preserving and learning from the past (Karlsson, 2011). Historical culture is manifested in different contexts, for instance by way of historic ceremonies and rituals. This construction of tradition emphasizes certain aspects of history that create social cohesion in the contemporary era, but also elaborates whole value systems and conventions of behavior which are a part of such rituals.

In line with this theoretical understanding, history and the past are activated and put to use in acts of semiosis and signification in the present. History as semiotic sign is largely staged and shaped through various forms of narratives and concretizations, such as in the form of material statues and other tangible monuments in public spaces. This signification is also something that is constantly renegotiated and questioned. History and memories are used as political resources while at the same time being of crucial importance for the formation, upholding, and imagination of identity. This means that history can be the subject of intense public debate in the present, resulting in extreme forms of polarization and sometimes even violence, such as during the BLM summer of 2020.

When it comes to debates and conflicts over symbolically important historical events and phenomena in Sweden specifically, controversy surrounding rulers and ruling classes, notably kings, has been a recurring theme. Not least the Swedish so-called "warrior king" Charles XII has been the subject of extensive debates and demonstrations throughout modern history and still today. Charles XII has especially been an object of celebration for right-wing extremists and Nazis (Zander, 2001). Monuments to this "warrior king" have therefore also been a source of controversy in recent years. Wahlström and Törnberg (2021), for instance, describe how an (imagined) threat against a statue celebrating Charles XII served as a symbolically charged mutual focus for

emotional and ideological attention for right-wing participants in a thread on a Swedish discussion forum, serving, on a micro-level of interaction, to fuel the legitimization of xenophobia and political violence. Besides the annual celebration of Charles XII which takes place on November 30 – the date when he was killed during a military invasion of Norway in 1718 – a number of other Swedish historical events have been in the focus for intense debates when it comes to understanding and coming to terms with the past. However, these have focused rather on interpretations of, for example, the history of the labor movement or Sweden’s relationship to Nazi Germany during World War II, than on specific monuments (Johansson, 2001; Zander, 2001).

However, relatively few public debates have been about interpretations of Sweden's colonial past overseas as most of them have centered on the colonization of Sapmi or Sámiland in the north of Sweden so the racialized memory battle regarding the question of monuments to Carl Linnaeus that took place in June 2020 was perhaps the first major debate of its kind in a Swedish context. Carl Linnaeus himself has been the subject of intense official or semi-official memory activities ever since the 18th century. Numerous streets, squares and buildings around Sweden bore his name early on such as Linneum, a “botanical temple” in Uppsala which was inaugurated in 1807 (Aronsson, 2007). Among Swedish scientists, Linnaeus is simply and without competition the most memorialized and monumentalized. He has not only been presented with statues and other tangible monuments in many cities in Sweden but also in other parts of the world. Besides, the official holding of a number of Linnaeus anniversaries has been going on for a long time, as has the formation of Linnaeus societies around the world, for example the Linnean Society of London which was founded in 1788. In Sweden, the most famous statue of Linnaeus was inaugurated in 1885 in the public park Humlegården in central Stockholm, and it can be noted that there is a similar monument in central Chicago, USA (Broberg, 2019).

Until recently, the presence of Linnaeus in the public space of contemporary Sweden has largely been undisputed, but in June 2020 this changed overnight by way of the globalized BLM movement which turned the question of statues of and other tangible monuments to Linnaeus into a racialized memory war over Swedish history and Swedish identity, channeling a more general renegotiation of the relationship between race, racism, Swedish identity and Swedish historiography.

Material and Methods

The material for this study comprises a corpus of editorials from the Swedish press and a sample of Twitter posts from the month of June, 2020. The editorial articles were found using the Swedish media text database *Svenska dagstidningar* (<https://tidningar.kb.se>) by using the search words “Linnaeus” and “statue.” In total, 37 texts were found that were published in printed newspapers in June. As only two texts came out after June, this material gives a thorough representation of the debate in the printed press (Birgersson, 2020; Björklund, 2020). Among the 37 texts, only 19 are unique editorials, with the remaining 18 being republished copies of several of these 19 editorials. It is common that the exact same editorial article is republished in several different Swedish newspapers around the same time due to co-ownership or collaboration between media houses. We include all 37 texts for the purposes of simple quantification in this section, but consider the material as consisting of 19 unique texts for the purposes of qualitative discourse analysis below.

Simultaneously, and to some extent in coordination with the editorial debate, the issue was also hotly debated on Twitter. This debate is much harder to capture in its entirety, so instead a sampling frame was constructed that specifically targeted explicit negotiations of notions of race

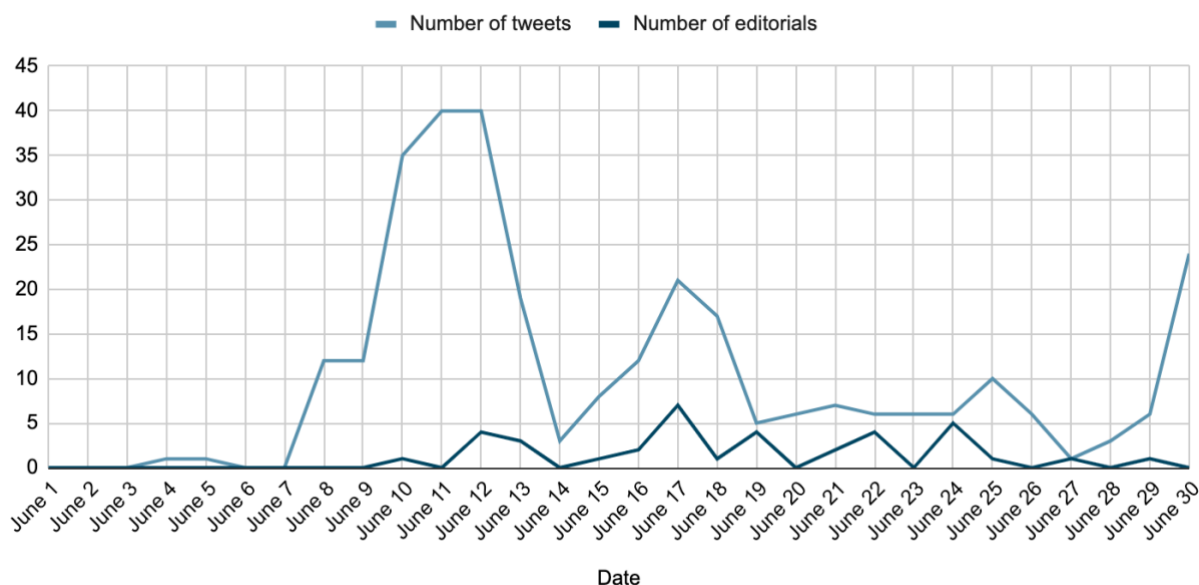
and racism in relation to the debate over Linnaeus. This sample was collected using Twitter’s public timeline advanced search. We thus captured a tailored sample of publicly available tweets containing Linnaeus’ name *and* an explicit reference to race or racism. The search paradigm included variants of Linnaeus’ Swedish name (Carl von Linné, Linné, CvL) and lemmas for the Swedish word *ras*, *rasism*, and *rasist* (*race*, *racism*, and *racist*). The search was further limited to tweets in Swedish (as identified by Twitter) and posted during the month of June. This resulted in a sample of 307 tweets, of which 305 were posted on or after June 8th, that is, after the eruption of the debate starting with the Swedish BLM activist tweet mentioned above.

The difference in sampling strategies between the editorial material and the Twitter material should be noted. The Twitter sample should not be considered representative of the Twitter debate over Linnaeus’ legacy as a whole, but rather only of contributions to that debate which explicitly mobilize concepts of race and racism. In the editorials, on the other hand, explicit references to race or racism was not an inclusion criterion. However, most of the editorials do in fact contain explicit uses of the terms *race* or *racism*, and all of them topicalize racism or racial prejudice, as this is what was at stake in the debate.

Figure 2 provides an outline of how the 37 editorials and the 307 tweets were distributed throughout the month of June 2020, showing that most contributions to the debate happened in the days following June 8. Later spot checks suggested to us that the debate tapered off significantly after the month of June, though some references to Linnaeus or to (generally hypothetical) calls for removal of historical monuments occurred occasionally both in the newspapers and online in BLM-related texts in the following year.

Figure 2

Distribution of Editorials and Tweets in the Material during the Month of June



After collecting the material, we proceeded with a thematic analysis. This thematization did not take into account the known political views of the authors or the political orientation of the newspapers, but rather focused on argumentative topics used to frame the issue. It should be noted that only two of the editorial texts were in some way sympathetic to the demand to remove statues of and monuments (Ripenberg, 2020; Wikberg, 2020). Thus, the majority of arguments presented

in the editorial texts were arguments against this demand. We adopted a bottom-up or inductive procedure of identifying themes, starting from the advance decision to identify argumentative topics rather than any other kind of theme. In reading the material in this way, we drew some influence from the rhetorical discourse analytic approach to argumentation in matters of ideology and race/racism of Billig (1987, 1991). As we present the themes below, we therefore devote some space to illustrating how we have analyzed the rhetorical and argumentative practices and strategies in relation to specific examples.

Four especially notable themes were identified among the editorials, most notably concerning argumentative topics of history and heritage, but also of science, present day politics and notions of identity politics. These themes were also found to recur throughout the Twitter material, though the Twitter material was overall more varied. Further, as is often the case with social media materials, some tweets were impossible to thematize according to argumentative topics, for instance as they expressed attitudes or affects without elaborating or even implying a specific argumentative topic. These themes were key topics of discussion in the texts which were used to frame, contextualize, and substantiate arguments against the demand for the removal of monuments to Linnaeus. The themes were roughly equally prevalent throughout the material. We thus present them as Themes A–D, in no special order:

- Theme A: The issue of monuments to Linnaeus and the question of cultural heritage
- Theme B: The use of history and the question of historical guilt
- Theme C: The practice of science and the question of research ethics
- Theme D: The Left, minorities, and the question of identity politics

The findings are presented below according to the argumentative themes outlined here. We have not attempted to quantify the material according to these themes, as we consider them to be overlapping and – to a large extent – mutually constitutive argumentative strategies, not a set of exclusive categories. Instead, we present summary descriptions combined with analyses of selected illustrative examples. Examples are presented translated into English by us, with exact original phrasing in Swedish commented on when analytically salient.

Findings

The four themes mentioned above are here accounted for under separate subheadings. Under each heading, we describe how the corresponding theme was articulated in the material both in summary and in relation to selected excerpts from the editorial texts and examples from the Twitter material. Again, it should be noted that examples treated under one thematic heading sometimes also articulate one or more other themes. All examples are presented translated into English, with an attempt to strike a balance between literal and idiomatic translation, by us.

Theme A: The Issue of Monuments to Linnaeus and the Question of Cultural Heritage

The first theme concerns the discursive construction of statues and monuments in the public space as being a part of the cultural heritage of Sweden, and by extension that of Europe and the West. In the editorials, various statues of Swedish kings like Gustavus Adolphus and Charles XII were referred to, as well as to statues of Hitler, Ceausescu, Lenin, Stalin and Saddam Hussein (Almquist, 2020; Arpi, 2020; Backholm Bohlin, 2020; Hammar, 2020; Jaenson, 2020; Lifvendahl, 2020). Even the celebrity soccer player Zlatan Ibrahimović was brought up, since he was bestowed

with a controversial statue in his hometown Malmö in 2019, which was later vandalized. All editorial texts as well as the Twitter posts that brought up Communist and other monuments associated with dictatorships agreed that it was right to tear them down or consign them to museums, while to the contrary arguing that monuments to Linnaeus had to be preserved in public places. In other words, there was by and large a consensus that it is sometimes justified to tear down and remove certain statues and monuments but not monuments to Linnaeus.

Erik Wikberg (2020) at *Vestmanlands Läns Tidning* and *Nerikes Allehanda's* Maria Ripenberg were as already mentioned the only ones supporting the critique of monuments to Linnaeus. Wikberg (2020) suggested that “in an act of solidarity against oppression” some statues could possibly be moved to museums “where they in the best way can be contextualized and given a historical framing”, thereby hinting at how Communist monuments have been treated in some Eastern European countries. Ripenberg, in turn, wrote the arguably most historically informed editorial on Swedish statues and monuments related to issues of colonialism and slavery, arguing for the necessity of postcolonial and non-white perspectives to be included:

(1) Old statues show who wrote our history – and also what history is not told. Many do not know that Louis De Geer, “the founding father of Swedish industry” who stands as a statue in Norrköping, started the Swedish slave trade in Africa in the 17th century, with the support of Queen Christina. (...) In Örebro, Charles XIV John poses in front of the castle. During his reign, Sweden had a colony whose entire existence was based on the slave trade and the enslavement of people. Charles XIV John also wanted more colonies. In addition to that, he did not like the freedom of the press; all debate over the transatlantic slave trade was stopped in Swedish newspapers. (...) It is not a day too early for historical monuments to be put into a perspective other than the white man's. But it's going very slowly. (Ripenberg, 2020, p. 2)

This first theme also contained references to other Swedish national “monuments” in the form of celebrities and canonical cultural works that had been debated previous to the BLM summer. Notably, the globally renowned children's book author Astrid Lindgren was brought up in relation to her use of the contested word “Negro” (*neger* in Swedish, which is usually known as the Swedish N-word) in her world famous Pippi Longstocking tales from the mid-20th century (P. Boström, 2020; Lifvendahl, 2020). For example, *Motala Vadstena Tidning's* Pontus Almqvist posed the rhetorical question “will we be unable to praise Astrid Lindgren because she used the N-word in her tales?” Lindgren was also occasionally mentioned on Twitter, such as in Example 2. This example clearly shows how Lindgren is invoked specifically as a part of the Swedish cultural heritage – a historical genius – just like Linnaeus.

(2) With today's ethics Linnaeus was a racist arse but at the same time a genius. It is the same with all historical geniuses. Astrid Lindgren used the N-word in her children's books. Jesus punished thought crimes with hell. And the same can happen to you when people of the future look in the rearview mirror. (Almqvist, 2020, p. 2)

Further, a rhetorical maneuver in relation to this first theme which turned up in some editorials and in several tweets was to question certain artefacts and buildings that historically can

be connected to forced labor such as Swedish runestones and the pyramids in Egypt, so as to suggest the sheer absurdity of wanting to remove statues of Linnaeus (Blomberg, 2020; Boström P., 2020):

(3) *The Vikings raped, murdered and kept slaves. But leveling runestones to the ground for that reason would make both us and future generations more stupid.* (Blomberg, 2020, p. 2)

(4) *A collection of names signed by 1,600 “confused” figures with a DEMAND that all Statues of Carl Linnaeus in Sweden should be taken down as a result of the BLM activists’ designation of historical racism. Should the Pyramids in Egypt also be DEMOLISHED as they were built by SLAVES ..? (Twitter)*

On Twitter, arguments framed in relation to cultural heritage were often made with strong affect. Example 5, for instance, shows a Twitter user commenting on a news report by denigrating the proposal to remove the statue as “idiocy” and its proponents as “fools”. Linnaeus is instead evaluated as “part of Sweden’s PROUD history”, and this evaluation is reinforced through emphatic use of upper-case letters. The tweet is dense with expressions of affect, for instance the exclamation “What the h*ell” (*Men för h*lv*te*), a rhetorical question expressing incredulity at the foolishness, and the demonstratively emotional reduplication of punctuation marks (“??” and “!!”). These strategies emphasize the message that Sweden’s historical legacy is not one to problematize or criticize, but only to be proud of.

(5) *[Replying to a news channel tweet of a Linnaeus article]*
*What the h*ll! Linnaeus has throughout history been known for being an eminent botanist. Do these fools believe that he is honored with a statue for his “racism”?? He is a part of Sweden’s PROUD history. Enough with this idiocy!! (Twitter)*

In all these instances of invoking or referencing Swedish cultural heritage, we see two main argumentative strategies as being central. Firstly, there was often a kind of argument against “throwing out the baby with the bathwater” – that is, even *if* it is conceded that the memory of Linnaeus could be problematized in hindsight, it is ultimately suggested that to engage in this problematization runs the risk of losing Swedes losing respect for a historically important legacy that should really only be celebrated. Secondly, problematizations of the legacy of Linnaeus were also argued against as a form of hindsight fallacy, on the principle that the past must not be judged by the standards of the present. These criticisms were also articulated as either *reductio ad absurdum* or slippery slope arguments, as critics suggested that removing statues of Linnaeus might be equivalent to, or a first step on the path toward, extreme acts of historical devastation such as leveling all runestones or demolishing the Egyptian pyramids. We will now continue with the second theme which instead of just looking at specific monuments deals with the whole issue of historiography, the use of history and, centrally, historical guilt.

Theme B: The Use of History and the Question of Historical Guilt

The second theme centers on the question of historical guilt in relation to Carl Linnaeus and monuments to him. As with the first theme, it should be noted that while the vast majority of editorials and tweets were critical of calls to remove monuments to Linnaeus, they were contrarily broadly sympathetic to removing various tangible monuments in the American South, in the UK or in Belgium, at least in certain contexts. Sweden's history is thus constructed as guilt-free by contrast with the history of other nations (cf. the notion of white innocence developed by Wekker, 2016):

(6) Edward Colston was a slave owner at a time when the slave trade was widely criticized in Britain; Churchill was an imperialist when the British got imperialism with their mother's milk. That is a significant difference. So, of course, under certain specific circumstances it may be right to remove a statue, but history's complexities and the blind spots of our time call for responsibility and humility. Those who now attack Linnaeus and Gustav III show these qualities as little as they present precise and well-founded arguments. (Hammar, 2020, p. 2)

(7) Pathetic that people will imitate Americans to such an extent that they also want to look for "role models" to attribute grave racism to. If you have no southerners, you can go with Linnaeus, because it works. (Twitter)

Similarly, to the above-mentioned arguments concerning historical hindsight, the topic of historical guilt was usually addressed with reference to different historical norms. Among other things, the expression "child of his time" or "children of their time" was frequently employed, for instance by Backholm Bohlin (2020). Fredrik Haage (2020a) used the term "moral precision measurements" (literally, "*millimeter measurements*") in his first editorial on the question of monuments to Linnaeus in *Smålandsposten* while *Svenska Dagbladet's* Ivar Arpi (2020) wrote that the BLM movement demands that "we must sweep our culture clean of everything that does not fit with the values we have right now".

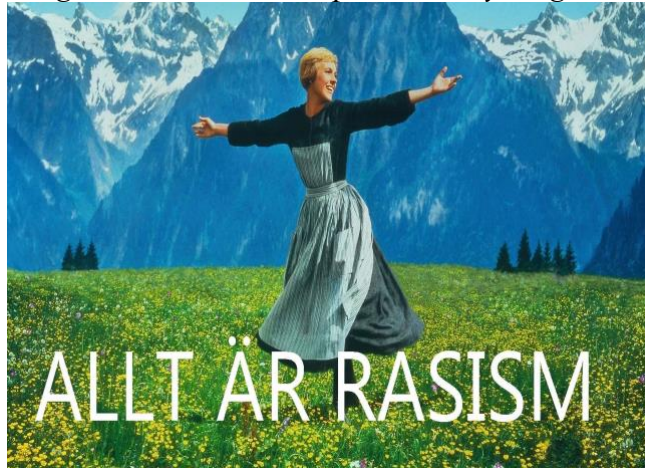
On Twitter, several posts expressed the same idea, frequently using cynical irony to mock the critics of the statues for espousing an absolutely absurd anachronistic thinking. In *reductio ad absurdum* arguments, the criticism of monuments to Linnaeus is constructed as akin to claiming that other historical persons had been misogynists, homophobes or pedophiles.

(8) It is also quite stupid to claim that Linnaeus was a racist. Even if his work would be considered racist or racially biological today, it would be a very anachronistic stamp. Like claiming that Saint Bridget of Sweden was a homophobe. (Twitter)

(9) Linnaeus was one of the most enlightened people of his time, a time when the concept of racism did not exist at all. If he had lived in today's context, he would definitely not have been a "racist". Absolutely bizarre debate. [Figure 3.] (Twitter)

Figure 3

Image Macro with the Caption “Everything is Racism”



Examples 10 and 11 show Twitter users taking the same strategy a step further by satirically enacting the supposed stupidity of critics of monuments to Linnaeus. The author of 10 pretends to believe that Linnaeus was responsible for the extinction of the dinosaurs and the medieval plague, by implication ascribing this extreme degree of misinformation to the protesters. The author of 11 sarcastically refers to Linnaeus as a genocidal dictator. The “indigenous population” that is referred to here below can either mean Sámis or the white majority population while the reference to gassing is an all too obvious reference to the Holocaust. As with example 10, a rather extreme irrationality or historical illiteracy is projected onto the protest movement by implication. What is being suggested through this ironic reference to 20th century atrocities is perhaps that critics of Linnaeus’ legacy are attacking the wrong target or missing the forest for the trees. In this way, we could see this also as an instance of the rhetorical strategy of invoking the Holocaust as a measure of “true” racism, against which other complains about racism can be dismissed (cf. Lentin, 2018).

(10) *It was Linnaeus who exterminated the dinosaurs as well, right? #svpol #blm #rasism And created the black death?* (Twitter)

(11) *We should have demolished the Linnaeus statues when Linnaeus was overthrown as a dictator after having gassed some of the indigenous population. Sweden is too cowardly. And racist.* (Twitter)

In many arguments, the issue at stake is framed as one of contested views on history itself, and a matter of lack of respect for historical facts or an important legacy. It was common both in the newspaper articles and in the Twitter posts to talk about “historical revisionism” and “historylessness” (the Swedish *historielöshet* is perhaps more idiomatically translated as “historical illiteracy”). In both cases, these are strongly politicized expressions, as historical revisionism is often associated with Holocaust denial and similarly extreme ideologies, while “historylessness” is generally associated with uneducated or even stupid and ignorant people. Ivar Arpi’s editorial in *Svenska Dagbladet* bore the title “Do not accept their historical revisionism”, presenting the protest as guided by misinformed ideology. Others referred to revisionism to frame the protests as a threat against education, rationality, and liberal values such as tolerance:

(12) *Historical revisionism will also – if anything – make future generations more ungifted and intolerant.* (Jaenson, 2020, p. 2)

(13) *The historical revisionism of the Black Lives Matter movement strikes in all directions. Statues of Confederate generals which among others have been raised by the Ku Klux Klan after WW2 are one thing. But to tear down statues of Linnaeus or Churchill is wrong. [link to blog post] #svpol #statues #kulpol #racism #slavery* (Twitter)

Several Twitter users also posted and retweeted a link to an article in *Svenska Dagbladet* (usually abbreviated as SvD) written by the well-known Swedish historian Dick Harrison. In 2016, Harrison had commented on a comic strip which wrongfully had claimed that Linnaeus had founded the Swedish State Institute for Racial Biology – which was not founded until 1922. This article was cited to make a point that the critics of the monuments during the BLM summer of 2020 were simply lying and falsifying history, just like the comic strip that an authoritative expert on history criticized in 2016. The text in example 14 appears to be automatically extracted from the article, and was retweeted rather than composed by the user in our material.

(14) *Lies are a dangerous weapon against racism / SvD But Carl Linnaeus was not involved. He died in 1778, 143 years before the institute was founded*

Harrison: Lies are a dangerous weapon against racism / SvD DEBATT. Propagandistic lies have previously been associated with authoritarian states. But in today's mediatized and individualized world, everyone can claim the right to construct a past that is found wanting... [link to the article; Figure 4] (Twitter)

Figure 4

Image Accompanying SvD Article Link



Another common feature in several editorial texts was to construct the BLM movement not only as historically illiterate and irrational, but even barbaric, through the use of violent metaphors and even explicit references to physical and lethal violence. For example, *Smålandsposten's* Jacob Sidenvall (2020) talked about the critics aiming for a “cleansing”, *Svenska Dagbladet's* Ivar Arpi (2020) and Tove Lifvendahl (2020) about “beheading everyone” and “[going] berserk on the past” to “tear down and crush” a historical legacy, respectively. *Norrbottnens-Kuriren's* Daniel Persson (2020) claimed that the goal of the critics of the monuments to Linnaeus was to “exterminate” history itself and “erase it from memory” which eventually was said to lead to “nothing remaining”. These rhetorical figures serve to emphasize the construction of the protesters as an ideologically extremist and potentially violent movement, posing a threat perhaps not only to some artifacts of history but to civilization itself.

The argumentative strategies exemplified in this section overall serve functions of positive self- and negative other-presentation (Billig, 1988), reducing substantial arguments against the appropriateness of unqualified and romanticized celebrations of a problematic historical heritage to stereotypes, and positioning oneself and rational and morally responsible. Thus, for instance, arguments invoking “historylessness” serve not merely as reasonable reminders that moral norms and standards change over time, but specifically to reconstruct the opposition: A problematization of how we, in our time, use history – how we celebrate and only selectively remember figures like Linnaeus – becomes reduced to an infantile moral condemnation of the historical Linnaeus. The latter position – which is arguably largely a strawman – is, of course, easier to rally against. We now proceed to the third theme, which concerns understandings of science and issues concerning research and research ethics in general.

Theme C: The Practice of Science and the Question of Research Ethics

Many arguments in the material were framed in relation to normative ideas or ideals of science and of ethical research practice, today as well as historically. Such arguments concerned the responsibility of an individual researcher as well as the consequences of research findings and results in general and especially negative and destructive implications. The most prevalent argument, however, concerned the exceptional status of Linnaeus as a monumental figure in the history of science. Linnaeus was constructed as Sweden's most revered scientist of all times as well as one of humankind's greatest geniuses ever, in his capacity as a botanist and taxonomist par excellence responsible for having taxonomized and named a plethora of plant and animal species, including our own species *homo sapiens*. The problematic legacy of Linnaeus' racial categorization was only very occasionally acknowledged, such as in example 15, from Twitter:

(15) *There are pieces of our history that are swept under the rug. Linnaeus was not just any “racist”, because he wrote about human races, not only unscientifically but in an outright contemptuous and derogatory way, and his writings played a part in justifying how Black people were exploited.*
(Twitter)

Even in this example, however, it is noteworthy that Linnaeus' racial thinking is here explicitly constructed as “unscientific”, and therefore something to be understood as separate from his proper scientific contributions. Similarly, the aforementioned Pontus Almqvist (2020) wrote that Linnaeus “might have had an obnoxious interest in alleged racial differences, but he is at the same time one of Sweden's – and the world's – biggest scientists of all times”. Thus, even when

acknowledged, the fact that Linnaeus did write about human varieties or races is to be understood as overshadowed by or as a minor issue apart from, the greatness of those of his contributions that we have latterly determined to be legitimate.

The rhetorical topos of historical guilt also occurred in relation to the theme of science and research ethics. Among the editorials, there was a unanimous conviction of Linnaeus' innocent intentions, as well as ironic mockery of the protest movements supposed demonization of the same. Fredrik Haage (2020a) at *Smålandsposten* ironically asked himself "Did Linnaeus accept that women could not vote?" while Ivar Arpi (2020) asked *Svenska Dagbladet's* readers rhetorically "Was Carl Linnaeus a pioneer for natural science or a person who, without knowing it, laid the ground for racial biology?". Further, *Norrköpings Tidningar's* Stefan Olsson (2020) wrote extensively about the greatness of Linnaeus and elaborated on the practice of science in the following way:

(16) There is no start point and end point in scientific research, and no individual researcher can predict how his research results will be used several hundred years later. How could Linnaeus know that politicians in the 20th century would divide people into races and try to exterminate some of them in concentration camps? Making Linnaeus morally responsible for all racist abuses is like making Albert Einstein responsible for the existence of nuclear weapons. (...) In this way, it is wrong to make Linnaeus morally responsible for all the abominations caused by racism. He was also just curious. (...) The idea that we should make Linnaeus responsible for our time's racism is outrageous. The idea is wrong at all levels. It is wrong to make a historical person responsible for the problems we live with today. It is wrong to demand that scientists have full insight into how their research will be used by others. It is wrong to demand that researchers should adapt to political conditions. (Olsson, 2020, p. 6)

Sydöstran's Ayman Fares (2020) reiterated Olsson's form of argumentation by also bringing up Charles Darwin and Lise Meitner and asking his readers if they are also guilty or not for their research findings:

(17) Is Linnaeus really responsible for this? Is Darwin also guilty for the Holocaust of Jews as Hitler applied the idea of "the strong" and "the weak"? Is Lise Meitner responsible for the existence of atomic bombs as she discovered nuclear fission? Are the researchers' discoveries really responsible for the political application of them? (Fares, 2020, p. 2)

Jacob Sidenvall at *Smålandsposten* reported on the fact that a university in the south of Sweden bears the name of Linnaeus – the Linnaeus University in Växjö and Kalmar – and that its vice chancellor Peter Aronsson had commented on the critics of monuments to Linnaeus in a way which Sidenvall himself found to be totally convincing:

(18) Finally, after a peripheral call for statues depicting Carl Linnaeus to be taken down, a response is requested from Linnaeus University's vice chancellor Peter Aronsson. Who with his answer completely takes the air out of the claims represented by a vanishingly small group. Linnaeus does

not need to be defended and one does not need to be ashamed of his efforts. His scientific work is one of the greatest in world history and one that we have great joy and benefit from today. It does not diminish the fact that his achievements were made under material and scientific conditions that have more to do with the thousand years that lay behind him than with the three hundred that separate him from us. If you as a society cannot respect that, there is not much left to respect. (Sidenvall, 2020, p. 2)

Among Twitter users, by contrast, it seems that many either were really not aware that Linnaeus also wrote about human varieties or races, or were comfortable with rhetorically posturing as if this was not the case:

(19) Carl Linnaeus was apparently a racist, now the statues of him will be torn down. Didn't he work with animals & plants. (Twitter)

(20) Yes, understand what a pig Linnaeus was! He had the gall to group plants and animals! It is racist to divide into groups, everyone knows that. (Twitter)

It is in fact likely that many or perhaps most Swedes do not know about Linnaeus' racial categorization of humans, as it is not commonly taught in school and has only rarely been the subject of public discourse. Other Twitter users did acknowledge that Linnaeus wrote about human varieties, which later became known as human races, but they also emphasized, just like the editorial texts, that his extraordinary greatness and genius overrode all his writings on race and also that he was a "child of his time":

(21) In short: Carl Linnaeus was a great scientist whose significance for modern biology cannot be ignored. He lived in a different time, a different spirit of the times. He didn't, simply put, know better. But to impose on him a modern definition of "racist" is grossly wrong! (Twitter)

(22) Totally insane. Bringing up Carl Linnaeus! He who classified all the plants of the world. He isn't known for any racial biology. That the matter was discussed during his time, is strange to take up now. Imagine dragging a world-famous scientist down in the mud. #statues #elimination #racism (Twitter)

However, there were also those who argued that Linnaeus did pioneer what later became known as scientific racism and consequently contributed substantially to racial thinking and possibly also to Western colonialism and imperialism on an ideological level. Maria Ripenberg (2020) and Erik Wikberg (2020) were again the ones who stood out while similar arguments were put forward by a few people on Twitter as well:

(23) Or that Carl Linnaeus, who is frequently depicted in Uppsala, in addition to working as a botanist, contributed to the "science" that ranked human beings based on skin color. This also happened when the slave trade was at its peak. (Ripenberg, 2020, p. 2)

(24) *Carl Linnaeus ranked people by skin color and Gustav III bought the colony St. Barthélemy. When we think about it, don't most of us agree that it is actually deeply problematic and that there are better people to praise in public spaces?* (Wikberg, 2020, p. 2)

(25) *It is actually true that Linnaeus was, if not “the first” then at least among the very first (and surely the most influential) person who, supposedly scientifically, divided humanity into different races (four) and assigned both physical and psychological characteristics to them.* (Twitter)

Finally, our fourth theme concerns arguments critical of the political activism of minorities and not the least of the BLM movement itself as well as a critique of the white Left and of so-called identity politics.

Theme D: The Left, Minorities and the Question of Identity Politics

This fourth and last theme is without doubt the most politicized theme, and the one that is most overtly framed in relation to contemporary issues as it centers on the BLM movement and the question of so-called identity politics. Further, we include under this thematic heading arguments that invoke or criticize the Left as well as various minorities, such as Muslims. These various groups or political ideologies were frequently conflated in various ways, and positioned as an irrational ideological other, who are sometimes all said to be the “real” or “only” racists contemporary Sweden.

To begin with the editorials, the BLM movement was directly linked to the critique of monuments to Linnaeus, even though this critique was never actually expressed or endorsed by the official Swedish BLM movement. Even in the paper editorials, which generally tend to be politer than online social media discourse, the BLM movement was quite harshly denigrated, portrayed partly as a totalitarian ideological movement and like a wild, violent and rioting mob coming from the high-rise building suburbs (*förorter* in Swedish), which are principally populated by poor inhabitants of color besides being marginalized, stigmatized and run-down. For example, Daniel Persson’s editorial bore the title “Barbarians are already banging on the gates of Rome” while *Gotlands Allehanda’s* Cecilia Blomberg (2020) wrote that “censoring culture and history is something that barbarians and totalitarian despots engage in”. Others wrote the following:

(26) *The triumphant mob that is now sweeping through the Western world is not interested in weighing arguments against each other, as little as the Communists during the Russian Revolution were. It is all about putting our civilization at the counter and beheading anyone who has any connection to slavery, colonialism or racism.* (Arpi, 2020, p. 2)

(27) (...) *who want to see the world burn. At least the Western world, which seems to be all they care about. This is not said in a derogatory but descriptive sense. The goal is however seldom stated, it is not something you see on posters during the demonstrations that regularly degenerate into huge riots.* (Persson, 2020, p. 2)

(28) *At the same time, we have something that can almost be described as a mob that is now going out in search of erasing events and individuals from history. The recent riots have led to a desire to tear down and destroy statues.* (Svanberg, 2020, p. 2)

On Twitter, the BLM movement was also portrayed as consisting of uncontrollable and blood thirsty rioters wanting to destroy civilization and culture alike as well as racists by making use of the concept of race or as many Afro-Swedes such as Bilan Osman derive from the Muslim part of Africa and not the least from Somalia and the Horn of Africa from where the Trans-Saharan slave trade once partly took place. Additionally, there were also examples of explicitly derogatory remarks made on Twitter about Black and non-white Swedes in general. Example 29 is a rather extreme example, showing a Twitter user employing blatantly racist stereotypes, namely comparisons to non-human primates and allusions to the supposed illiteracy of non-white Swedes:

(29) *Don't understand how you can turn Linnaeus into a racist. There is something wrong with their fucking heads! Fucking monkey brains! It's plain that they're primates, don't understand shit, are apparently illiterate as well.* (Twitter)

Example 30 shows yet another Twitter user engaging in putatively reductio ad absurdum-argumentation ascribing both anger and a form of confusion to “BLM activists”. This commenter thus accepts – at least rhetorically – the premise that Linnaeus really was responsible for introducing a specific form of racial thought. Nevertheless, the commenter formulates a rejection of the BLM movement on those grounds as *also* being concerned with the dividing people into racial categories, thus also recruiting a (mis-)understanding of antiracist activism as being race-obsessed and pseudo-scientifically racist as a premise for a satirical argument.

(30) *So, BLM activists are angry at Carl Linnaeus for dividing mankind into different races. Isn't that exactly what #blacklivesmatter is about? Shouldn't they rather be grateful to Linnaeus for introducing the concept of race, which they have now adopted?* (Twitter)

Example 31 names a specific black, female journalist, Bilan Osman, who is among Sweden's most well-known antiracist activists in public discourse. The author of the tweet alludes to Muslim slave trade before the time of Western colonialism in order to construe contemporary antiracists as hypocritical. This argument rests on the idea that Leftists and antiracists in today's Sweden give preferential treatment specifically to Muslims.

(31) *Bilan Osman thus pushes the thesis that it was Carl Linnaeus (1744–1778) who was the founding father of racism. The Atlantic slave trade took place between the 14th and 18th centuries, the Muslim slave trade between the 6th century and the 20th century. So good thing that the slave trade was antiracist before that.* (Twitter)

If the BLM movement as such was portrayed as a barbarian mob coming from the marginalized non-white suburbs wanting to erase history and memory, burn and destroy, the Left and implicitly the white Left was accused of allying itself with the BLM movement. The so-called

“postmodern”, “extremist” and “identity political” Left including everyone from militant anarchist Anti-Fascist Action (abbreviated as AFA, akin to Anglophone anti-fascist activists often referred to as Antifa) to the Social Democrats and Leftist intellectuals and scholars were often lumped together and also referred to in an oftentimes disparaging way on Twitter:

(32) *Swedish Leftist scum must have been looking for weeks for a really mean and racist oppressor bastard among historical Swedes. And somehow concluded that Carl Linnaeus suited them the best. Impressive.* (Twitter)

(33) *I think it's all about a postmodernist (=idiotic) theory at the universities that before Linnaeus divided plants and animals into species and races, there was no concept of human races, and therefore they believe that he somehow created racial thinking. It's so incredibly stupid.* (Twitter)

(34) *Yuck! There are no worse extremists than these. If they really want to wipe out racism, they should wipe themselves out. Their entire foundation is built on identity politics based on race. Linnaeus has contributed many valuable biological principles while AFA hasn't contributed anything.* (Twitter)

Some longer editorial texts dug even deeper down into the history of the Left by bringing up the so-called New Left of the 1968 movement and the Maoists as well as the Cultural Revolution in China, which was compared to what was happening during the BLM summer of 2020:

(35) *When today's iconoclasts visit the past, they do so with the revolutionary's gaze: everything that does not fit into the future they intend to build must be purged. The Maoists thought the same way during the Chinese Cultural Revolution – everything old must go away. Away with old ideas, old habits, old traditions and old culture.* (Arpi, 2020, p. 2)

(36) *But it is still carried on with an almost Maoist frenzy that is not far from 1968. Of course, it is perfectly legitimate to want to improve the world. But it is much harder to do it than to want it. (...) Although the student revolutionaries of the 1960s were better educated than today's image stormers, their craze for socialist dictatorships is hardly something to be yearned for, is it? (...) Rather, as so often in the history of revolutions, it is about power, the utopia of year zero, society and man as a pure sheet of paper without any burdensome historical relics.* (H. Boström, 2020, p. 2)

Some Twitter posts also accused the Swedish Social Democrats for being the “real” racists and perhaps even the only ones, bringing up the 1922 foundation of the Swedish State Institute for Racial Biology under the directorship of Professor Herman Lundborg. Contemporary Right-wing discourse in Sweden often assigns blame for this to the Social Democrats specifically, but in reality, all political parties of its time supported the institute and its ideology, and not just the Social Democrats and the party's then leader Hjalmar Branting (Broberg, 1995). The idea that the Left is

especially responsible for Swedish racial biology itself seems to have gained a relatively widespread support due to a propaganda “documentary” film claiming this, which was produced and disseminated by the Far-Right party the Sweden Democrats (abbreviated as SD) during the election campaign of 2018, and which hundreds of thousands since then have watched on YouTube (Pallas, 2018). It is worth mentioning here that this argument even turned up in one of the editorial texts, which says something about the discursive and political impact and breakthrough of the Sweden Democrats’ Right-wing populist discourse in today’s Sweden:

(37) However, it is interesting to note that I have not seen any demand so far to demolish statues of, for example, Hjalmar Branting, Sweden's Social Democratic Prime Minister at the time of the establishment of the Institute of Racial Biology. (Svanberg, 2020, p. 2)

(38) It is very difficult, if not impossible, to see how the botanist Linnaeus, whose passion was plants and vegetation, could inspire @[Social Democratic party] to start measuring the skulls of Sámis and start dividing people into different races. It is wholly the Social Democrats’ own invention with their followers that influenced this. (Twitter)

(39) Yes, at the Institute of Racial Biology, Herman Lundborg - on behalf of the Social Democrats - was supposed to work toward racial hygiene measures. It has NOTHING to do with Linnaeus! He was a racist because he divided plants into different groups, or what???? (Twitter)

Both editorial and social media discourse participants thus engaged in strategies of ideological and political positioning by invoking stereotyped, denigratory, and even conspiracy-theoretical understandings of BLM, antiracists, Leftists, and associated actors or movements. In these examples, it becomes especially obvious that the outcry in response to calls for removing monuments to Linnaeus was not purely a matter of principles – for instance, principles of conserving historical artifacts and legacies – but a matter of appropriating a symbolically significant figure to wage a politically polarized memory war.

After having accounted for the four main themes that we were able to discern in the selected and examined material consisting of editorial texts and Twitter posts, we will now proceed to discussing and summing up the findings.

Discussion and Conclusion

While the 2020 debate on monuments to Linnaeus was not the very first public debate on the Swedish involvement in and engagement with European and Western colonialism and racial thinking, Linnaeus’ possible contribution to scientific racism had not previously been debated to the same intense extent. Given its connection to the global emergence of the BLM movement, our Swedish case can be seen as part of a transnational debate on statues and monuments linked to racism and colonialism. In this case, the debate came to center on how the Swedish historical contribution to racial thinking should be understood, or, indeed, whether there is anything there that needs to be understood at all.

Our purpose in conducting this study was to understand how questions of race, racism, identity and history were articulated in this debate over Swedish history. As we have shown, this

debate was in fact quite one-sided, with a majority of discourse participants quite clearly adopting positions and rallying arguments in defense of the cherished memory of Linnaeus as – and only as – a masterful scientist and botanist, and a Swedish claim to fame in the world history of science. In turn, this defense of Linnaeus was rarely ever only a defense of Linnaeus, but also a defense of Swedishness and Swedish version of what Wekker (2016) has called white innocence. This conforms to a more general tendency observed in other national contexts for contemporary memory wars to become resources for political mobilization around issues of identity and nation (cf. Cubitt, 2019; Hunt, 2018; Roberts, 2021;). Critics of the white-washed memorialization of Linnaeus in Sweden raised questions concerning who has the privilege and authority to imagine both the past and the future of Sweden. In the outcry responding to the call to remove monuments celebrating Linnaeus, it was mainly Right-wing and white majority Swedes who ended up reinforcing their claim, and solitary right, to this authority, positioning themselves as the beleaguered defenders of truth, tradition, and common sense.

In the course of the debate, discourse participants expressed and positioned themselves in relation to various understandings of race, racism, identity, and identity politics, as well as of history and historical legacy and memory. Even if the Swedish BLM movement never officially raised any public critique of the statues and monuments to Linnaeus, the examined debate came to center to a significant degree on BLM as an emerging movement in Sweden. This movement was portrayed as something of a mindless, non-educated, unruly and uncontrollable Black and non-white horde pouring out from the impoverished Swedish high-rise building suburbs, while the (white) Left was depicted as having gone completely astray into the essentialist or even racist world of identity politics. This depiction of Black and non-white people as being barbarians and primitives who “go berserk” and want to “behead everyone” as well as “exterminate”, “erase”, and “tear down” and “destroy” history, culture, civilization and the world as we know it has a long tradition in the Western colonial and racial imagery, and which Gustav Jahoda (1999) has traced back to the 18th century’s natural scientists in its modern and “scientific” version in his treatise *Images of savages*.

The challenge to the celebrated status of Linnaeus was thus perceived as something of an outright attack on the cultural heritage of Sweden and, for some, by extension on Western civilization itself. Further, it was also linked to previous minority criticism of other monumentalized celebrities in Sweden such as the equally world-famous author Astrid Lindgren who once had used the Swedish N-word in her Pippi Longstocking story. Linnaeus himself was generally found to have no particular historical guilt, and it seems that many discourse participants either were not aware racial taxonomy, had heard of it but disputed its facticity, or knew about it but considered it an irrelevant footnote in Linnaeus’ body of work. Other scientists such as Darwin and Einstein were also taken up in relation to Linnaeus to underscore that the researchers cannot be held responsible for how their discoveries and results end up being used. Critics of the celebratory memorialization of Linnaeus were thus branded as being generally ignorant and historically illiterate at best, or ideologically blinded historical revisionists at worst.

By standing up for the monuments to Linnaeus against an imagined Black and non-white barbaric and primitive mob and a confused white, postmodern and identity political Left, the defending side also made use of strategies of irony and ridicule, constructing the latter as irrational and themselves standing up for realism and common sense. Specifically, the common-sense reality being defended is a historiographical imaginary of Sweden as an innocent nation that has largely stood outside the European colonial and racial projects, thereby adhering to the exceptionalist Swedish self-image which says that Sweden as well as the other Nordic countries had very little or anything to do with colonialism and racial thinking (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). The cultural

geographer Daniel Jansson writes the following concerning this Swedish exceptionalism and by referring to scholars like Holger Weiss and Gunlög Fur who have studied the Swedish slave trade and Swedish colonialism respectively:

...there seems to be a general agreement that most Swedes have very poor knowledge of the era of Swedish empire and the country's involvement in colonialism (e.g. Weiss, 2016). (...) Past studies of colonialism have been criticized in recent years for whitewashing Sweden's colonial experience, romanticizing this era in Swedish history and emphasizing the contribution of Swedish "adventurers" (Fur, 2013). It is indeed fitting that Fur (2013: 17) characterizes the relationship between colonialism and Swedish history as "unthinkable connections"; a major obstacle to an increase in the level of knowledge and understanding of Sweden's colonialism is the very self-image of Swedes as a humanitarian superpower. (Jansson, 2018, p. 88)

Jansson (2018) then continues by adding that:

I would hesitate to claim that Swedish colonialism constitutes a trauma for the collective psyche in quite the same way that slavery and genocide do in the US, as in Sweden there appears to be less general awareness of this aspect of their history. (p. 89)

This aspect of the Swedish debate on statues and other tangible monuments during the pan-Western and global BLM summer of 2020 is arguably what makes the examined debate on monuments to Linnaeus uniquely Swedish as the debates that raged in practically all other Western countries at least took as their point of departure the fact that for example the Belgian king Leopold II, the British slave trader Edward Colston, the US Confederate general Robert E. Lee and Christopher Columbus were all deeply implicated in their time's racial and colonial projects. In other words, while for example slavery is something of a historical trauma for all Americans regardless of background very few in any Swedes harbor any bad conscience concerning Linnaeus' possible contribution to racial thinking and scientific racism and the majority of today's Swedes are likely still unaware of Linnaeus' writings on human varieties or races despite the controversy of 2020. For Swedes, especially majority Swedes, what appears to be traumatic is instead to have the narrative of Swedish innocence questioned.

To conclude, we would argue that our case study of a specific debate in a Swedish context illustrates a major challenge facing both antiracist political movements and those concerned with the use of history in the contemporary publics. While historiography is constantly subject to revision in the light of new evidence and new perspectives, in the publics, memory is shaped by dominant interests, and contestations of a glorified past are likely to meet resistance. Inspired by the international BLM movement, some antiracist activists in Sweden saw an opportunity to challenge such a cherished element of Sweden's past, to update Sweden's relationship to this element of its past. In the debate that followed, however, discourse participants reduced the debate into a false dichotomy, into a matter of being "for" or "against" Linnaeus – to think of Linnaeus either as a brilliant scientist or an evil racist – and thereby into a matter of being for or against science, reason, progress, and a supposedly non-ideological historiography. As this reductive and polarized understanding of the terms of the debate became dominant, both in traditional and social

media, an opportunity to interrogate our use of history, how we selectively remember and celebrate historical legacies, or formulate tendentious narratives of the past, was lost. While editorial writers and Twitter users positioned themselves as fighters against a Leftist or identity political agenda-driven historical revisionism, they did so in service of a no less ideological status quo – the idea that we need a heroic past to venerate, and that any dirty laundry is better forgotten.

Finally, it is worth noting that in numerous other parts of the world, tangible symbols of racism and colonialism were literally thrown into the lake by dismantling and destroying statues and monuments. In England for example, the Edward Colston statue was thrown into the water and at the initiative of a local history association, the statue was thereafter placed in an exhibition titled which in its turn involved a continued public discussion via, among other things, digital media about how the memory and legacy of slavery could be understood in the local community (Steinberg, in press). A lively debate came about and thus a memory process was set in motion in interaction between public cultural heritage institutions, social media, local community associations and the citizens themselves. We see this as an exemplary way of dealing with a monument and a memory that may be perceived as problematic but which so far unfortunately has not yet happened in Sweden. Instead, in the Swedish memory war over Linnaeus, discourse participants mainly representing the white majority population of Sweden mobilized a defense of a “canonized” understanding of Linnaeus’ legacy on the editorial pages of the Swedish newspapers and on Twitter. This defense supports an ongoing effort to absolve Swedes of any substantial complicity in European and Western racism and colonialism. In effect, what is defended is a white-washed use and understanding of history – a status quo that largely remains unchallenged in Sweden, as minority voices of resistance are marginalized, ridiculed, or ignored.

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Appendix 1. Timeline of events during the Swedish Black Lives Matter summer of 2020, focusing on the issue of Carl Linnaeus in June

- June 2: A BLM protest meeting outside the US Embassy of Sweden in Stockholm and a digital manifestation involving 70,000 participants
- June 3: A BLM demonstration with 8,000-10,000 participants in Stockholm. Smaller demonstrations took place in several Swedish mid-sized cities such as Sundsvall, Örebro and Uppsala during the following days.
- June 7: A BLM demonstration with 2,000-3,000 participants in Gothenburg.
- June 8: The influencer Lovette Jallow criticizes and questions the existence of several statues of Carl Linnaeus in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and Uppsala on Twitter. A certain "Becks Malke" initiates the petition and name collecting campaign "Ta ner Carl von Linnés staty i Sverige!" ["Take down Carl Linnaeus' statue in Sweden!"] at skrivunder.com.
- June 9: A BLM demonstration with 500-2,000 participants in Malmö.
- June 10: A piece of paper is attached to the bust of Linnaeus in Botaniska trädgården in Gothenburg.
- June 13: Another protest meeting outside the US Embassy of Sweden.
- June 13: A piece of paper is put up close to the statue of Linnaeus in Humlegården in Stockholm.
- June 16: A debate on the statue of Louis De Geer at Gamla torget in Norrköping is debated.
- June 16: A debate on the statue of Gustav III at Skeppsbrokajen in Stockholm is debated.
- June 20: The anonymous Flashback account AntifaSverige is calling for the gathering of Anti-Fascists and Leftists to destroy the bust of Linnaeus in Linnéparken in Växjö.
- June 22: The statue of Linnaeus at Petriplatsen in Lund is partly painted red.
- June 26: The Sweden Democrat Mattias Karlsson puts flowers beneath the bust of Linnaeus in Linnéparken in Växjö.
- June 27: The bust of Linnaeus in Linnéparken in Växjö is guarded by around 15 Sweden Democrats.
- June 29: The anonymous Reddit account AntifaSverige is calling for the gathering of Anti-Fascists and Leftists to destroy the statue of Linnaeus in Humlegården in Stockholm.
- June 30: The statue of Linnaeus in Humlegården in Stockholm is guarded by around 50 Far Right activists and hooligans.